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Musical Learning in Nineteenth-Century America

American musical historiography has been dominated by two different perspectives. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, from Frédéric Louis Ritter, Oscar Sonneck, and Louis Elson to John Tasker Howard and H. Earle Johnson, accepting music as a European-based art, have told the history of music on American soil through tracing the extension of European music-making, especially its art music, to the New World. In their chronicles, beginning with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century psalm-singing, each noteworthy event can be seen as another link in a chain of musical "progress": the introduction of "regular singing" in place of "the old way" in New England churches; the replacement of American-composed psalm tunes with more smoothly harmonized European-style pieces; the spread of music instruction, from informal singing schools to the public school curriculum and then to the conservatory and university; the influx of talented musical immigrants from Europe, some as traveling virtuosos and others as residents; the advent of talented American-born performers and composers who sought out European training; and, finally, the emergence of an American concert culture that in creativity, performance standards, and general energy can be seen to rival or even outstrip those of the mother countries whose sons and daughters have made America's music. Because the beginnings of formal music-making by European settlers in America are both relatively well known and extremely modest, the metaphor of growth is almost unavoidable when one talks about American music from this perspective.² This is what might be called the "chip-off-the-old-block" school of historiography, in the spirit of "he's looking more like his dad every day."

More recently a second perspective on American musical history has come to the fore, especially in the work of such scholars as Gilbert Chase, Irving Lowens, H. Wiley Hitchcock, Charles Hamm, and others. Drawing on the work of earlier scholars, they have nevertheless rejected the assumption that European music-making is the worthy and inevitable model for American music-making. From this

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perspective the central drama of American musical history lies not in the building of an environment for a European-style concert culture but rather in the process of Americans finding their own forms and styles of musical expression, distinct from those of European musicians. In the work of most recent writers on American music, institutions and organizations recede into the background, and music itself becomes central. Concentrating on music style, they have focused on musicians who are seen as having resisted European influence: in the eighteenth century not Alexander Reinagle but William Billings; in the mid-nineteenth not Henry Russell but Stephen Foster; at the end of the century not Arthur Foote but Charles Ives; more recently, not Edward Burlingame Hill but Edward Kennedy Ellington, or, among performers, not Andre Watts but Sarah Vaughan. The list, which could be extended at length, defines a roster of American musicians who "did it on their own," who found their own way to musical artistry, not by following rules laid down by Europeans, but by ceaselessly, even heroically, exploring their own talents and gifts.

While offering many musical delights and revealing a lively musical tradition for Americans to celebrate, the second perspective has also illuminated certain dark corners of the past. At the same time, as any historical perspective must, it has imposed its own values on that past. Those that openly contradict the first perspective are more or less obvious and are forthrightly addressed.³ Others are left unaddressed. It may be worth noting that holders of the first perspective seldom felt the need to explain their negative opinion of folk and popular musics. Instead, they generally overlooked them, now and then dropping a hint that left no doubt of their position and thus handing down a negative judgment mostly by implication. Likewise, the second perspective, asserting that the most important American music is, in Chase's phrase, music that "*is different from European music*,"⁴ implies its own set of corollaries: that American musicians who have followed European models have tended to do so more from fashion than practicality; that European music and musicians, rather than healthy stimuli for Americans, have instead been burdens to be shaken off; that, in fact, American music composed in ignorance of European practices is somehow more worthy than music that has sought to come to terms with it. Although these corollaries are seldom if ever stated as directly as they are here, one finds little in recent American musical scholarship to contradict them. Rather, in many studies Europe functions as a foreboding presence lurking in the background, to be trotted out now and then for a ritual show of disapproval, rather like the Communists or the Moral Majority, depending on which side of the political fence one favors.

