

# ARTICLES

# Introduction to the Issue

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The history of music in nineteenth-century America, and the place of music within American culture of the period, is an area of scholarly inquiry that recently has received increased attention. It is also, as the varied articles collected in this issue illustrate, a complex topic and an area ripe for much additional research. The four articles deal with different aspects of nineteenth-century American music history and culture; in each, however, there are also areas of overlap and intersection. All four authors use as a starting point issues that have already been the subject of some scholarly attention, and examine these topics either more thoroughly or from a new theoretical or contextual point of view. The resulting aggregate should help readers to understand better a complicated and under-explored world, for all four articles highlight the complexity of musical life in America and explore some of the many ways that cultural life in the United States reflected and resonated with that of Europe. All four authors, furthermore, either hint at or explicitly mention areas that are ripe for further research.<sup>1</sup>

Francesco Izzo, in his article 'William Henry Fry's *Leonora*: The Italian Connection', writes that, although critics and scholars have long noted the influence of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* on Fry's grand opera, no one has ever studied the work carefully from this point of view. His welcome close examination of *Leonora* – its composition, the libretto (by Fry's brother Joseph) and the music – illustrates clearly and in detail just how closely the Fry brothers followed the conventions of contemporary Italian and French styles. Izzo also briefly summarizes opera performance history (in both Italian and English) in Philadelphia during Fry's formative years, which provides important background information about Philadelphians' familiarity with the lyrical art. This understanding helps to explain both the Fry brothers' interest in Italian opera and their desire to undertake (prior to *Leonora*) a new translation of *Norma* (in 1841): the composer, who was also a critic, openly disapproved of the 'adapted' English versions that were so popular on the American and British stages in the 1830s and 1840s. Izzo's useful examination of the few extant excerpts of the Fry/Bellini *Norma* confirms the brothers' claim that theirs was a translation and not an adaptation. This discussion, however, also draws attention to an area crying out for further research, for in fact we know very little about these adaptations beyond the contemporary claims (by Fry, among others) and routine supposition (by modern

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<sup>1</sup> This issue of articles on music in nineteenth-century America was originally proposed in 2005 by Charles S. Freeman of the University of Kansas. He solicited most of the articles and shepherded the issue faithfully, but felt compelled to withdraw as issue editor in the summer of 2008, when newly discovered documents revised the basis for his own article.

scholars) that they were 'mutilations' and 'travesties'.<sup>2</sup> There are, in fact, extant performance materials that would shed a great deal of light on precisely this issue, and they await scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup>

Patrick Warfield's article 'John Esputa, John Philip Sousa, and the Boundaries of a Musical Career' shifts the subject to a community of musicians in Washington, DC, during the second half of the century. Warfield bookends his article with a familiar figure – the American composer Sousa – but his major focus is one of the band master's teachers: a man whose name is unknown today, but whose career as a composer, performer, educator and conductor serves as the perfect prototype of a urban journeyman musician of the period. Esputa's work illustrates both the ubiquity of music in urban American life and the blurring of many boundaries (between art and popular, black and white, and secular and sacred) that we take for granted today. A major focus of Warfield's article, in fact, is this white musician's work as choir director of an African-American church, director of the Colored American Opera Company and teacher in the Washington Colored Schools: extraordinary pursuits in heavily segregated post-Civil War Washington. The activities of the Colored American Opera Company also foreshadow the important role that musical theatre would play in providing African-American performers and composers access to the mainstream American stage around the turn of the century. Furthermore, as a musician who 'moved easily between indistinct and overlapping musical traditions and activities' (p. 43), Esputa served as a role model to the young Sousa, who later would create programmes that deliberately incorporated both 'light' music (dances, marches and arrangements of minstrel songs) and 'serious' compositions (symphonies and concertos). This blurring of distinctions between different categories of music is an important theme in much nineteenth-century American-music scholarship and will continue to inform and be the subject of valuable research.

