

Part I.

The Musical Longfellows

The expressed goodwill and active participation of distinguished men and women in relevant disciplines to one's field is always meaningful to the creative artist. To review the earnest concerns for music of John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Henry;¹² to read of George Washington's benevolent patronage or visualize Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry playing violin duets is exhilarant.¹³ Washington Irving attended numerous operas in Europe before a single grand opera was heard in the United States and Ralph Waldo Emerson attended concerts in the futile hope that music would speak to him in language of the emotions.¹⁴ Walt Whitman and Margaret Fuller did their turns as music critics for New York journalism. Fuller's ebullience culminated in a call on Frédéric Chopin in Paris. George William Curtis¹⁵ devoted many pages of *Harper's* to the arts, and Winslow Homer was an able pianist. The avocations of these men and women, with others, comprise a supportive influence to the progress of music in America.

The most passionately involved was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Whatever the present estimate of his writings in terms of American literature, the length of his service to music and the rightness of his judgments stand as a helpful commentary on the cultural life of his time.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's life (1807–1882) was coincident with the formative years of music maturity in the United States, our years of *Sturm und Drang*. It was also a period of rare creative activity in Europe. Haydn was alive when he was born, Jefferson was President, and Beethoven's Fourth Symphony was performed in Philadelphia, July 23, 1819; Grand Opera by a reputable troupe—the Garcias—was first heard on November 29, 1825, in New York. Much of America was a geographical and cultural wilderness.

Earliest tastes, beyond those of boyhood in Portland, Maine, were formed under a talented émigré, Herman Kotschmar, during three years in Europe from 1826 to 1829. Longfellow spent six months in France, where Camillo Sivori gave him lessons in Italian, eight months in Spain, a year in Italy, and six months in Germany. In 1835 further stays in Scotland, the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Germany, France, and Switzerland comprised an inclusiveness equal to or surpassing that of John Quincy Adams and Washington Irving. There were two later voyages to Europe, in 1842 and 1868, the latter as a celebrated poet.

Hearing *Die Zauberflöte* in Pisa (1826), Longfellow considered the music beautiful but the production "horribly massacred." Of *Der Freischütz* in Dresden

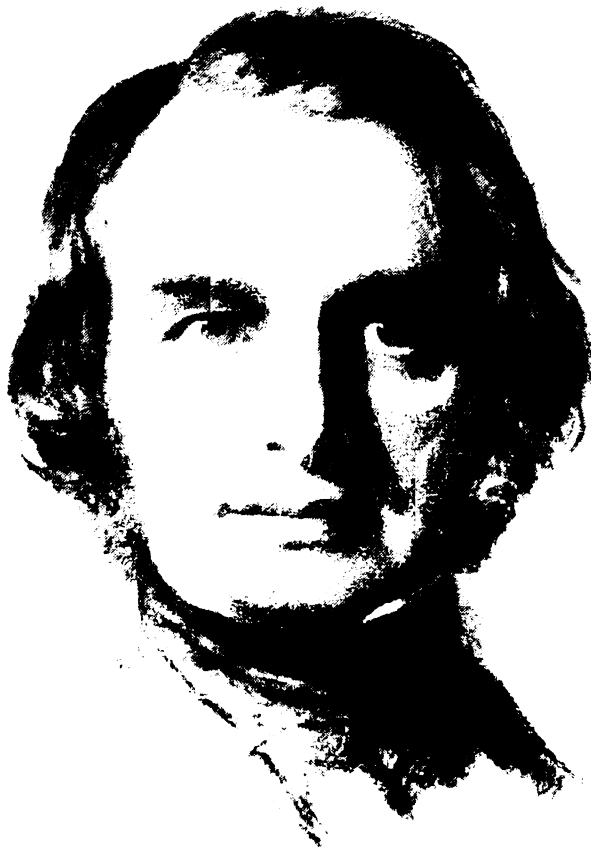
he wrote: "The orchestra was good; the singers, with one solitary exception, very bad. The Devil, dressed like a collier with smutty face and puddingish hat, frightened the Grand Duchess into hysterics." On January 25, 1829, he heard Paganini, forty-seven years old and at the height of his celebrity; *Die Zauberflöte* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* again in Paris and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* "sitting squeezed into a little box, bent up like the letter Z," and Cherubini's *Les deux journées* in Dresden. These gave him a selective taste in the operatic genre. He also frequented the concert hall more often than had Washington Irving.