Because most nineteenth-century American cultivated musicians did model their music-making on European forms and values, it is no surprise that the second perspective has tended to take a rather dim view of nineteenth-century American music and musical thought. Reformers like Andrew Law and Thomas Hastings, who criticized the Yankee psalmists' lack of musical "science," are themselves taken to task for seeking to stamp out indigenous creativity.⁵ Lowell Mason's *Musical Letters from Abroad* is dismissed by one commentator as a manifestation of "American priggery."⁶ Horatio Parker, if referred to at all, is most often recalled as a

pedant who at Yale University turned a deaf ear to the experiments of the young Charles Ives.⁷

This kind of attitude suggests that, as helpful as the second perspective has been in identifying a strain of vitality in American musical life, it will not likely lead toward a sympathetic understanding of the nineteenth century. Rooted in twentieth-century aesthetic perception and a very specific set of values, it is very much a twentieth-century perspective. Like a metal detector, its specialty is sorting. Focused on particular musical traits, it is less concerned with their context. In fact, the first perspective, conceived in the nineteenth century and centered on Europe and the concert hall, is far more sympathetic to nineteenth-century values, better suited to understanding its musicians and their concerns, and all in all much more helpful on context.

Both perspectives do pose the key historiographical issue in nationalistic terms: Europe vs. America. Here historians of American music have been willing to give up some degree of objective control in order to gain clarity and drama. For "Europe" and "America" are terms at once so broad and so ideologically loaded that they are more likely to invite avid partisanship than cool, detached, historical analysis. Perhaps, then, we ought to drop the nationalism and seek a perspective offering more promise for understanding the nineteenth century on its own terms. Perhaps if we chose not to focus on American music of all periods but on nineteenth-century American music in particular, and if we chose an issue fundamental to nineteenth-century American musicians and studied it systematically, we could begin to understand the age as something other than simply an early stage in a larger process—as a time of preparation for our country's impending musical maturity, or as a time when the leaden hand of Europe lay so heavily on American musical sensibilities that only through ignorance or rejection of its influences could an American musician achieve anything artistically worthwhile.

My hunch is that a study of musical learning and its dissemination in nineteenth-century America could make that period more accessible to scholarly understanding than it has been.⁸ ("Musical learning" here is taken to mean musical knowledge and/or skill voluntarily acquired.) The agenda for such a study would be wide-ranging. It might seek to define the various degrees and states of learning that specific American musicians sought and achieved; it might deal with modes of learning—self-study, group instruction, private study—always within the framework of the learner's and the teacher's methods and expectations; it might also trace the geographical spread of musical learning; and it might examine the resistance or indifference to formal musical learning found in many quarters, and all that that implies.⁹

There are two reasons why I think a study of musical learning and its dissemination could be a key to coming to grips with nineteenth-century American music.

First, such a study offers the promise of comprehensiveness. All aspects of musical experience involve some form of learning: playing, singing, listening, composing, understanding, and judging music. Learning—that is, gaining knowledge or skill that one did not have before—is a fundamental element of musical life

in human society. Because the topic of learning ranges so widely, touching many aspects of every kind of music, it invites the building of a roomier scholarly framework than we have so far enjoyed. Accepting learning as a focus will make it hard to exclude any kind of music. Thus, it provides a strong push for the observer to try to see nineteenth-century American music as a whole.

Second, the topic of musical learning involves change, and change is a subject that lies close to the center, not just of American music, but of American culture. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, perhaps the keenest observer of nineteenth-century America, the most conspicuous national traits were the preoccupation with economic, social, and cultural status and Americans' impulse to change—that is, to improve—them. De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* notes "the permanent agitation characteristic of a peaceful and well-established democracy" and identifies the sources of that agitation as "the love of physical pleasures, the hope to better one's lot . . . and the hue of success anticipated." This "wish to rise above one's station" he finds to be a "very democratic" trait. "In democracies," he concludes, the citizens "think about nothing but ways of changing their lot or bettering it."¹⁰

