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Cosmopolitan and Provincial: American Musical Historiography

HISTORICAL WRITING IS JUDGED on quality of information and authority of interpretation. Other scholars are its ultimate judges, for worth is measured by its usefulness to them. Quality of information depends upon accuracy and thoroughness. (Are the facts true? Are the sources comprehensive? Is the documentation complete?) But the quality of a study's information can be hard to judge apart from the author's interpretive perspective. As time passes, the past enlarges and, like the road already traveled, takes on new aspects. Facts about the past do not change. But as one's vantage point moves, the meanings of facts often change with it. New interpretive perspectives appear, sometimes strongly reacting against earlier ones. Such shifts can carry the temptation to dismiss earlier work, as if a perspective that one no longer accepts taints even the facts its author has brought to light. Fresh insights are sure to follow a break with past perspectives. But if such a break is allowed to relegate older histories to oblivion, it works against the building of a tradition of historical study.

A scholarly field forms a tradition of historical study when earlier writers on the same subject are recognized as predecessors, when their work is studied closely, when the questions they raise are identified, discussed, and debated, and when their findings are assimilated. A tradition of historical study progresses, in the sense in which E. H. Carr has defined historical progress, by transmitting the knowledge and experience of one generation of scholars to the next.¹ Entry into a musicological field with a tradition thus depends upon mastering a core of scholarly writings, which themselves deal with a certain musical rep-

ertory and are centered on fundamental issues, subject to changing interpretations and approaches.

Within American music, one can find a few fields in which such a tradition has formed. The music of Charles Ives is one. In Ives studies, and a few others as well, bibliographical and editorial foundations have been laid, biographical investigations undertaken, local inquiries launched, and style-based books and articles written. In such fields, an agenda has been set and a process of distillation begun. Scholars have mapped the terrain, data are more known than unknown, major issues have been defined, and interpretive refinements are proceeding apace.²

No such tradition has formed for historical studies in American music as a whole. Since 1955, Gilbert Chase, Wilfrid Mellers, H. Wiley Hitchcock, and Charles Hamm, four respected scholars, have each written a history of American music from earlier times to the present. Chase's, Hitchcock's, and Hamm's books were published for the American college textbook market, while Mellers's was brought out by a trade publisher.³ As a group, the four books are most remarkable for having so little to do with each other, either in approach or in territory covered. Hamm's work, the most recent of the four, contains the following statement: "Though I have dealt with a wider range of music than is found in any earlier histories of music in the United States, much has been left out. In fact, one could easily write another book, perhaps of equal length, dealing with the music I have chosen to exclude. Perhaps I will undertake such a book myself one day."⁴ Hamm's words suggest that historians of American music have yet to agree what the history of American music *is*; the four books I've mentioned bear out this suggestion.

Chase's book is comprehensive by the lights of its time, and it is written with the conviction and documentary command of a seminal work. Chase breaks sharply with earlier histories by devoting more than half his book to folk and popular music, which he claims as our chief source of musical vitality.⁵ Mellers praises Chase's work as "admirable" and then proceeds to go his own way, saying little about folk music or the years before 1900. He distinguishes elements in American music that are "genuine and meaningful" from those that are not,⁶ and he concentrates on music that shows twentieth-century American composers coping successfully with a commercial environment—with special emphasis on composers and players in the jazz tradition. Hitchcock,

who wrote the slimmest volume of the four, acknowledges the influence of Chase's work on his own, but his account includes folk music only peripherally.⁷ His division of the nineteenth century into two streams—the “cultivated” and the “vernacular” traditions—has been widely borrowed. But not by Hamm, who deals with his predecessors in a respectful footnote, then strikes out on an entirely new path, concentrating on music brought to the New World from Europe and Africa and changed in its subsequent history here. Folk and popular musics fill a large proportion of his book, as they do Chase's. But unlike Chase, Hamm cares most about reception—about the music that has won the widest audience; and he flaunts folkloric values by claiming “contaminated” music as America's “most characteristic and dynamic” musical product.⁸