Longfellow was hearing music in Europe at the time Foster and Gottschalk were born in America and he continued to hear music regularly for twenty years after their deaths. How remote this seems until we learn that Mr. Longfellow's last letters in 1881 are concerned with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. By that time Béla Bartók was out of his cradle and, in a matter of weeks, Stravinsky would be born. So much of progress in fifty-five years!

An invitation to teach at Harvard in 1835 was preceded by a second visit to Europe where he continued to gratify his passion for opera. Works by Bellini and Donizetti were of the thirties, while Mendelssohn's efforts in 1829 with a performance of the Saint Matthew Passion had brought about the rebirth of J. S. Bach. Mozart was always perfection. Even so, the strictures of New England theology led him to deplore "the plot [*Don Juan*] as very bad." "Mozart's music is far too Divine for such stuff." But "I am enraptured with Mozart's music," he wrote in 1836. "His soul was full of melody and he poured it forth like a bird, in 'full-throated ease.'" To the sensitive young man, *Der Freischütz* was loud, thundering music, and in comparison with Mozart's "not music, but noise." He also saw Taglioni, "exhibiting her science and her legs in a high degree."¹⁶ At Kirche, Longfellow was moved by the singing of Martin Luther's "quaint" "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," fairly comparing its purpose with that of "Old Hundredth" from the Geneva Psalter of 1554, included in *The Bay Psalm Book* of 1640.¹⁷

Newly established in Boston, the young man contemplated buying a piano with keys that "rattled a little, and put me in mind of an old woman with loose teeth." The decision was negative, but within two weeks of passing Fanny Appleton on the street, the rattled young Harvard instructor—thirty-three years of age—bought a Chickering with masculine tone and firm teeth. Indeed, American-made pianos were outranking those of Europe by reason of iron-cast frames developed in the twenties by Babcock of Boston.

At this point a musician of quality entered his life. Frederic Rakemann¹⁸ from Bremen, apostle of the "new school of pianists"—Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt, and Henselt—played at the Melodeon on November 4, 1839. There were further public recitals and an ensuing friendship with Rakemann playing at Craigie House before guests.¹⁹ Margaret Fuller's enthusiasm for Rakemann was properly Fullerian, as she knew him in New



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow by Eastman Johnson
Courtesy Longfellow House Trustees

York, and Samuel (Gray) Ward wrote enthusiastically: "I came home at ten o'clock with every nerve tingling." (January 9, 1841) Indeed, Rakemann's acquaintances in this circle led to his marriage to Elizabeth Sedgwick,²⁰ closest of all friends of Frances Anne Kemble.²¹

Marriage to Fanny Appleton on July 13, 1843, enlarged the poet's devotion to music inasmuch as she was an equally discerning partner.²² The one type of music to which the Longfellows did not strongly respond was that of choral singing. Actually there was little at the time to enthuse over in the pious orgies of the Handel and Haydn Society. Perhaps it was the amateurish character of choral singing at its best compared with the superb professionalism of young artists now arriving, men and women whose playing made clear the dynamism of the Romantic Movement. They embodied a deep sincerity, compared with the flashy pyrotechnics of Henri Herz and Leopold de Meyer. Nevertheless, the arrival of Ole Bull in May 1844 stirred everyone's imagination. This pseudo-artist played few works of musical merit; it was his sincerity and naive showmanship that won instant admiration. Not only the ladies lost their heads over this handsome Norwegian as he offered *Mountains of Norway*, *Nocturno Amoroso* [sic], or *Recollections of Havana*, but men were charmed by his presence. Social life at Craigie House was the livelier for his visits.