It is good to keep these words in mind when one looks through nineteenth-century tunebooks, musical journals, and historical accounts. They alert the observer that the segment of American society that de Tocqueville observed overlapped with the segment that reform-minded nineteenth-century American musicians like Hastings and Mason addressed. Mason, Hastings, and their compatriots viewed American music in terms rather like those of a latter-day Sisyphus. They believed that if left to their own devices people naturally favored music of low quality and that through the United States a debased musical taste prevailed; only through study and application and learning could the state of American music-making be "improved." As they saw it, their own programs of study, presented by competent teachers, held the key to such "improvement," which was not merely recommended but urged as an act of moral responsibility. The essentials of their view were shared by most nineteenth-century cultivated American musicians who followed them: the summary rejection of uncultivated musics (and hence of most peoples' earlier experience and instinctive tastes), the commitment to change for "improvement's" sake, and the particular amalgam of self-interest and morality that justified the process.¹¹

But even as we identify a widespread impulse toward change in nineteenth-century American music, we need to remind ourselves, in the words of Robert Nisbet, that "change is . . . not 'natural,' not normal, much less ubiquitous and constant. Fixity is. If we . . . look at actual . . . behavior, in place and time, we find over and over that persistence in time is the far more common condition of things."¹² Evidence about nineteenth-century American music that has come down to us supports Nisbet's point strongly, indicating that advocates of change met strong resistance. Despite the efforts of sacred music reformers, Protestant congregations in many places went right on lining out their hymns.¹³ Oral musical traditions seem to have been little affected by the criticisms they received. And musical genres that had risen to popularity despite the scorn of most musical authorities

persisted in their appeal, including the songs and dances of blackface minstrelsy, the music of town brass bands, and so-called gospel hymnody.

The musicians who led in the development of these latter genres were by no means unlearned. Many were skillful craftsmen indeed. In contrast to Mason, however, they apparently felt no strong commitment toward change. Where Mason and Hastings made reform and "improvement" their highest priority, men like Dan Emmett, Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore, and Ira Sankey seem to have been more content to accept people as they were—to meet them on their own terms and to seek to fill the musical needs that they themselves defined. These musicians seem to have approached music-making as a practical matter. It is difficult to discover what they thought about musical learning and musical technique because they were not given to public discussion of these matters. For Mason and Hastings, musical learning embodied a hierarchy that encompassed both techniques and attitudes; to learn music from them was to be offered a structure for all of one's musical experiences, one that set different values on different kinds of music-making.¹⁴ In contrast, Emmett, Gilmore, and Sankey were nonprescriptive. The musical value that seems to have concerned them the most was how well their music fit the tastes of the people for whom it was written.

As we move farther and farther from the traditions of Mason and Parker and John Knowles Paine, it becomes harder and harder to find data on musical learning in nineteenth-century America. Whoever pursues this perspective further will be hard-pressed in studying, for example, fields like the popular musical theater and music in the oral tradition. In the former, it appears that the usual approach to learning was that of the apprentice—in Lawrence Cremin's words, a "round of imitation, explanation, and trial-and-error."¹⁵ It was no accident that the theatrical life, like music, was a calling that ran in families; and it would be no great surprise if further research showed that many nineteenth-century American theater musicians were introduced early to their vocation, played many roles in the theatrical enterprise as youngsters, and picked up their musical skills without any particular rationalized pedagogical scheme or any explicit value system other than that of simply trying to survive in the business.

As for musical learning in oral tradition, Alan Jabbour has made a helpful contribution in an essay on the Hammons family of West Virginia. In response to the recollection of the elderly Maggie Hammons that, as hard as she and her brothers and sisters would beg their father to repeat riddles or stories he had told them, he almost never would, Jabbour writes that it seems to be

the feeling of the older generation that one learns most effectively when one actively seizes the knowledge instead of being a passive recipient of an effort to teach. The [Hammons] family has not cultivated analytical teaching methods; they prefer models and examples to precepts in learning and teaching. This is a matter of degree of course; the most systematically schooled conservatory violinist still learns a great part of what he knows by keen observation and subconscious assimilation. But it is quite

characteristic of the Hammons family to learn, say, a fiddle tune quite accurately simply by listening very closely.