These contrasts may be pursued a bit more through glimpses of further details. Chase violates chronology by ending his book with a chapter on Charles Ives, for him the culminating figure in American music, because, “first and alone among American composers,” Ives “was able to discern and to utilize the truly idiosyncratic and germinal elements of our folk and popular music.”⁹ With Ives identified as the Messiah, one tends to notice in the earlier parts of Chase's text prophecies of his eventual coming. Mellers's scholarly apparatus—a bibliography of books running barely to a page and a discography of more than fifty pages—shows that he approached the subject with open ears if with somewhat closed mind. Hitchcock balances his coverage between eras, genres, and approaches and preaches the gospel that American musical history is coherent. (He lacks the curmudgeonly streak of Chase and Mellers; if anything on the American music scene makes Hitchcock mad, the reader doesn't find out about it.) Hamm begins by announcing that several new record series are the most significant recent developments in American musical research. And his book reflects his own encounters as a listener with an unusually wide range of American musics.

These incongruities reflect the different backgrounds and interests of our four authors and the differing sponsorships under which their books appeared.¹⁰ But more than that, they reflect the absence in America of a canon of musical masterworks and composers—the kind of canon on which European musical historiography centers.¹¹ One might guess that our historians' freedom to define their subject is a recent phenomenon—part of the general social reorientation that followed World

War II. But in fact, that freedom (or lack of continuity) goes back much further. It is present from the beginning of the writing of American music history. And it reflects the strain of randomness that, over nearly a century and a half of serious study, has run through histories of American music. If one thinks of pluralism as an American trait, perhaps it is especially fitting that such disparate figures as Hood, Ritter, Matthews, Elson, Howard, Chase, and Mellers have written histories of American music. For in background, outlook, taste, and training, it is hard to imagine a more various crew of historians undertaking the same mission. That that mission, even now, remains something of a pioneering endeavor—a trip whose route and destination are up to the traveler—testifies to the field's schismatic legacy. At the same time, it invites reflection on that legacy and the benefits of historiographical study.

Our historians and works, however various, do hold certain things in common. All take Europe as a starting point. Indeed, no fact about the writing of American music history is more characteristic than the looming presence of Europe. Scholars of music are trained and acculturated to think of European music history as their norm. Whether as provider, exploiter, or authority figure, whether in the foreground or background, Europe is the powerful “other” in the story that Chase, Mellers, Hitchcock, and Hamm tell. All agree that the U.S.A. is a European colony—an outpost of European settlement on a faraway continent. All focus chiefly on musical practices created in the Old World (whether Europe or Africa) and extended to the New. All concentrate, to one degree or another, on the *process* of extension, and especially on how Old World practices have been accepted, altered, or ignored. Finally, all have described the extension of Old World practices to the New in value-laden terms; colonialism, whether in politics, economics, or music, is a hard topic to treat from the cool, objective posture that scholars are trained to strike.

As for discontinuities, from the bird's-eye vantage point of today, the histories fall into two groups, depending upon their response to the issue of colonialism. It was on this point, in fact, that Chase broke decisively with the historical perspective of his predecessors. The issue can be drawn clearly by referring to the eighteenth century, a time when American musical life was comparatively simple. A musicologist studying the American scene before 1800 soon recognizes the existence of two sharply contrasting musical ways of life. One was carried on by musicians

who took their direction from creative and intellectual centers abroad; the other involved those who resisted, or reinterpreted, or, most likely, failed to receive messages from such centers. The first group worked to extend Old World hegemony; the second, seldom conscious of more than the outlines of Old World practices, found their own ways of making music within the general run of their daily lives. The first group was small, urban, and professional, led by immigrants. The second group, larger by far, lacked intellectual focus, though most members hailed from American villages and the countryside.¹²

Here is the kind of dichotomy with which a historian can work and play. Though it is surely too black and white to account for all musicians in colonial America, it does define tendencies inescapable then and still present today. By doing so, it fixes a point of view from which American musical life as a whole can be studied. Once the two polar opposites are labeled—we'll call the first cosmopolitan and the second provincial—we have a typology that, if the labels are separated from connotations of approval or disapproval, can help to order our view of the past.

