



"Furthering the cause of American music" in "Music librarianship in America, Part 3: Music librarians and American music"

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Furthering the Cause of American Music

Steven Ledbetter

“American Music” is a vast topic, and there are many ways of “furthering” its cause: through scholarship, collecting, organizing, analyzing (its materials and context), performing, recording, and publishing; in general—by disseminating both the music and information about it. Several speakers have dealt with various aspects of popular music and its genres; I will concentrate on certain areas of the “cultivated” tradition, the kind of music we play in tuxedos—as Bruno Nettl describes it—the music in which I have been most directly involved.

It is important first of all to recognize the role music librarians have already played in furthering the cause. To a large degree, music librarians, beginning with Oscar Sonneck, created the subdiscipline of American music. They have led the way by collecting material, organizing it, and informing the rest of us of its existence. From Oscar Sonneck’s seminal work as bibliographer and historian to more recent contributions, such as Don Krummel’s *Resources of American Music* and his *Bibliographical Handbook of American Music*,¹ and special resources like the *Boston Composers Project*,² we musicologists would be much the poorer without the devoted work of music librarians. They have sparked our interest and enabled our work through their own scholarship, their generous assistance to scholars, whether experienced researchers or neophytes, and in some cases by their dissemination of American musical works to suspected kindred spirits.

Others at this symposium have considered the relationship between scholars and librarians; I will deal with the dichotomy between scholars and performers. One individual sometimes undertakes both scholarly and performing activities, but there is a fundamental difference between scholars and performers, particularly in the way they interact with a music library. Although scholars are generally knowledgeable about the organization and use of library materials, they are usually less experienced with or interested in any of the practical elements that are related to preparing and putting on musical performances. Performers, on the other hand, are almost always less familiar with the library—even wary of it, uncertain about how to proceed. To many performing musicians, “research” means looking in the card catalog (or its modern high-tech version) or possibly in *Grove’s Dictionary*. Their primary concern is to find performing materials, and many musicians are interested in going beyond the canon—that rich but overworked standard repertory—but they want guidance in finding genres of music, specific pieces, and, especially, usable scores

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¹ D. W. Krummel et al., *Resources of American Music History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); D. W. Krummel, *Bibliographical Handbook of American Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

² Boston Area Music Libraries, *The Boston Composers Project*, ed. Linda I. Solow et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983).

and parts. To the performer, whether a scholar/performer or just one who wants to do a little “intimidating” research, the music librarian is the noble, generous-spirited soul who has assembled a rich horde of materials and who opens it up to others.

Performers tend to feel quite at home with stuff-in-a-box—to use Suki Sommer’s coinage—if they can only find a way of gaining access to the box. (After all, most musicians sooner or later store considerable portions of their own working scores in boxes somewhere.) Sometimes, when the boxes are opened to performers, surprising things can happen as soundless materials come to life. Two areas of American music, albeit in the vernacular tradition of silent film music and Broadway musicals, have recently been the direct beneficiaries of “box-opening.”

Silent films, of course, were never truly silent; they were always accompanied by music. The Library of Congress has a particularly rich collection of materials from the early film studios, especially from those that were located on the East Coast. Several scholars and librarians have been working to bring these materials under bibliographic control and to make them heard after years of silence. Martin Marks has surveyed most of the collection. Wayne Shirley has prepared performing parts from the unpublished manuscript of Victor Herbert’s full-length score to the 1916 film, *Fall of a Nation*. What we discover upon hearing Herbert’s Prelude to the film, which was intended to warn Americans of the possibility of foreign invasion, is a rhetorical style that was subsequently used in countless film melodramas. Unfortunately, the film itself has been lost. Gillian Anderson has been reconstructing and performing important musical scores to major films, among them D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* and the silent version of *The Thief of Bagdad*, which starred Douglas Fairbanks. *Thief* was recently shown on public television with a highly touted score that turned out to be a cobbled-together version of excerpts from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sheherazade*, repeated ad nauseam and scarcely connected to the events on the screen. Given the choice, one naturally wants to hear the music that was conceived specifically for the images of the film.