One of the finest accounts we have of "Old Father" (Anthony Philip) Heinrich (1781–1861), a persistent advocate of the American composer, is by Mr. Longfellow, who attended his concert on June 15, 1846. The second part of his account follows:

Heinrich is now an old man. The concert was given him as a compliment to provide him funds for a visit to Germany. Tremont Temple was full, nearly 2000 people. The old man entered, with his bald head, white cravat and waistcoat and large, loose coat. A hurricane of applause saluted him to which he bowed and bowed and shook from his tremulous outstretched hands the electrical excitement like drops of water. He reminded me of Paganini. He sat down at the pianoforte and the orchestra began his "Battle of the Thames." Noise enough, and with a Walpurgis night of notes running through frantic scales. The author himself wild with delight and anxiety. Now he looked at the men with the cymbals. Then he whisked the music leaves about, then gave his music stool a whirl, parting his coattails, sat down again in sublime satisfaction. At the close of the piece he seized the leader's hand and shook it with vehement affection, exhibiting symptoms of a desire to do the same with everybody. I rejoiced in the old man's triumph. But his music is most facile to comprehend.

Musical parties in Cambridge of the late forties included the Lorings; the Charles Eliot Nortons; Samuel Gridley and Julia Ward Howe; members of the Harvard German Department; Charles Sumner on occasion; Thomas Gold Appleton, step-brother of Mrs. Longfellow; the James Russell Lowells; and Louis Agassiz.²³ A memorably happy evening at Dr. Webster's was given by

Adele and Charles Hohenstock, brother and sister newly arrived from England. Within a month Prof. Webster was apprehended and charged with murder and dismemberment of his colleague, Dr. George Parkman, to whom he was in debt. Cantabrigians rallied to Dr. Webster until his full confession dismayed them all. The Professor was hanged on August 30, 1850.²⁴

Opera continued to attract the Longfellows as the variety and quality of singers improved. They journeyed to Boston by horse car to hear Verdi's *Ernani*, Giovanni Pacini's *Saffo*, Bellini's *Romeo and Juliet* ("this with women singing both parts the absurdity of one woman making love to another from which one cannot divert the mind," May 18, 1847),²⁵ Verdi's *I lombardi*, Rossini's *Moses in Egypt*, about which the poet wrote: "to see the miracles of Holy Writ mimicked on the stage, the burning bush, the voice of God, and so forth, is rather startling."²⁶ The nobility of Bellini's *Norma* won all hearts—Longfellow heard the work seven times. All were supreme examples of the *bel canto* style.

One of the more persistent attractions of the time was the singer and divorced wife of the composer of "Home, Sweet Home," Mme. Anna Bishop, who had eloped with Bochsa, a harpist. Mme. Bishop toured all America and, when her career ended, settled down in New York to teach voice. When the Longfellows heard her in 1849, he wrote that she had a "wild, determined look, as if she were capable of eloping again." Walt Whitman described her voice as "the purest soprano of brilliant quality—and of a silvery clearness as ever came from the human throat." Bishop and Bochsa were not entertained at Craigue house.

The times marked a turning point in the quality of music and musicians available to Americans. Maturity set in with the best that Europe had to offer. Artists gaining experience (Malibran, Patti) or on the downside of their careers were thereafter companioned by men and women in their prime. Among the most noteworthy were the Germania Society of twenty-five young men, come to America in 1848 "in order to further in the hearts of this politically free people the love of the fine art of music through performance of masterpieces of the great German composers."²⁷ The Germanians settled in Boston until their disbandment in 1854 and the Longfellows heard them regularly in superior performances of Beethoven symphonies, works by Mozart and Mendelssohn, Wagner's overture to *Tannhäuser* ("strange, original and somewhat barbaric") and "concerti at the hands of skillful players; an audience of thousands before us. Lovers of music, the Americans certainly are, if not musicians" (March 2, 1853).²⁸ Looking back from latter days of the twentieth century, what a feast was there, in music and in performance! Most of these new works remain basic to our repertory.

Emphasis was always on "music of the new." Thus the Mendelssohn Quintette Club, formed in Boston in 1849, "gave us Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Cherubini" in early 1854. There was Bottesini on the double bass, a player never surpassed, a party at the Norton's where "Miss (Isabella)

James played Chopin's Preludes and Nocturnes, and again the Quintette Club at Henry Greenough's with Mendelssohn and a Quintette by Mozart."²⁹ And for relief, the "Ethiopian Serenaders" in the company of James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Then back again the symphonies of Haydn, Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, *poesies d'occasion* which paralleled many of his own verses, various works by Paganini and Viotti for violin which the poet estimated at their proper value, that is, as show pieces.