Like American musicians of the eighteenth century, historians of American music have tended to line up in two camps. The cosmopolitan school, which dominates the historiographical outlook through John Tasker Howard (and World War II), has been inclined to find European hegemony inevitable, or healthy, or both. The provincial outlook, which informs histories of New England psalmody written in the 1840s and 1850s and resurfaces in parts of Arthur Farwell and W. Dermot Darby's volume of 1915, came to full fruition only in the 1950s. Chase and Hamm have been its chief spokesmen. Rejecting Europe as a musical model for America, its advocates have concentrated on the deeds of musicians who seem to have done the same, finding value chiefly in divergence from European practices. For the cosmopolitan school, technical mastery and the acceptance of European forms and aesthetic principles are signs of musical vitality. For the provincial school, these traits are less highly prized than originality, experimentation, eclecticism, and an absence of self-consciousness.

In shaping their accounts to fit a particular point of view, historians of American music have merely borrowed a trick of the trade available to any writer seeking to order a large stock of information. Henry James gave an eloquent description of this technique shortly after the death in August 1891 of James Russell Lowell, his mentor, teacher, and friend.

James observed that after a man dies those who knew him “find his image strangely simplified and summarized.” He continued:

The hand of death, in passing over it, has smoothed the folds, made it more typical and general. The figure retained by the memory is compressed and intensified; accidents have dropped away from it and shades have ceased to count; it stands, sharply, for a few estimated and cherished things, rather than, nebulously, for a swarm of possibilities. We cut the silhouette, in a word, out of the confusion of life, we save and fix the outline, and it is with his eye on this profiled distinction that the [writer] speaks.¹³

James was writing here about biography, but his words apply to the writing of history, too. For, once their research has uncovered the human achievements of the past, historians explore all available ways of revealing them: summarizing, intensifying, and casting certain events into relief in part by deemphasizing, even omitting others—by “cut[ting] the silhouette . . . out of the confusion of life.” If we accept James’s description as relevant to history, we are reminding ourselves that, every bit as much as an act of compilation, the writing of history is an act of clarification, compression, and surgery.

James’s image of cutting a silhouette from the disorder of life is especially apt. In the first place, a silhouette fuses data and perspective into one image, which is the way they appear in written history. In the second, just as a silhouette requires a deft gesture of the artist’s hand to catch the likeness, historical writing depends upon the writer’s skill in holding many facts and ideas simultaneously in the mind and catching from among them precisely those that clarify—first for the writer, then for the reader—the outline and texture of the matter at hand.

The image of a field whose polarities are “cosmopolitan” and “provincial” is precisely the kind of silhouette that James described. It has served American music historians well, helping them both to order their information and to judge the music with which they have dealt. But it’s important to remember that the image comes from historians’ own beliefs, values, and experiences. Historical “silhouettes,” formed from facts seen and heard, are summoned by the historian’s own habits of seeing and hearing. Who historians are, the background and training

they bring to their task, the motives behind their studies, the stake they hold in the outcome—all of these things shape the history they write.

Although the first comprehensive history of American music was a product of the 1880s, two books of narrower scope set the stage for it. Their early dates and their consistent use by later historians gives them pride of place as fundamental works of American music history. And so it is with Hood and Gould, pioneer historians of American psalmody, that our survey begins.

George Hood (1807–82) was born in Topsfield, Massachusetts. “Early in life,” according to a contemporary, “he began teaching as a profession, and, in turn, was teacher of a public school, of church music, of a ladies’ seminary, and finally became minister of the Gospel.”¹⁴ After his ordination as a Presbyterian clergyman (1848), Hood’s involvement with music decreased. But for a decade beginning in the mid-1830s—from about the time he attended a Boston singing convention led by Lowell Mason and George J. Webb (1835)—he was occupied with the history he published in 1846.¹⁵