Among the most publicized finds of recent years is the rich trove of materials found in a Secaucus warehouse—rather than in a well-ordered library—containing original orchestral parts for Broadway shows, among them many important works. The recent complete recording of *Show Boat* in John McGlinn’s reconstructed score resulted from this discovery. Furthermore, the recording’s success in both commercial and artistic terms has led to similar work on major shows of George Gershwin, which will include recordings as well as the publication of vocal scores and authentic orchestrations. For anyone interested in furthering the cause of American music, these events are indeed to be celebrated.

But the area of American music that I want most to discuss is that portion of the “cultivated tradition” that has long been known by such misleading designations as “The Boston Classicists” or “The Second New England School,” terms that should be permanently retired from scholarly use.

About a century ago, when Frédéric Louis Ritter and Louis Charles Elson wrote their histories of American music,³ the works of several Boston composers were considered the acme of American composition. Changes of taste and historical

³ Frédéric Louis Ritter, *Music in America* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1883); Louis Charles Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1904).

viewpoint reversed the situation: from not long after the First World War until sometime after the Second, these New England composers were virtually ignored. Their music was neither played nor recorded, and only a handful of single-minded people, mostly graduate students seeking topics available for dissertations, dealt with them at all. An entire series of such dissertations was directed by a theorist at the Eastman School of Music, who had his students analyze the harmonic techniques of each composer on the basis of available printed scores but failed to suggest any survey of the unpublished works, biographical study, or archival work on the composers' professional or institutional activities.

Gradually, however, these composers and their music are now regaining acceptance. Passage of time arouses curiosity about how the music sounds. Performers—including soloists, orchestra members and chamber music players—want to find something a little unusual and off-the-beaten-track, but not too “unpleasant” or “modern,” for fear of frightening audiences. A good source for such repertory is American music of the pre-modernist period. As a result, more and more of this music is being recorded, allowing record buyers, concert-goers, and listeners to classical-music radio stations the opportunity to know the music of composers whose names, until recently, were unknown to them (that is, unless the radio station follows the devastating current trend of programming excerpted movements from larger works or the wallpaper music of nondescript Baroque trio sonatas, carefully avoiding anything with voice or chorus and anything that might arouse a response from the listener).

Performers no longer dismiss out of hand the music of John Knowles Paine, Arthur Foote, George Chadwick, Charles Martin Loeffler, Amy Marcy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Frederick Shepherd Converse, Daniel Gregory Mason, Henry Hadley, and the like. They are willing to try the music and will often enough find something they enjoy playing and to which audiences respond favorably. Thus more and more performances of works by these composers are being heard.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Karl Krueger conducted various orchestras in a number of works by these older American composers. The performances were issued by the Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage in a series of sound recordings called the Music-in-America Series. Unfortunately many of the works were drastically cut, seriously underrehearsed, and, obviously, recorded on a shoestring. But the recordings were exceedingly valuable because at the time they were all we had.

Times are changing for these composers, and in many places—from Boston to California to old Vienna to England and other unlikely venues. Last winter John Rockwell wrote a lead article for the music page of the *New York Times* Sunday edition that bore the headline “Paine and Chadwick Return to Favor.”⁴ Certainly if the *Times* says it, it must be so.

How did we ever reach such a watershed? The record companies have contributed greatly, two of them in particular. One is New World Records, with which most music librarians are familiar from the generous and richly varied series of recordings assembled and sent free to hundreds of libraries as part of the nation's bicentennial celebration. Among those records was one that I believe truly initiated the revival. Gunther Schuller “discovered” the *Mass in D* by the youthful John

⁴ *New York Times*, 15 January 1989, sec. H, p. 23.

The image shows the title page of a musical score. At the top, the word "Mass" is written in a large, ornate, blackletter-style font, surrounded by intricate floral and scrollwork decorations. Below "Mass" is the word "in" in a smaller, simpler font, followed by a large, decorative initial letter "D". Underneath this, the text "for Chorus, Orchestra and Organ" is printed in a bold, serif font. Below that, the words "composed by" are enclosed in a decorative oval frame. The name "JOHN K. PAINE." is printed in a large, bold, serif font with a drop shadow effect. Below the name, "Op.10." is written between two horizontal lines. At the bottom, "New-York, Beer & Schirmer." is printed in a bold, serif font.

Figure 1. John Knowles Paine's Mass in D (published 1866).