The first musical sensation in the nation's history came in the person of Jenny Lind in September 1850. Boston was not immune to Barnum's flamboyant publicity; prices were high and Mr. Longfellow paid \$8.50 for a gallery seat to her first Boston concert. Even so, the lady lived up to expectations. "She is very feminine and lovely. Her power is in her presence, which is magnetic, and takes her audience captive before she opens her lips." Mr. Longfellow called on her with a letter from Frederika Bremer, the Swedish novelist, and she received him with the remark that no letter was needed from one whose poems were so fine an introduction. A genuine friendship developed and Mlle. Lind thereafter presented him with tickets whenever she returned to Boston. However, the Longfellows were not invited for her wedding to Otto Goldschmidt early in February which was "most quietly and privately accomplished" at the home of friends on Beacon Hill.

Great singers came to America in these revealing years: Theresa Parodi; the bass Marini for whom Verdi wrote; Angiolina Bosio and her husband; Mario Bettini, Katherine Hayes, Anna Thillon, Cesare Badiali ("the superbest of all baritones in my time"); and finally, in 1852, the distinguished sopranos Henriette Sontag and Marietta Alboni. Sontag, as far as can be discovered, gave the first public hearing of Schubert's *Erlkönig* in America. Walt Whitman viewed these artists from his gallery seat in New York but never met them. Washington Irving, however, moved easily among the society in which they were entertained.

The Longfellows were familiar with the great performers and the performing places of distinction. The nation's finest auditorium, the Boston Music Hall, opened on November 30, 1852, a truly gala occasion, with the Longfellows in attendance.

The next wave of great operatic performances came with Mario (Count of Candia) and Giulia Grisi in January of 1855. Washington Irving had admired Grisi's *Norma* in Paris in 1843, and Emerson heard her and Alboni in 1848 at Covent Garden. They sang new works, surpassing all previous recollections: *I puritani*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Semiramide*, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, *La sonnambula*, *La fille du régiment*, *Faust*, *L'étoile du nord*, *Rigoletto*, and *Il trovatore*. The Longfellows missed none of these gala evenings. "Morning *Hiawatha*, evening *Norma*" records his busy day. *Hiawatha* was midway toward completion, a work destined to have to its appeal to composers. After a strenuous fortnight: "So ends our Opera-going for the present. Now for quiet evenings at home, and reading by the fireside." A vain hope.

In 1854, Longfellow enjoyed release from duties of the Smith Professorship at Harvard and a bit of relaxation. He reports, "After dinner took the boys to see *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the Museum, so badly done!" or "Took the boys to see the Regels and the tightrope dancing. It was very amusing." The quiet evenings did not continue, for there was another round of opera culminating in *Fidelio*. "Beethoven's music, like the Latin words *odi* and *memini*, though past in form has always a present significance," he wrote.

To parallel the singers there were notable pianists. Sigismund Thalberg was among the foremost, arriving January 3, 1857, and (as usual) meeting several times with the famed poet. "An affable, pleasant man, a collector of autographs, of which he says he has a large collection. He very much wants one of Washington, which I promised him."

The newly-published *Hiawatha* shortly became the subject of a work of indeterminate form in the style of David's *Le désert*, an affair with recitatives by Robert Stöpel, to be sung (or spoken) by his wife, Mathilde Herron.³⁰ The premiere on January 8, 1858 at the Boston Theater drew kinder words from the poet than from the critics. The score included a "War Song and Dance of the Pawnees," the former drawn from Schoolcraft, but neither its French nor its American ingredients could lift Stöpel's work above mediocrity.³¹

In 1860, Adelina Patti, emerging from her period of study at the "age of sixteen" (actually seventeen), was singing the role of Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, as Maria Malibran had done at the same age in 1825. "Too young to appear on the stage," Longfellow wrote. In *I puritani*, "I have a kind of fear for her, she is so very young, and am afraid her voice will be strained." This was a kindly but unnecessary concern, for Patti sang her last concert in Boston in 1903 and in London in 1914.

