

Introduction

Many years ago Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana invited me to go over the poet's diaries and journals with the idea of assessing their usefulness to a musician. Henry Dana was one of the kindest men I have ever known. We were members of the Stratford Club of Cambridge which frequently met as his guests at Craigie House.⁹ This was in years before Andrew Hilen undertook an edition of the correspondence.¹⁰ Acting on Henry Dana's invitation I spent delightful hours in the poet's study.¹¹ My vocation as a musicologist enabled me to identify almost every musical figure and every work named. These included the greats of the time, as anticipated; but more useful to my purpose were accounts of lesser figures whose candles have long since been extinguished, men and women whose identities survive, if at all, as footnotes in biographical dictionaries. Yet they were known in every concert hall and "opry house," and their works, through publication, were present in many American parlors.

Why this high regard accorded to a poet's interest in music? We must reaffirm the fact that no native bard played as meaningful a role in the lives of ordinary folk as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He was a best-seller to the common man, a cultural, refining and gracious, even metaphysical guide to English-speaking peoples everywhere. His verses inspired more than one thousand musical compositions whose equivalence ranges from tawdry ballads designed to draw the ready tear to cantatas and oratorios of noblest intent. His popularity as a source of musical text paralleled that of Goethe, Scott, and Heine, and of his contemporaries, Tennyson and Browning. No American, not even Whittier—and there were others of equal or superior merit—achieved so benign an influence.