

## Review

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William B. Bradbury, *Esther, the Beautiful Queen*, ed. Juanita Karpf. *Recent Researches in American Music*, 38. Madison, Wisc.: A-R Editions, 2000. xxx, 122 pp.

A wildly popular work after its appearance in 1856, William Bradbury's sacred cantata, *Esther, the Beautiful Queen*, sold more than 255,000 copies during its first ten years of publication; it continued to be regularly reprinted until 1924 (p. ix). Despite, or perhaps because of the relatively larger number of new editions of *Esther* during its first sixty-eight years, many deviations crept into Bradbury's original plan, encouraging a new critical edition offered here by Juanita Karpf and A-R Editions. The *Recent Researches in American Music* series was a natural home for this critical volume.

*Recent Researches in American Music* is a component to the larger A-R Editions *Recent Researches*, which includes series on the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical eras. From its inception this American music series has demonstrated a commitment to putting out modern, critical editions of neglected works in American music. Since 1977, forty-three volumes have been published. Early American musical theater, sacred music of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, little known works of the mid-nineteenth century, and works from the turn of the twentieth century encompass the business of the series so far, although publications focusing on other genres and eras are planned.<sup>1</sup> (Some volumes also belong to a smaller, more select series: *Music of the United States of America* (MUSA). A joint venture with the American Musicological Society,<sup>2</sup> the MUSA series, projected to be a forty-volume set, is dedicated to publishing a balanced body of significant works not already available through other channels.) Because sacred music and gaps in the repertoire of mid-nineteenth century music have been the two important concerns of *Recent Researches*, Bradbury's *Esther* clearly warrants a spot.

William Batchelder Bradbury was born in Maine in 1816. His parents, amateur musicians, provided him with his earliest music training and initial exposure to church music. After the family moved to Boston in 1830, Bradbury attended Lowell Mason's celebrated Academy of Music, and gained experience as an organist and teacher. He gave keyboard and voice lessons and taught classes in the rudiments of music during the 1830s.

Bradbury moved to New York in 1840 to work as music director of the First Baptist Church in Brooklyn (p. ix). His first collection, *The Young Choir*, was compiled with Thomas Hastings and published in 1841.<sup>3</sup> Bradbury became music director of the Baptist Tabernacle of New York later that year, and initiated a series of singing classes for children similar to those offered in Boston by Mason. In 1847 Bradbury began a period of study in Europe. While abroad he toured England, Switzerland, and Germany, meeting prominent musicians such as Jenny Lind, Franz Liszt, Louis Spohr, and Robert and Clara Schumann. Most of his two-year stay was spent in Leipzig, studying piano and organ with Moritz Hauptmann, voice with Franz Magnus Böhme, and composition with Ignaz Moscheles (p. ix).

Bradbury returned to New York in 1849 to play the organ and direct the choir of New York's Broadway Tabernacle. He organized and conducted "musical conventions" in the tradition of Mason, in which hundreds of participants gathered for huge singing and music literacy classes, events which provided performance opportunities for his choral works and instructional materials. At first restricted to the New York City area, Bradbury soon began to conduct conventions throughout the East and Midwest as well. By the 1850s, Bradbury was heavily engaged in music teacher training, and he promptly emerged as a leading figure urging the establishment of music education in the New York public schools (p. x).

Bradbury continued to figure prominently as a composer and compiler. His collection *The Jubilee* (1858) reportedly sold more than 200,000 copies, and sales of his smaller tunebooks aimed at Sunday School audiences, such as *The Golden Chain* (1861) and *Fresh Laurels* (1868), exceeded three million copies. His most popular sacred melody is "Jesus Loves Me." Other tunes such as "Just as I am Without One Plea," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and "He Leadeth Me" are still anthologized and familiar to American Protestant churchgoers. Other publications include several cantatas, of which the most popular was *Esther*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1854, with his brother Edward and a German piano maker, F.C. Lighte, Bradbury formed a piano manufacturing and sales business. Bradbury pianos were endorsed by William Mason, Theodore Thomas, Gottschalk, and many others. The firm was eventually absorbed into the Knabe Piano Company.<sup>5</sup>

Bradbury's *Esther* resulted from a collaboration with his friend Chauncey Marvin Cady, a well-known writer and teacher. Bradbury set Cady's text to music in August 1856, when the two, according to Cady's reminiscences, found a secluded boarding house, borrowed a portable melodeon, and worked from sunrise until 11 p.m. for four days straight, completing the entire work save the first chorus. *Esther* is Bradbury's only extended choral composition for which he alone wrote all of the music (p. x).<sup>6</sup> (Most of his works consist of individual hymns, anthems, or multiple-author compilations.)