One Kielblock, first name unknown, another composer of mediocre talent, essayed an opera on *The Courtship of Miles Standish* in 1860 with libretto by G. T. Congdon. The poet was not impressed, nor was it a success. Mr. Longfellow had on that day (April 7) written the first lines of "Paul Revere's Ride."

It is understood, of course, that Mrs. Longfellow accompanied her husband on most of these happy occasions. Their mutual joy in music and musicians shines through her own words. But this blissful partnership was not to continue for on July 9, 1861 the tragedy of her death, a result of her dress catching fire, plunged the poet into a grief which naught could console. It was a fateful end to a precious union, leaving the poet with three daughters and two sons. Not for a long time would there be the excitement of opera. Only in late afternoon organ recitals at Harvard was there solace. John Knowles Paine, a former Portlander newly appointed instructor in music at Harvard, was introducing the works of J. S. Bach and Felix Mendelssohn. "We sat in the twilight, some fifty of us on the platform, under Beethoven's statue, without lights in the gathering darkness, and listened for an hour or two. It was very impressive." (June 1, 1867) Of the Bach works he wrote: The

Preludes and Fugues of Bach [are] learned and, I am afraid, to unlearned ears, decidedly heavy.”

In due course the burden of sorrow lifted and musical experiences of a lighter order were renewed. The great and near-great sought him out and the renowned literary figure was always the gracious host.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869), the American, Paris-trained pianist, never a great favorite in Boston, records seeing a portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Longfellow at the home of James T. Fields.³² Gottschalk’s diary has this passage for December 4, 1864: “How I should like to know Longfellow personally; but his habitual melancholy and the burden of his afflictions keep him at a distance from the world. He called on me at my hotel but I was absent and my regrets are so much more the bitter and profound as it is probably the only occasion that I might have to see our greatest poet.”³³ (Did Gottschalk know that Mr. Emerson heard him play in Pittsburgh on January 23, 1863?)

Accompanied by his sister Anne (Mrs. George W. Pierce) and his daughter (“grave Alice”), Mr. Longfellow went to Europe again in 1865 for a year’s stay. He kept no orderly journal, but there was sightseeing and private hospitality in the company of literary folk. At the age of sixty-one he no longer sought an active night life. In Italy he called at the studio of George P. A. Healy (1813–1894), the American portrait painter, where he admired a portrait of Franz Liszt. This may have reminded him of a first hearing of that composer’s *Un soir dans les montagne*, as played by Frederic Rakemann in 1840. The poet asked for an introduction and the meeting with Liszt took place in the monastery of Santa Francesco Romana, close by the Forum. The fine portrait now in Craigie House is a souvenir of the visit.³⁴

According to Healy, the poet “exclaimed under his breath: ‘Mr. Healy, you must paint that for me!’ ” The visit with the abbé was followed by a dinner party and a second visit at which Liszt played on his American-made Chickering.³⁵ (He preferred his European-made instrument at other times.) This was a remarkable encounter, for both were ardent hosts, Mr. Longfellow of European visitors and the Abbé Liszt of young Americans, often as pupils. Liszt’s letters to William Mason, for instance, are evidence of his cordiality.³⁶ Mrs. Pierce sums it up: “Our visit [of January 17, 1869] was a great thing; a very handsome but still gay man in spite of his tight-laced dress, and he and H. W. L. made a fine picture sitting side by side that day.” Meanwhile Mrs. Pierce and the Princess Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein, once the *belle amie* of Liszt, hit it off with an exchange of gifts and later correspondence, an odd alliance if ever. That Liszt valued this meeting is shown by his setting of “Glocken des Strassburg Muensters” (Part II of *Christus*). The work was sung in Cincinnati (1875), Boston (1886), and New York (1887) and probably elsewhere, but it is not one of the composer’s notable scores.

Later years of Mr. Longfellow’s concert-going coincided with a new roster of artists. On October 8, 1870, he attended a concert of the Thomas Orchestra

with the young German pianist, Anna Mehlig, as soloist. Theodore Thomas (1835–1905), a former violinist, achieved a career serving the American public in exemplary ways. He formed his own orchestra of sixty in 1869 and toured the country with the full repertory of the German classics and romanticists as then known. As for Miss Mehlig, she was a pupil of Liszt.