Hood wrote as a pious Christian in search of the origins of New England psalmody, the musical tradition in which he himself was a participant. He harbored no illusions about the place of musical artistry in the environment he described. “We know that our music was mean,” he admitted. But by gathering the past “carefully up,” he hoped to “set it with the future, that the contrast may appear the more bright and beautiful.”¹⁶ It was not Hood’s style to ridicule earlier practices, however sharply they contrasted with those of the present. Like other New Englanders of his time, who, in writing the histories of their families and their communities, honored and venerated their forefathers, Hood came to admire New England’s sacred music pioneers. For him, the figures meriting the deepest respect were the Reverends John Cotton, Thomas Symmes, Cotton Mather, and other clergymen who led the reforms of sacred music in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. “Never was a discussion in this country conducted by better men, or men of better minds,” wrote Hood.¹⁷ While promising to carry his account “to the beginning of the present century,” Hood focused on earlier times, when sacred music was a matter of deep concern to these

redoubtable men. Thus, Hood's history is about the implanting of English psalmody in the colonies, the Regular Singing controversy, and the founding of singing schools and choirs.

Having chosen an antiquarian subject, Hood discovered how elusive historical documents could be. "The matter has been gathered by much labor, time and expense from different parts of the Union, and frequently in very small portions. The labor has been almost incredible. To show something of its difficulty, there are six consecutive lines that were unfinished more than one year." But once the documents were in hand, he determined "to give the facts as he found them."¹⁸ He did so chiefly by letting the original authors tell their own stories. Of Hood's first 150 pages, two-thirds are direct quotations from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers. Several more pages are devoted to a chronological listing of American sacred tunebooks, based on his own collection and that of Lowell Mason. Hood proposed that this list be completed by others and that the books themselves be collected and deposited in the Massachusetts Historical Society. "In the future," he explained, they will "tell the history of the past, far more impressively than the page of history."¹⁹

Here, in a nutshell, is Hood's historiographical philosophy. For him, documents were primary, historical opinion and interpretation secondary. Hood's appreciation of the value of historical documents is distinctly modern. It explains why, while other nineteenth-century histories of American music lie neglected on library shelves, Hood's *History of Music in New England* has provided the foundation for all later accounts. Hood's struggle to find accurate information on the remote past took on the character of a passionate quest, at one point provoking the following outburst: "When we see the devastation that is almost universally made, with old books, papers, and records, valuable for their historic information, by brutes in human form, what language is harsh enough to denounce such impious destruction?"²⁰

It's hard to imagine such thoughts crossing the mind of Nathaniel D. Gould (1781–1864), whose history followed Hood's by seven years.²¹ Although Gould, like Hood, restricted his account to psalmody, he shared neither Hood's love for research nor his fascination with origins. Gould's story picks up where Hood's left off: with the career of William Billings, who for Gould exemplifies the "dark age" (1770–1805) when psalmody in America began to be carried on largely free of religious

control.²² Its main subject, however, and its method are more autobiographical and practical than historical. Gould's last eight chapters concentrate on the singing school since 1800. As teacher of some 115 singing schools and "not less than *fifty thousand*" scholars, Gould could look back over half a century in the field—he was seventy-two years old when his book appeared—and see himself not as "a mere compiler, but a busy actor in the scenes he has described."²³

Born in Bedford, Massachusetts, Gould opened his first singing school in 1799 and from that time followed the teacher's trade, chiefly in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.²⁴ His authority as a historian varied with his chronicle's proximity to his own experience. After an erratic sprint through Billings's American predecessors, he announced: "We now leave the traditional history of church music, and enter a field where, for the last fifty years or more, we are enabled, from experience, observation and information, to vouch for the facts we relate."²⁵ There follows a participant's account of the workings of the New England singing school during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gould wrote in the belief that "unless accomplished by some one soon, the history must forever remain a mere matter of hearsay."²⁶ He evoked vividly the world of early American choral singers and their eccentricities. These were the conditions we teachers faced in those backward days, Gould told his readers, and I know because I was there.

Gould's underlying theme was that sacred music, a powerful aid to religious devotion when sung to God's glory, was vulnerable to corruption for profane ends. In Gould's account, human nature seems perpetually at odds with the proper employment of sacred music. To gain musical skill as a performer of psalmody is to be tempted to forget its sacred purpose. Tippling teachers, status-seeking singers, choristers who sleep through sermons, viol players who tune at distracting length, parishioners who criticize the choir's singing: These are the characters in Gould's tale for whom psalmody had become human display drained of sacred content. American sacred music-making achieved its true purpose, Gould believed, only when carried on under the scrutiny and control of religious leaders.