Aaron McClendon's 'Harmonizing the Nation: Margaret Fuller and the Music of Antebellum America' is the most culturally based of the four articles, because he deals with a writer about music rather than a practitioner of it. This article fills yet another lacuna in our understanding of the place of music in nineteenth-century American culture, for McClendon observes that, although there is a significant body of scholarship on the important feminist intellectual Fuller, her writings about music have been either ignored or dismissed. He persuasively argues, however, that Fuller's beliefs – especially her attitude towards symphonic works by 'the masters', such as Beethoven – had an important impact on her ideas about mid-century social reform and the eradication of gender inequity. Fuller used music as a rhetorical device; she also believed that large symphonic

<sup>2</sup> Izzo cites two Italian-language articles on this topic, but to my knowledge there is very little scholarship in English.

<sup>3</sup> I deal briefly with this issue in a forthcoming article titled 'To the Opera House? The Trials and Tribulations of Operatic Production in Nineteenth-Century America' (*Opera Quarterly*, forthcoming; electronic publication in August 2008), in which I examine performance materials from a translation by the American prima donna Caroline Richings of Donizetti's *La fille du Régiment*. Based on these primary documents, I conclude that Richings' adaptation was neither a mutilation nor a travesty. There are extant performance materials for many other English adaptations of operas in the Tams-Witmark Collection at the University of Wisconsin/Madison (see <http://oq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/kbn026?ijkey=pd58zD9Ec14fo3D&keytype=ref doi: 10.1093/oq/kbn026>). See also 'Notes from (the Road to the) Stage', *Opera Quarterly*, 2008. <http://oq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/kbn025?ijkey=Gb9paUVQsZwkZQF&keytype=ref doi: 10.1093/oq/kbn025>).

forms and other examples of what she called 'harmonic music' could both serve as a model for harmonious social organization and function as an agent for social reform. McClendon places Fuller's beliefs about music within the world of antebellum Transcendentalism; his article is strongly informed by scholarship from musicologists, American historians and literary scholars, and illustrates well the important role of music (which was clearly more than simple 'diversion') in the theorizing of some antebellum American intellectuals and social reformers. Ultimately, McClendon's observations on the correlations between Fuller's beliefs about the power of music and the 'music for the masses' educational movement in 1840s England suggests a clear and little-examined link between mid-century England and America.

The final article is my own, and there are obvious correspondences with topics in each of the other three. In 'Encouragement from an Unexpected Source: Louis Antoine Jullien, Mid-Century American Composers and George Frederick Bristow's *Jullien Symphony*', I explore in some detail an American symphony that is undeservedly unknown today, and use the symphony's commission, composition and reception as an entrée into the world of concert music in mid-century New York. Criticism levelled at Bristow for his 'Europeanist' language was similar to that directed at Fry for *Leonora*. Both composers, however, received their musical training in the United States, and their obvious familiarity with the musical language of Western Europe reveals much about musical sophistication in America and about the close cultural bonds that connected the United States with Europe at mid-century. The former issue echoes Izzo's subtext; the latter resonates with McClendon's observations about correlations between Fuller's ideas and similar beliefs inherent in the English music-education movement. Bristow's symphony, moreover, is Beethovenian and Mendelssohnian in style, and his work might have met with Fuller's approval, for her theories about music were predicated on the compositional techniques of these classical 'masters'. The *Jullien Symphony* was commissioned by the French virtuoso conductor Louis Antoine Jullien, who toured America with an orchestra that performed a mixed repertory of both 'light' pieces (dances and narrative compositions) and more serious works (symphonies and concertos) – similar to the repertory that Warfield discusses. In addition, the musical background of both Fry and Bristow – while not discussed in detail – is contextualized by Warfield's careful examination of the many hats worn by a typical nineteenth-century American musician, and the range of John Esputa's experiences can be applied also to those two composers. The most familiar element of my article is reference to a public argument that is well known among American-music historians (one scholar called it 'the musical battle of the century'): the 1854 journalistic brawl between Fry, Bristow and the music critic Richard Storrs Willis, the crux of which was the non-support for American composers by the Philharmonic Society of New-York.<sup>4</sup> The encouragement that I mention in my title refers to Jullien's support for American composers, which may have served as the catalyst for this seminal musical battle.

Some of the topics dealt with in this issue are probably new to readers of this journal. We trust, however, that by highlighting some of the rich complexity of musical culture in nineteenth-century America, the articles in this issue will both pique the interest of scholars and students, and serve as a catalyst for further scholarly inquiry.

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<sup>4</sup> Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 2, *Reverberations, 1850–1856* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 378.