In November 1870 the beautiful and talented Christine Nilsson visited Boston, the most notable singer since the days of Jenny Lind, Henriette Sontag, and Marietta Alboni. Visiting Craigie House, she “came at seven and stayed until nearly midnight,” clear evidence that there was much to be shared. Nilsson had a broader repertoire than Lind and sang in opera. She was the great Marguerite in *Faust* and sang Elsa in America before essaying *Lohengrin* abroad.

Unlike other members of the Saturday Club, Longfellow cultivated music with an informed taste, but his days and evenings were now of relaxed enjoyment without critical appraisal. The “Diary” conveys his pleasure without reserve; he enjoyed everything from entertaining leading artists to attending Prof. Paine’s organ recitals at Harvard. (In 1875, Paine held the first post of that stature in an American university, and we may assume that Mr. Longfellow’s commendation influenced President Eliot in appointing him.) Musicians sought out the poet: Count Mario (Giulia Grisi died in 1869) returning to Boston in the company of Adelina Patti; Anton Rubinstein, greatest of pianists thus far to visit America, with the violinist Wieniawski; and Sir George Grove. There were Beethoven symphonies from Theodore Thomas, Beethoven’s *Fidelio* and Wagner’s *Lohengrin* once more, the latter thirty years after the poet’s first encounter with the revolutionary master.

Perhaps it was Tom Appleton’s acquaintance with Prosper Mérimée that motivated the twenty-eight year old Minnie Hauk (née Mignon Hauck, 1851–1929) of Brooklyn to call with her mother and the Baron Ernst Hesse-Wartegg. Hauk was a flamboyant Carmen of Bizet’s sensational opera, first heard in Paris in 1875. There were moments of sadness, as Ole Bull’s death in Norway (November 17, 1880), only three years after his last visit to Craigie House; the report was a reminder of the loving portrait in *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, published 1863.

Perhaps the summation of the poet’s long experience as attentive, enthusiastic devotee of the arts is shown by a letter from Lord Houghton introducing a young man named Georg Henschel (1850–1934). In his native Germany, Henschel sang the principal role in Bach’s Saint Matthew Passion under the direction of Johannes Brahms. In England he became the leading baritone and, as Lord Houghton expressed it, was about to make himself half-American by marriage to Lillian Bailey. Little did Henschel know that this visit to Boston would culminate in his being selected by Henry Lee Higginson to lead a new orchestra called the Boston Symphony.

The formal debut of the Boston Symphony on October 22, 1881, initiated a new era for music in the United States. This same year also marked the end

of a long life of musical patronage by America's renowned poet. The eager young man of our story heard his first opera, *The Barber of Seville*, on December 30, 1827. Fifty-four years elapsed in which an unflagging curiosity and an open mind sought out works of every musical genre. With nine performances of *Don Giovanni*, and seven of *Norma*, extending to the novel *Carmen*, *Mefistofele*, and works of Wagner, his cup was full. Opera foremost, the symphonies of Beethoven repeatedly, concertos, chamber music, piano selections and organ works; for all of these Longfellow was the discriminating listener, instinctively selective, and unfailingly sophisticated in appraisal. There were evenings of conversation about music in the company of those well able to sustain their parts. The poet attended America's growth from a period of unprofessional yearnings for even one Beethoven symphony to the fullness of a bountiful European repertoire, one year short of the Metropolitan Opera House's founding in 1883.

In the final pages of the journal there is mention of *Carmen*, music by Brahms, a musical visit from Sweden, one from Spain, a tribute to Ole Bull, a recommendation of the Italian opera, dinner with Salvini, and the aforementioned interview with Georg Henschel. At the age of seventy he writes: "A day of dissipation. In the afternoon Mme. Essipoff's concert, and in the evening at Miss Amy Fay's."

Longfellow was a deeply sincere man to whom music was an incentive and spur for his own work. It sustained him emotionally and assuaged his grief. I know of no literary or artistic figure in the annals of American culture whose devotion to music was more manifest at a more auspicious time.³⁷