Gould's theme was a familiar one in the Calvinist tradition. Yet his account is no jeremiad. He took a bemused pleasure in his countrymen's musical superstitions, as in his tale of the congregation in which erstwhile foes of instruments in church were won over when told that the

sounds accompanying their Sunday morning psalm singing were those of the “Godly Viol.”²⁷ The relish with which Gould cataloged the “improprieties” of American choral singers seems rooted not in a reformer’s zeal to condemn but a patriarch’s inclination to temper judgment with humane understanding.

That a wide gulf separates Frédéric Louis Ritter (1834–91) from his predecessors is clear to even the most casual observer. That gulf may be measured by time (three decades elapsed between Gould’s work and Ritter’s *Music in America*),²⁸ by scope (Ritter’s work encompasses the whole of significant music-making in America as he saw it), and by the author’s outlook. For it was Ritter, writing as a scholar grounded in a knowledge of European music history, who introduced the cosmopolitan perspective. At a time when New Englanders were still debating whether the Bible authorized them “to sing or read the psalms in the church,” Ritter reminded his readers, Bach and Handel had already begun “to fashion their immortal strains.” And while “the child Mozart was astonishing the European musical world as a performer and a composer,” on this side of the Atlantic the likes of Lyon, Flagg, and Bayley, borrowing from “the weak and often insipid strains of a Tansur, Williams, [or] others of that stamp,” were compiling their rudimentary tunebooks.²⁹ Ritter brought to his work the experience of a historian who had already written a two-volume *History of Music* (1870–74). Moreover, on the very same date that Ritter’s *Music in America* was published, a companion volume, *Music in England*, also appeared. “When I determined to write the history of musical development in the United States,” he explained, “I found, that in order to enable my readers to understand the peculiar beginnings and first growth of that development, an insight into the history of musical culture in England was desirable. I therefore concluded to introduce the history of music in America, by that of the immediately preceding period in England.”³⁰

If Hood had written to reconstruct the record of a forgotten age and Gould to preserve hallowed memories, Ritter stated a more complex agenda:

[to present] a faithful mirror of past music life in the United States, to accentuate that which is in accord with a true art spirit, . . . to expose . . . that which is puerile, hollow, pretentious, fictitious, and a great hindrance to progress; to give their justly

merited due to those musicians who, by means of great exertions in the interests of higher musical culture among the American people deserve the grateful remembrance of the present . . . generation; to dispel, as far as possible, the errors and false views still entertained in Europe regarding musical affairs in America.³¹

These words introduce an account of American music history deeply imbued with cosmopolitan values. Ritter was a native Alsatian, trained musically in Europe, who arrived in this country in 1856, directed choruses and orchestras in Cincinnati and New York, who composed vigorously throughout his life, and who served as professor of music at Vassar College from 1867 until his death in 1891.

For Ritter, the reformed Calvinists of England and America were religious zealots who stifled music's development as either an independent art or a characteristic folk expression. Ritter treated the Puritan attitude with undisguised scorn. He found it the chief source of a religious climate that, in his judgment, lay like a wet blanket over American musical life. Even in the nineteenth century, he wrote, America was full of "church-people"—people "opposed to all aesthetic tendencies that cannot be rendered absolutely subordinate to ecclesiastical power."³² That state of mind, Ritter believed, robbed Americans of all incentive to develop their musicianship beyond an elementary level. Ritter's acid comments on nineteenth-century psalmody provide a succinct measure of the distance between the cosmopolitan and provincial outlooks of his day:

In the time of Hastings, Mason, [and] Gould, the New-England psalm-tune teacher thought, on the whole, little of the professional musician, who was not able to quote the Bible on each and every occasion, and who could not lead a revival meeting. The professional musician, on the other hand, thought little of the psalm-tune teacher, who, in general, could not play, sing or compose.³³