Later in the same passage Jabbour notes some of the “obvious advantages” of the “model” or “example” system of learning, among which he cites the following: “it encourages active learning, with the dazzling feats of mental alertness that often accompany it; by placing the burden of passing along knowledge upon the learner, it puts a premium upon the acquisition of something withheld.” Jabbour concludes by recommending “a closer study of habits of learning” in folk cultures for the “valuable insights” he believes they would reveal. Jabbour’s comments hold out hope that musical learning in twentieth-century oral traditions can be studied and that such studies could help to illuminate earlier learning practices.¹⁶

Having noted some of the advantages and problems of studying musical learning and its dissemination in nineteenth-century America, I will conclude with two general observations.

First, a study of learning should help to refocus attention on the building and the significance of American musical institutions, a topic emphasized much more by earlier historians of American music than by recent scholars. Working in a heavily institutionalized musical culture, we have tended to take that structure for granted—as if it had always been there, an entrenched force to be reacted against. But that structure has not always been there; in the nineteenth-century United States organized support for music-making existed only on a very small scale, and musical institutions had to be built up, painstakingly, from the grass roots. Earlier American musicians and historians knew full well how precious and how fragile such institutions were. If some seem in retrospect to have set too high a value on the opening of a concert hall or a conservatory, it should be remembered that such events helped to structure the musical environment in which American musicians worked. We should be careful not to overlook them as we pursue our search for the anti-establishment American musical genius.

The thinness of institutional support, in fact, is responsible for much of the tone that pervades the literature of nineteenth-century American musical learning: often self-righteous, self-congratulatory, and coercive—buy *my* book; attend *my* class; study singing with *me*. Purveyors of musical learning, and especially learning at an elementary level, may seem more like hucksters than educators. That their efforts to dispense cultural uplift did not preclude an unashamed jostling for public attention in the marketplace may strike the present-day observer as both inconsistent and downright undignified. Yet, in nineteenth-century America musical learning was a private, not a public mission, and would-be learners found their way only to the entrepreneur-teacher whose pitch reached them and was convincing.¹⁷ If the tone of those pitches now seems shrill, it must be recalled that music teachers were far more accustomed to meeting indifference or resistance than receptiveness. American skepticism of teachers and cultural arbiters of any kind runs deep; it is the force animating much of our comic literature. In Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example, one of the drifters that Huck and Jim

encounter describes his livelihood: "Jour printer by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theater-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn to mesmerism and phrenology when there's a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture sometimes . . . most anything that comes handy, so it ain't work."¹⁸

My second point is that, even as we delight in Twain's skepticism about knowledge and its purveyors, we ought not to overestimate the distance between ourselves and nineteenth-century American musicians who worked to disseminate musical learning. Their rhetoric is certainly not ours, and the music they composed may not please our tastes. But they had a hand in shaping our legacy, and some of their assumptions and goals survive. Like them, most of us are subject to the prejudice that musical learning is a key element in a healthy musical culture. It may be true that Mason's *Musical Letters from Abroad* contains some vintage examples of "priggery"; but that's not all it contains. For example, after hearing the choir at the *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig sing, in 1852, Mason wrote, "I wish I had words to point out that consecration to the work, that deep, heartfelt interest which these choir members seem to possess; so that it might be sought for by our American singers. But we cannot obtain it unless we use the appropriate means; education only will do it; musical training, such as we have but little idea of, must go before; and as we plant, so we shall reap in these things." And after observing the Leipzig Conservatory in the same year he wrote:

It has not been generally known in our country, that there is enough in music to occupy years of close application. The older singing books, published some 50 or 80 years ago, contained a few pages of "Rules," . . . and a man who could so explain these that no one could possibly understand him, was thought to be musically learned. Many a time have I heard the exclamation: "What, devote his whole time to music!" as if it was quite impossible that one could find anything to study in it for more than an evening or two in a week, for two or three months. . . . The subject is better understood this side of the Atlantic.¹⁹

Mason's reputation as a Germanophilic ideologue ought not to be allowed to distract the reader from recognizing him also as a practical American musician for whom musical ignorance was no abstract cultural issue but a difficulty that had to be faced virtually every working day.