Knowles Paine (figure 1) and believed in it strongly enough to record it with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. The recording demonstrated to anyone who heard it that a twenty-three-year old early American composer had fully mastered the techniques of the cultivated tradition and could express them in music of a remarkably wide expressive range. Schuller's commitment to Paine has continued to this day.

Around the time that these recordings were being released, I became actively interested in American music of this period (beyond simply listening to every new release from New World). For the Handel Society, an oratorio chorus that I was conducting at Dartmouth College, I wanted to find a major American work to

program during the bicentennial season. Because I particularly relish works with a dramatic thrust, I began tracking down the manuscript score and parts of George Chadwick's lyric drama *Judith*, premiered at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1901 (figure 2). After studying a reprint of the vocal score (in a Da Capo Press edition sponsored by the Music Library Association⁵), I decided that the work was well suited both to the occasion and to my chorus and soloists. Though I enjoyed working with Chadwick's piece, I had no intention of becoming a particular partisan of his. A year later, however, Rufus Hallmark invited me to talk about the Chadwick manuscripts at the New England Conservatory of Music for a Music Library Association session on the special resources of Boston-area music libraries. I had looked at only one Chadwick manuscript in my life, and that one was at the Library of Congress, but after a little arm twisting, I agreed to look at the Chadwick manuscripts at NEC. I discovered that the Conservatory's orchestra library owned the performing parts, not only of *Judith*, but of virtually every large-scale piece Chadwick had written. It seemed worthwhile to publicize this information, so I prepared a little handout that described the scores and parts and listed their respective locations. I thought that after the MLA meeting I would perhaps offer my paper for publication in *Notes*, but first I wanted to include just a bit more information about each piece. At the moment my little handout has reached book length and has taken on the format of a *catalogue raisonnée*. It should be ready for publication in the near future.

What next directed my feet into the halls of American music was a professional move from Dartmouth to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, putting me only a block away from many of Chadwick's scores. The move also connected me to the institution where most of Chadwick's major works were premiered. In fact, Chadwick shares, with Walter Piston, the record for the most world premieres—eight apiece—with the BSO. More important, my move to Boston brought me into contact with a large number of highly talented musicians who were interested in finding new pieces to play. One day, violist Patricia McCarty, who was appearing on a vocal program that included the Brahms songs with viola obbligato, lamented the lack of other works with similar instrumentation. I suggested she look at a group of songs by Loeffler, a German immigrant who was assistant concertmaster of the BSO for twenty years, a popular figure in Boston's musical life, and a composer of great refinement. McCarty took the songs to her singer, D'Anna Fortunato, and pianist, Virginia Eskin, and before long they had planned an entire recording of Loeffler songs. The program was issued by the other record company that plays a part in this story, Northeastern Records, founded as a part of the Northeastern University Press in Boston. The company is now independent and—like all small classical record labels—is valiant and hopeful, but struggling to survive.

After that, things happened quickly. I was invited to review proposals for recordings on Northeastern, with special attention to music of New England origin, though the label has always ranged widely in its material. Upon hearing an interesting discussion of John Knowles Paine's unpublished violin sonata at an American Musicological Society meeting, I asked the BSO's concertmaster Joseph Silverstein, who had already recorded the Beach and Foote violin sonatas for New World, whether he would be interested in looking at the Paine work with the

⁵ New York: Da Capo Press, 1972; originally published New York: G. Schirmer, 1901.

possibility of recording it. After studying it, he was eager to record it. Coupled with two other unpublished works by Paine, the sonata became Northeastern's first release on compact disc. It received wide air play and the first pressing recently sold out. It also generated a large number of requests for a printed score, which John C. Schmidt is now editing for the series *Recent Researches in American Music*.⁶

Another BSO musician, flutist Fenwick Smith, is one of those performers who is not afraid of a library. He came to Northeastern Records with a carefully conceived proposal for a collection of all the chamber music by Arthur Foote that featured the flute. We eventually coupled the Foote works on a CD with Smith's performance of all of Copland's chamber music featuring the flute.