Ritter's European birth, his forthright antiprovincialism, and his often sarcastic pen have combined to give him a terrible reputation. It has become almost obligatory for writers on American music, if they mention Ritter's name, to take a shot at him.³⁴ If historians worked by deduction, one could infer from Ritter's values that, borrowing from

Hood and Gould, he would polish off the early years of American music in short order and then move on to greener pastures. He doesn't. Instead, he devotes almost a quarter of his book to the eighteenth century, basing his own account on Hood (whom he admired) and Gould (whom he didn't) and on his own research in primary sources from the period, some of which he acquired for his own library.³⁵ Ritter's reputation might serve as a cautionary note to the foreign-born critic of America's music. He is remembered as an ardent Columbiaphobe and a prejudiced man, even though his evaluations of American musical practices are presented and documented as those of a reputable historical craftsman, working from research and personal observation.³⁶

Ritter's history focuses chiefly upon two processes in nineteenth-century American musical life. In the foreground is the implantation of cultivated European music in America. (What European musicians traveled, performed, or settled here? What European music did Americans hear and perform, and in what circumstances?) More in the background is a second process: that of Americans struggling to free themselves from the legacy of musical Puritanism. (What institutions offered American singers and players the chance to widen their technical and aesthetic horizons beyond the requirements of the simplest church and instructional music?) Ritter describes the two streams of American musical development separately. In doing so, he concentrates all the interpretive precision he can muster upon these questions, which, for him, were the central ones of American music history. Both his questions and his answers show that he understood the complexity of his subject. Ritter had worked long and widely enough as a musician in America to appreciate the achievements of musicians who had come before him, even as he took them to task for their outlook. Ritter's work has sometimes been read as an ideological tract. But his treatment of the battle between cosmopolitan and provincial forces is also an account emanating directly from his own practical experience as a music-maker.

Six years after Ritter's history was published, *A Hundred Years of Music in America. An Account of Musical Effort in America during the Past Century . . .*, (etc., etc.) appeared in print.³⁷ Here was a book whose size and comprehensive scope seemed to promise the whole story. The introduction predicted: "We are confident that no reader will rise from a careful examination of this book unimpressed by the richness of the material here presented."³⁸ The richness turns out to be biographical.

The book is first and foremost a gallery, its text recording the lives of some 500 musicians, supplementing the “two hundred and forty portraits” (i.e., photographs) of the men and women whose likenesses stare with unrelieved dignity from its pages. “None of the sciences, arts and industries,” the reader is told,

compare with music in the extent, universality, directness or beauty of the beneficence with which it dowers the human family. . . . Yet what other has been so neglected in that kind of honor which places its representative men in enduring eminence upon fame’s immortal scroll? . . . The priests of music . . . are alone left to the transient and evanescent reward of passing praise. To what more eloquent task can type . . . be placed, than to that of rescuing these from ingratitude and forgetfulness, and giving them, both for the present and for posterity, enduring place and honor?³⁹

A Hundred Years is based on information gathered from the subjects themselves “or their immediate representatives . . . at immense expense of trouble and patience.”⁴⁰ The early chapters, drawn from Hood, Ritter, and other secondary sources, are written as historical narrative. But once the time of Lowell Mason is reached, most chapters turn into successions of brief biographies, dwelling upon the positive achievements of their subjects, introduced and connected with narrative explanation. The progress of music education, for example, is shown by two whopping chapters, filling some 200 pages with accounts of the lives of music teachers. The book’s tone is hagiographical. One imagines, in fact, that data were extracted from these priests and priestesses of music with a promise to accentuate the positive. Nevertheless, the book shows a common sense awareness of the process of colonization from a perspective different from Ritter’s.⁴¹ Topics seldom covered in histories are broached here: the importance of publicity in musical life, the different values that separate the pianist’s world from that of the singer, or American singers’ difficulties with English (attributed “in part” to foreign training “and in part to their own mistaken ideals of . . . singing of the highest class”).⁴²

Although no author claimed *A Hundred Years*, it was the brainchild of W. S. B. Mathews (1837–1912). A native New Englander and a pianist,