I am willing to predict that a study of musical learning in nineteenth-century America will surprise us. Americans, accustomed to thinking of musical tradition as a matter of repertory, tend to believe that we have grown beyond and repudiated all but a tiny part of our own musical past. Perhaps, however, if we define our legacy more broadly, incorporating musical learning and related issues into our musical history, we will discover that our American roots run deeper than we had thought.

NOTES

This paper was delivered in slightly different form at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Boston, Nov. 13, 1981, and in substantially different form at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill on Feb. 3, 1981.

1. For many of these writers, American musical "progress" was both quantitative and qualitative. As they observed, the passing of time brought a spectacular increase in the amount and variety of musical activity here; it also brought what they believed to be a raising of the aesthetic level of American music-making. For that reason, they were given to condescension when they discussed early American music, as when Elson referred to colonial America as "a country almost destitute of artistic taste" in his *The History of American Music*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1915), p. 8. One reason that Sonneck stands out among earlier historians of American music is that he did not allow his own musical taste to shake his faith in the necessity of establishing a historical record. Recognizing, as he wrote in 1916, that past American musical history "lies in the lowlands" of the art's development and that the American historian had "few heroic deeds" or "artistic forbears greater than he can ever be" to celebrate, Sonneck nevertheless worked meticulously to document the nation's early musical history. See "The History of Music in America," in Sonneck, *Miscellaneous Studies in the History of Music* (1921; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 324-44, esp. p. 330. For a recent survey of how western man has viewed "progress," see Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

2. The metaphor of growth, which pervades most earlier writings, continues to be found in recent works such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), where, for example, the article on Boston heads its sections on the nineteenth century "Approaching Maturity" and "Full Maturity," the latter marked by the founding of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1881). W. S. B. Mathews, *A Hundred Years of Music in America* (Chicago:

Howe, 1889), p. iii, offers data on the American musical past and presents as "a fair forecast of the future . . . especially as it regards the likelihood of the creation here of an original school of American composers." By 1900 there existed in the United States the elements of a fully developed musical environment in the European mold. Therefore, some observers expected that great composers in the same mold would naturally begin to emerge. In fact, the narrative tracing a pattern of growth falls a bit flat without a Great American Composer, which is one reason why various figures—Edward MacDowell, Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Charles Ives, among others—have at different times been fitted for the mantle.

3. The introduction of Gilbert Chase, *America's Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955) is a good example. Noting previous writers' preoccupation with cultivated art music, Chase takes as his jumping-off place "Charles Seeger's dictum that 'when the history of music in the New World is written, it will be found that the main concern has been with folk and popular music'" (p. xix). Rather disputatiously, Chase identifies his own musical taste as "not at all respectable" (p. xvii) and calls "the genteel tradition" his own "bete noire." He even resorts to direct comparison to dramatize the point: "I prefer [W. C. Handy's] 'Beale Street Blues' to [Horatio Parker's] *Hora Novissima*" (p. xviii). Fourteen years later, H. Wiley Hitchcock wrote in the preface to his *Music in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969): "I have attempted to view [American music] in the round, believing that pop songs as well as art songs, player-pianos as well as piano players, are important parts of the American musical experience." (In the second edition, 1974, he added "rock as well as revival hymns" after "piano players.") Hitchcock's assured tone here reflects the ascendancy of Chase's approach: by around 1970 few would be likely to dispute the importance of musical vernaculars in American musical history.