The BSO's choral director, John Oliver, also conducts his own group, the John Oliver Chorale, which has performed a wide range of American music from William Billings to Elliott Carter. When the Sonneck Society met in Boston in 1984, Oliver put together a choral program consisting entirely of turn-of-the-century New England music, with Ives's *The Celestial Country* as its main work and a half-dozen smaller pieces by other composers. Later he recorded the Ives for Northeastern, along with Loeffler's Psalm 137, an exquisite work for women's voices.

The biggest single project at Northeastern thus far began when the members of the Portland String Quartet were recording all of Walter Piston's quartets. I asked them if they had ever played Chadwick's Fourth String Quartet, the only one of five to have been commercially published. They had never heard of Chadwick, so I sent them the parts for the Fourth to play through and mentioned that manuscript material for four other string quartets and a published piano quintet were available. In very short order they called to say that if the others were as good as the Fourth, they wanted to play them all. Over several years, we recorded all six works, which were finally issued together just last winter. The set offers an opportunity to trace the development of a major American composer from his young days at the conservatory in Leipzig to his mature years later in Boston. Chadwick's personality is already clearly present in the First Quartet, one of his earliest surviving pieces. Moreover, the work uses familiar kinds of American music—hints of marches, hymn tunes, and dance melodies—even though it was composed in Leipzig in 1877.

For the last five years, I have had the special pleasure every summer of offering a lecture on older American orchestral music to the young conductors studying at Tanglewood. Not surprisingly, the majority are completely unaware of its existence (though this has begun to change). I try to tell them something about the tradition of American music—their own tradition, since most of them are Americans. Although I talk about the composers, I mostly play music—music they have never heard before. The reaction to Chadwick's Second Symphony, for example, is usually one of astonishment that it could have been written in Boston in 1883. The first year, one young conductor commented to me, "You know, when we play German music, we try to think 'German'; when we play French music, we try to think 'French'; it's wonderful to have some music that lets us be ourselves!"

I give the conductors a handlist of orchestral music by New England composers between 1875 and 1925 that includes timings and instrumentation, indicating which pieces can be borrowed from the Fleisher Collection at the Free Library of Philadelphia, which ones are still available for rental from a publisher (unfortunately, very few), and, in a few cases, where the manuscript materials are located. The results

⁶ Published in John Knowles Paine, *Three Chamber Works for Piano and Strings*, ed. by John C. Schmidt (Madison, Wisc.: A-R Editions, 1991), 1-41.

have been wonderful: almost every year, at least one of the young Tanglewood conductors gets excited by a piece and ends up leading a performance with a local orchestra back home. They often send me tapes, especially of compositions that have never been recorded. In one case, Chadwick's 1890 Serenade for String Orchestra recently received its European premiere (by the American Music Ensemble Vienna, under the direction of Hobart Earle). Chadwick has developed a justified reputation as a composer especially gifted in the lighter moods, displaying a delightful musical wit and clever orchestration. But the string quartets and this Serenade also reveal a fine control in slower, more lyrical passages.

I also gave a copy of my handlist to Elizabeth Ostrow of New World Records. After perusing the several hundred pieces, she asked if I could recommend a few works that I knew were particularly deserving of being recorded. The result is that New World has now recorded both Paine's and Chadwick's second symphonies—works that Karl Krueger had recorded earlier for SPAMH, but with ill-conceived cuts. I still hope to hear a worthy recording of Horatio Parker's *Hora Novissima*.

The tide is turning. Indeed, perhaps it has already turned. More and more musicians are becoming interested in American music. Ten years ago I sometimes felt like a fanatic promoting all these composers whose works were of interest to no one. I rarely miss an opportunity to tell performers or ensembles that I have just the work they might be looking for—a string quartet, a piano trio, a sonata, an orchestral piece, a song, or whatever may be suitable. I don't push everything these composers wrote, but I am trying to get good pieces back into the repertory.

Music librarians should always be alert to making that crucial connection between performers who use their library and the music on their shelves. Some works need no special promotion: they can speak for themselves. But some valuable pieces are being overlooked, perhaps unjustifiably, and a nudge in the right direction may be all it takes. The expanded canon is, after all, already accepted. It has been said that teachers never know where their influence stops. The same can be said for music librarians who assist performers and scholars looking for material. With just a little healthy fanaticism about the materials in their collections, librarians can spark an interest that will have exciting repercussions for the musical community.