Mathews lived in Chicago for most of his mature life, working as a teacher, journalist, and critic. *A Hundred Years* describes him “as a music educator, in the widest sense of the term,” explaining: “his higher vocation is that of an intermediary between purely musical ideas and purely literary ideas, in which sphere he has been the means of conveying to literary life something of the impression that music makes upon those who understand it intimately.”⁴³ This characterization suggests how Mathews’s book can best be read: as the work of a facilitator, a man who understood and recognized the many different levels and lingo of his subject, who combined the pride of a provincial enthusiast with the experience of a cosmopolitan critic, and who could communicate with a broad readership. Mathews’s work is most valuable as a compendium of firsthand data about American musical life in the second half of the nineteenth century, compiled by a man who experienced, understood, and sympathized with an unusually wide range of it.

The early years of the twentieth century saw the publication of three new histories of American music (1904–15), each commissioned to fill a niche in a larger series of books.⁴⁴ In contrast to the histories of Ritter and Mathews, all are works more of compilation and summary than of original research. While varied in approach and content, all seem rooted in a wish to illuminate and assess the present-day scene. All attempt comprehensiveness. All seek, with the help of a growing secondary literature, to cover earlier periods. Nevertheless, the authors all show more interest in describing the present state of American music-making than in trying to discover how it got that way. In all three histories, the reader is shown a musical culture whose potential outweighs its achievements. Louis C. Elson, in comparing American and European musical life, expresses hope for the future but finds his own country’s musical training misdirected: too much emphasis on solo performance, too little on ensembles and music appreciation, and the whole carried on too hastily for students to digest.⁴⁵ W. L. Hubbard warns that, although American musicians are overcoming geographical isolation and “the utilitarian spirit always in evidence in young nations,” the United States would become “a true home of art” only when it produced a composer of “genius.”⁴⁶ Arthur Farwell (writing in the book coedited by W. Dermot Darby), interpreting musical life as a reflection of “national ideals,” sees the present as a time when “the many are striving to obtain [what] has been the exclusive possession of the few.” That process, he predicts,

will soon transform the art of music as practiced on American shores.⁴⁷

Elson's, Hubbard's, and Farwell and Darby's histories were all written by experienced writers who were inexperienced historians. In an age where reliable musical information could be hard to come by, these men worked to supply it and hence to meet a public need. But they were no explorers of the mysteries of the past. Elson (1848–1920), a Bostonian born and bred, worked there all his life, chiefly as a music critic for the *Daily Advertiser* and a teacher of music history and theory at the New England Conservatory.⁴⁸ Elson's interest in folk music and patriotic song had also helped to inspire his *National Music of America and Its Sources* (Boston, 1900). Among the others involved in this historiographical flurry, composer Arthur Farwell (1872–1952) seems to have held the highest personal stake in telling the story of American musical life. In four cross-country trips (1903–7), he had presented lecture recitals on contemporary American music and experienced musical conditions in the United States firsthand.⁴⁹ Less is known about the other two authors, and nothing about their interest in American music. William Lines Hubbard (1867–1951) worked off and on from 1891 to 1907 as music critic and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*—he was also dramatic editor (1902–7)—while teaching singing and living in Europe from 1893 to 1898.⁵⁰ W. Dermot Darby (1885–1947), Farwell's coeditor, was a native of Ireland. Trained in England and New York, Darby served as secretary of the Modern Music Society in New York in 1916 and helped to edit *The Art of Music* (1914–17) but has left no further mark on the written record.⁵¹

Elson's *The History of American Music* is the closest thing to a coffee-table book that the field has yet produced and, if later editions signal success, the most successful before Howard's *Our American Music*.⁵² Printed on thick, glossy paper, bound so that it will lie open, supplied “with twelve full-page photogravures [the first one of the author himself] and one hundred and two illustrations in the text,”⁵³ it is a handsome volume by any measure, and especially so when compared with its modestly produced predecessors. (At nearly three pounds, it weighs in at about the level of a volume of *The New Grove*.) Elson's work owed its sumptuous format to the circumstances of its issue. As part of a series edited by John C. Van Dyke, a critic, professor of the history of art at Rutgers College, and a president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, it was designed to sit on the shelf next to such companion

volumes as Lorado Taft's *The History of American Sculpture* and Samuel Isham's *The History of American Painting*.