4. Chase, *America's Music*, p. xix.

5. See, e.g., Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York:

Norton, 1964), pp. 117-18, 173, 284, and also Richard Crawford, *Andrew Law: American Psalmist* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 253-54.

6. *American Quarterly*, 20 (Spring 1968), as quoted in Hitchcock, *Music in the U.S.*, 2nd ed., p. 94.

7. See David Wooldridge, *From the Steeples and Mountains* (New York: Knopf, 1974), esp. pp. 68-71. See also pp. 14-15 for the author's personification of the American cultivated tradition Ives inherited as "a meek little old lady, soft, emasculated, barren," with the penultimate adjective elaborated upon at the end of the paragraph.

8. A large chunk of American musical life between 1800 and 1900 remained opaque even to Sonneck (1873-1928), who lived half of his life in the nineteenth century. He identified "the first half of the nineteenth century and no longer the eighteenth" as "the mysterious period in our musical past." See Sonneck, "History of Music in America," pp. 341, 339. There are signs that the mysteries have not yet been cleared up. Lowens recently referred to nineteenth-century American music as "a virtually unexplored jungle," though that may have been the bibliographer in him speaking rather than the historian. See his *Music in America and American Music* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1978), p. 7.

9. Perhaps a scholar pursuing a study in the field I propose would work out a more precise definition of musical learning than the broad, informal one offered here. Lawrence Cremin has defined education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcome of that effort." See *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. viii. As encompassing as Cremin's definition is, its first six words suggest a degree of commitment a bit too strong and hence potentially limiting for our proposed consideration of nineteenth-century American musical learning. Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), ch. 8, presents a useful survey of musical learning. For a detailed treatment of one early American subculture see Harry H.

Hall, "Moravian Music Education in America, ca. 1750 to ca. 1830," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 29 (1981), 225-34.

10. Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, tr. George Lawrence (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1969). The quotations are taken from pp. 460, 479, 462.

11. Charles Seeger has written about "the phase of hostility to the 'rude' music of the people," which "was entered in the 1830s at the instigation of the growing number of [American] professional musicians, amateurs ('music lovers') and music teachers in the public and private schools." Seeger believed that the "hostility" was not directed at folk music *per se*, for he noted that teachers "would admit German, French, Italian and even British folksongs into the songbooks used in their classes, provided only that these were taken from books published in Europe and not from living oral tradition in the New World. The campaign," he concluded, "was so well organized that by about 1900 young people of the prosperous urban classes did not even know of the existence of oral traditions of Euro-American folk music at their very doors." *The New Grove*, 19:439-40. For many nineteenth-century American musicians the moral foundations of music were axiomatic. See, for example, *The Musical Visitor* (Boston, 1841), II/1, p. 8: "General musical instruction rests on two unmoveable bases, viz. its usefulness in the sanctuary, and its great importance as an exercise. In the one case, it will be supported by the principles of revealed religion. . . . In the other case, it is supported by the undeniable principles of physiology." Nor was musical excellence unrelated to the level of general cultivation: "Are those [congregations] not the *most intellectual* where they have the best music? Where can we find an intellectual congregation or society, where they do *not* have good music? . . . Who knows of a society or congregation, where they have poor music, and care little about the subject, that is either refined or prosperous in religion?—We pause for a reply." See *ibid.*, II/9, p. 69.

12. Robert Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 270.

13. According to George Hood, writing

around 1840: "To this day, [lining-out] prevails over three fourths of the territory of the United States." See his *A History of Music in New England* (1846; reprint ed., New York: Johnson, 1970), p. 200. The practice survived in certain parts of the South well beyond the mid-twentieth century.