Cady's text was compiled mostly of direct quotes or paraphrases of events in the biblical book of Esther, but also includes quotations from

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Psalms (p. xii). *Esther* opens with a narration describing King Ahasuerus's marriage to Esther, the subsequent promotion of Haman over all of the princes, and Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. The adoration of Haman forms the subject of the first chorus, followed by Haman's anger over Mordecai's resistance to him. In revenge for the perceived insult from Mordecai, Haman urges that the king kill all of the Jews in his kingdom because they flout his laws. The king agrees and gives the order. Mordecai, having learned of the pogrom about to take place, begs Queen Esther, his niece and adopted daughter, to petition the king for the lives of her people. After pointing out that all who approach the king without being summoned can be killed instantly, Esther declares she will "go unto the king, tho' not according to the law! And if I perish, I perish." After revealing her Jewish heritage, she succeeds in saving her people and identifying Haman as a traitor. The gallows that Haman initially intended for Mordecai are used to execute Haman instead, and the work ends with a triumphant chorus, delicately bypassing the biblical description of the slaughter of thousands of Haman's followers by avenging Jews. The published score also included an excerpt from the writings of the first-century historian Flavius Josephus, which Bradbury felt would enhance interest in the work among potential buyers.

Musically, *Esther* did not conform to traditional standards for sacred oratorios or cantatas. Written for SATB choir and soloists, the cantata is divided into two parts with twenty-nine numbers. The first half climaxes with Zeresh's solo before Mordecai's planned hanging. In all, there are nine choruses, five solos, two duets, several combinations of solo and chorus, duet and chorus, two quartets, and one instrumental number. Bradbury dropped recitative in favor of solo chants and spoken narration, the latter directed to be performed by a clergyman or by the best reader available. This direction may well be unique for a choral work of this period (p. xii).

Karpf notes that although solo chant was unusual in a sacred oratorio, Anglican chant was experiencing a revival in mid-nineteenth century American church music (p. xi). Vernacular chant of this type had its roots in Anglican liturgy, which was practiced widely in colonial America until the Revolutionary War. Its use diminished in the early Federal period, but in the 1840s, Lowell Mason urged a revival with more success.<sup>7</sup> Some of his earlier books included chants; indeed his 1842 *Book of Chants* consisted entirely of Anglican style melodies intended for use by Protestant congregations of any denomination.<sup>8</sup> Mason's enthusiasm for this musical style, as well as his argument that chanting might be the most effective means of handling certain texts, must have been Bradbury's primary reason for using the solo chant style instead of operatic recitative. Bradbury's style of chant adheres closely to the standard Anglican practice. Text lines are underlaid by block chords with rhythms and tempos left entirely in the hands of the singer or speaker.

Bradbury's use of tunes with a vernacular flavor in many of the numbers aligns him with another church music reform movement (also begun

by Mason) to write more accessible melodies and harmonies, with words set to enable clear declamation. George Frederick Root called pieces written in this vein—such as *Esther*—“cantatas for the people” (p. xi). The melodies of these works were generally of a limited range, with relatively simple rhythms, little chromaticism, and straightforward harmonies. In many ways Bradbury’s *Esther* is similar in design to Root’s operatic cantata, *The Haymakers*.<sup>9</sup> *Esther* is much more subdued musically, but otherwise falls firmly into this category. The work consists of a mixture of strophic and through-composed songs of varying lengths.

Bradbury also combined snatches of popular tunes into his melodies. His borrowings included everything from popular ballads to minstrel tunes to hymn tunes like “Old Hundred,” which occurs in the final chorus of *Esther* (p. xi). Whether his borrowing consisted entirely of direct appropriation from popular repertoires or included the use of many common melodic formulas remains to be definitively answered. Melodic formulae identified by Nicholas Tawa in his analysis of nineteenth-century popular songs show that many tunes of the time use the same basic vocabulary: similar short rhythmic figures, melodic contours, and patterns of text accentuation. For example, one particular melody type Bradbury used in the number, “A Song of Joy,” corresponds to that of the minstrel tune “Kiss Me Quick and Go”<sup>10</sup> (see figure, p. 51). In addition, various dance rhythms appear in some sections. A succession of quarter notes dominates “Call to the Banquet,” while a jig precedes the duet “Long Live Our Beauteous Queen” (p. xii).

In other portions of the work, a light operatic style—emphasis on the dramatic scenarios rather than bravura singing—dominates. Suggestions for stage movement appear in songs like “Go Thou Unto the King,” where the score calls for a chorus of Jews in the distance. Likewise, the text of “A Song of Joy,” which refers to passing the cup around, might also indicate the possibility of stage action. Probably wanting to reassure his patrons, wary about even the suggestion of theatricality, Bradbury denied that *Esther* was a secular drama, claiming the work to be only a musical representation of a most interesting scripture scene. No one should attempt to perform it theatrically, tragically or comically, he insisted.

Most reviews of *Esther* were complimentary, but some commented on the work’s alleged technical shortcomings and limitations. One reviewer mentioned Handel’s oratorio, *Esther*, but declined to compare Bradbury’s version in detail, writing that it would be too cruel to Bradbury and too disrespectful to Handel. Other reviewers criticized Bradbury’s “popular and easy” musical language as incompetence. The majority of reviewers, however, found *Esther* to be pleasing to the ear and easy to perform—both important considerations for the average church choir of the time (p. x).

