

Editorial Preface

H Earle Johnson was an avid musician and humanist who reveled in the cultural accomplishments of the United States, especially those of his native New England. The poetry of Longfellow inevitably became an object of interest to him. He made its study his final goal, and drawing the lines between the poet's own love of music and others' use of his poetry for musical setting was Johnson's final achievement.

Johnson's image of Longfellow is untroubled by modern concerns about elitist bias, political correctness, or critical theory. But he got one thing very right. Longfellow's work dominated the attentions of a certain class of composer and listener for a very long time in America. There is a cultural message to be read here about its popularity. Johnson's own love of Longfellow's verse gives us a hint as to how widespread that affection was among Johnson's peers. Indeed no elementary school graduate of his generation—or, for that matter, the generations immediately preceding and following his—could have escaped being exposed to “The Village Blacksmith,” “Hiawatha,” or “Paul Revere's Ride.” Despite inevitable shifts in fashion, Longfellow's place in the pantheon of American poets is secure.

Of course Johnson's unembarrassed enthusiasm for the subject of Longfellow, not to mention his approach, is unfashionable. Devoid of both self-doubt and jargon, Johnson's style and attitude perhaps account for why this article has only now, twelve years after its composition, found a publisher.

Every effort has been made to preserve the spirit and sound of H. Earle Johnson's prose. Insofar as it has been possible to update his occasionally incomplete notes, this has been done, but significant editing of the text has been avoided. Unfortunately Johnson frequently omitted page references in his notes, although it is clear that most of the quoted material so treated comes from the unpaginated and unpublished journals and diaries of Longfellow now housed at Harvard University. The only feasible manner by which to clear up the details, albeit not the usual one among editors, was to take the author on faith. Johnson's scholarly thoroughness was amply demonstrated years ago and has no need for further justification in this space. The reader determined to chase down every last attributed word is recommended to Harvard's rare book and manuscript library.

As Johnson's longtime friend, office mate, and colleague at the College of William and Mary, Bonnie Hedges explains in her biographical note and foreword that the main body of *Longfellow and Music* was drafted as part of a larger book. The list of “Musical Compositions Based on Longfellow's Literary Works” was in its earliest form also the work of Johnson (not of the present

editors), although its format has been somewhat amended, with numbers added to the entries to aid in cross-referencing. Unfortunately, since it was not Johnson's purpose to create a list of *available performing* editions, but rather mainly to illustrate the poet's popularity, there are a number of omissions in this list that cannot be rectified easily without extensive further research.

This monograph is not what it might have been had H. Earle Johnson lived to thoroughly edit and supplement it. Yet because it represents the last work of a pioneering scholar it deserves to see the light of day even with its flaws. We hope in presenting *Longfellow and Music* as volume seven of this journal that we are honoring the memory and the accomplishments of both the nineteenth-century poet and the twentieth-century musicologist.

Thomas L. Riis
Editor