14. One symptom of this attitude was the way that early nineteenth-century champions of systematic musical learning like Mason and Hastings and their compatriots used the word "science." In their rhetoric music was commonly described as a "science," and pieces, composers, or repertoires that they admired won the label "scientific." Mason could use the term to refer to technically elaborate compositions of serious character, as when he wrote of Ignaz Moscheles: "His influence is on the side of truly scientific music, like that of Beethoven and Mendelssohn, nor will he do anything to patronize a more superficial style or flippant taste, either in composition or in playing." See *Musical Letters from Abroad* (1854; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), p. 41. Sometimes, "science" meant music theory, as when Hastings wrote, early in the 1820s: "the science of musick, as it is now cultivated, is much more important than it formerly was. Then it was the rigid chastiser, if not the substitute of genius and taste; now it condescends to become their guardian and protector." See *Dissertation on Musical Taste* (Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1822), pp. 121-22. Then again, "science" could refer to nothing more than the elements of musical literacy, as in the following passage, written to complain about the low state of music in rural Maryland in the 1850s: "A music teacher will organize a school . . . and after two or three times meeting, the members will be enabled to 'go over notes.' Then, the further consideration of the 'rudiments' is dropped, and the members do nothing but sing over tunes, without once thinking of the science. In this manner, a person may go to these schools winter after winter, and know no more of music—the science—than he did before he took his first lesson." *The Musical World and New York Musical Times*, 4 (20 Nov. 1852), 180. However it was used, "science" was a code word with powerful connotations. It identified music not simply as a pleasant

pastime but as a branch of human endeavor governed by certain recognized principles. See also Robert Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America* (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 78, n.

15. Cremin, *Traditions of American Education*, p. 12.

16. See *The Hammons Family: A Study of a West Virginia Family's Traditions*, ed. Carl Fleischhauer and Alan Jabbour (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Archive of Folksong, recording AFS L65-L66, 1973), pp. 31-32 of accompanying booklet.

17. For example, *The Musical World and New York Musical Times*, 4 (25 Sept. 1852), 50, prints a long advertisement for a sacred tunebook, Lowell Mason and George J. Webb, *Cantica Laudis* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1850), illustrating how successful compilers sought to market their wares. First, the advertisement laments the poor quality of most sacred collections, sympathizing with musicians who are forced to use them for lack of anything better. Then, after citing the long-term endurance of the authors' previous successes (*Handel and Haydn Society Collection*, *Boston Academy Collection*, and *Carmina Sacra*), it reports the wide circulation that the present work has already achieved since it was published: in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Cincinnati, "as well as throughout the country." Emphasizing the "staying power" of the music, it names more than a dozen of its tunes, concluding: "such music can never wear out." The advertisement ends with a report that written testimonials had been received from "very numerous distinguished professors and teachers of music," naming quite a number. Thus, Mason and Webb's advertisement disparages the competition, boosts its own authors' credentials, and does some fancy name-dropping—both of pieces and endorsers, the latter widely scattered geographically and representing both urban and rural settings. Its clever blend of attitude and information seems quite revealing of the kinds of sensibilities it sought to reach. Nym Cooke of the University of Michigan has helped me to interpret the significance of this ad.

18. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), ch. 19. A further reflection of that skepticism can be found in

the way Americans have used the word "professor," our foremost academic title. As H. L. Mencken noted, "In all save a few of our larger cities every male pedagogue is a professor, and so is every band leader, dancing master, and medical consultant. Two or three generations ago [in the mid-nineteenth century] the title was given to horse-trainers, barbers, bartenders, phrenologists, caterers, patent-medicine vendors, acrobats [and] ventriloquists." To continue this diverting history, Mencken reports that John Bartlett, in 1859, noted the use of the term to designate "dancing masters, conjurors, banjo players, etc." A

correspondent wrote Mencken in 1927: "Most of those who insist on being given the title of *professor* are quacks or fakers of some kind, or they are chiropractors, or chiropodists, or tonsorial experts, or boxing instructors." Mencken concludes: "It has been applied . . . to a really immense range of virtuosi, mainly frauds." Thus the proud heritage of academia's principal honorific! See Mencken, *The American Language*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 272; also *Supplement I* (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 529.

19. Mason, *Musical Letters*, pp. 83, 71.