Complete piano accompaniments appeared in only nine numbers of *Esther*, with partial accompaniment—reminiscent of baroque-style basso continuo without the figures—in the rest of the original score. In some cases prose directions provided guidance for realizations. However, if no

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# KING AND HAMAN. "A Song of Joy."

No. 5.

HAMAN, 1st time Solo, 2d time, DUET with king.

ALLEGRO con SPIRITO.

The zest of roy - al  
Nor dream of grief or

al - loy.....  
to - day.....

let nought, let nought  
En - joy, en - joy

of joy.....  
we may.....

time.....  
wake.....

1. { A  
HAMAN.

2. { There's

When storms, when storms are high..... For us the skies are  
With loud, with loud re - strain..... That prais-eth roy - al

A song, a song, a song, a song of joy..... Let nought, let nought al - loy..... The zest of roy - al

Accompaniment - Play also the Melody in Octaves.

1. { fare, The zest of roy - al fare..... Then  
care, Nor dream of [Omr.....] grief or  
1st time. 2d time. Then

2. { clear, For us the skies are clear..... Then  
cheer, That praiseth [Omr.....] roy - al cheer. 1. Kings sometimes un - bend, E'en kings may jo - vial be, ha, ha, ha, ha!

fare, The zest of roy al fare.....  
1. Wisdom here is found, And wit doth spar - kle free, ha, ha, ha, ha!

William B. Bradbury, Esther, the Beautiful Queen, "A Song of Joy" (New York: Mason Bros., 1856),  
12 (Part 1, no. 5). Courtesy of American Music Research Center.

accompaniment or instructions appeared, the keyboard player usually doubled the bass voice with the voice immediately above the bass, or improvised an accompaniment (p. 119).

Karpf used the original 1856 Mason Brothers score as the basis for her work. In this critical edition, Karpf has updated some of the archaic notation of the original score, modernized spellings, and corrected several errors. Karpf provides cue-sized notes in the keyboard staves under the bass voice in accordance with Bradbury's apparent practice noted above. Successive editions published before 1874 retained Bradbury's notes and organizational plan. However, in 1874, R.W. Seager prepared an edition that included almost all of Bradbury's music, while omitting the Biblical readings and adding instructions for costumes and stage directions. Two choruses, "To God on High," by Felix Mendelssohn and "Beautiful are Thy Towers, O Zion," by Luther Orlando Emerson were also appended to that 1874 score following the conclusion of Bradbury's music. Both have been omitted from Karpf's critical edition.

This volume mirrors the other *Recent Researches in American Music* in layout and design. Historical and biographical information is given at the beginning, followed by Cady's text, four facsimile pages of the original publication, the musical work itself in a piano/vocal score, and a critical report at the end. The drawbacks of this edition include a lack of discussion about performance practice and the stage history of *Esther*. A more detailed exploration of Bradbury's musical borrowing would also have been interesting although perhaps beyond the scope of the volume. Overall, Karpf's edition at least makes Bradbury's *Esther* available in readable format to those who might wish to investigate this historical curiosity.

Lisa M. Cook

## Notes

1. "Recent Researches in American Music," [web site] (*Recent Researches in American Music* [cited 13 September 2001]); originally available from [www.areditions.com/rr/rra.html](http://www.areditions.com/rr/rra.html).

2. "Music of the United States of America," (*Music of the United States of America* [cited 13 September 2001]); originally available from [www.areditions.com/rr/index/set\\_musa.html](http://www.areditions.com/rr/index/set_musa.html).

3. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd edition (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001), s.v. "Bradbury, William Batchelder," by Harry Eskew, 174. [originally available at [www.grovemusic.com](http://www.grovemusic.com).]

4. Eskew.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Esther* does use the tune "Old 100" as a chorale in the last number, but the harmonization is original.

7. Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985), 164. Those attempts include Andrew Law's *Rudiments of Music* (Philadelphia, 1783), which was the first American tunebook to include chant; and Joshua Cushing's *Chants, Occasional Pieces and Psalm Tunes, for the Use of the Protestant*

*Episcopal Churches in the United States* (1814), which was one of the first American books to consist almost entirely of chants. Jonathan M. Wainwright and Dr. George K. Jackson also encouraged the use of chant in the early nineteenth century (*ibid.*).

8. *Ibid.*

9. A-R Editions has also published a critical edition of *The Haymakers*, edited by Dennis R. Martin, as *Recent Researches in American Music*, Volumes IX and X (1984).

10. For further information, see Nicholas E. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980); and Nicholas E. Tawa, "Serious Songs of the Early Nineteenth Century. Part 2: The Meaning of the Early Song Melodies," *American Music* 13 (1995): 274, 280-81.