Earlier historians of American music had begun their books by announcing why they were writing them and what they hoped to show. In Elson's history, however, the only prefatory statement was the general editor's. "This series of books brings together for the first time the materials for a history of American art," Van Dyke announced.

The present volumes begin with colonial times, and carry the record down to the year 1904. They are intended to cover the graphic, the plastic, the illustrative, the architectural, the musical, and the dramatic arts, and to recite the results in each department historically and critically. That the opinions ventured should be authoritative, the preparation of each volume has been placed in the hands of an expert,—one who practices the craft whereof he writes.⁵⁴

Of Elson's history, Van Dyke notes: "Many of the events here narrated occurred but yesterday or are happening to-day, and hence have little perspective for the historian." In *The History of American Music*, he adds, "the widely scattered facts have been brought together and arranged sequentially that they might tell their own story and point their own conclusion." Elson's history shows every sign of having been written to specifications set by its editor.

Though it covers different ground, Elson's *The History of American Music* shares with Mathews's a topical organization. It begins with the New England Puritans and proceeds to the middle of the nineteenth century, tracing the founding and progress of performing institutions—choral societies, orchestras, opera troupes—and the building of concert halls. At this point, it goes off in a new direction. First, by introducing chapters on American "folk music" (ten pages on American Indians, one and a half on black Americans, and five on Stephen Foster) and patriotic music (e.g., "The Star-Spangled Banner," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"), it steps outside a chronological framework. Then, in a sequence of seven chapters, it reviews American composers' contributions to the major genres of art music, concentrating almost entirely on living composers. The final chapters return to a topical approach, treating, in turn, American women in music, American writing about

music, and music education. But with nearly half of the book devoted to them, the central role in Elson's *History of American Music* is occupied by composers of the present and recent past and their music.⁵⁵

Elson documents the historical sections of his history and identifies sources in a bibliography. (He's the first historian of American music to include one.) Mathews's history is mentioned in the bibliography but remains untapped in the text. Ritter comes in for more attention. For Elson, Ritter was a "profound musician" who "in the domain of music literature" was "as important a figure as any in America after Dwight and Thayer."⁵⁶ Of Ritter's history of music in America, however, Elson writes:

Dr. Ritter approached his subject with little sympathy. . . . Our national music did not appeal to him deeply, and of the American composers he had not a word to say. . . . Dr. Ritter, however much he labored for us, worked from without, not from within; he was among us, but not of us. He could not realize what a group of good American composers was growing up around him.⁵⁷

The *History of American Music* that appeared in W. L. Hubbard's *The American History and Encyclopedia of Music* (1908–10) carries on its title page only Hubbard's own name as volume "editor," which means that he wrote the chapters whose author is unnamed.⁵⁸ Hubbard's *History* has a shape all its own. It begins with chapters by two leading American musicians: George W. Chadwick on living American composers (chiefly Bostonians)⁵⁹ and Frank Damrosch on public school music.⁶⁰ Then it takes up American music outside the concert hall: "Music of North American Indians," "Negro Music and Negro Minstrelsy," "Popular Music," and "Patriotic and National Music." By the time the New England Puritans appear on the scene (p. 138), their position as musical founding fathers is seriously weakened. In earlier histories, the past is the foundation of the present. But Hubbard's organization undermines the past as a shaping force, clearing the way for the subject he seems most eager to discuss: the United States as a musical democracy.⁶¹

The distinctiveness of Hubbard's work lies not in the survey of "the aesthetic side" of American music that occupies numbers seven through twelve of its fourteen unnumbered chapters but in its discussion of a

widening range of American people's music. Hubbard deals respectfully even with genres absent from earlier histories, including college songs (pp. 88–89), gospel hymns (pp. 89–90), songs of Tin Pan Alley (pp. 83–87), the Broadway stage (pp. 97–99), and the American wind band (pp. 285–87). Hubbard is not known to have written elsewhere on American music, either before or after his history appeared. Nor, like Elson, did he state his historiographical philosophy or describe his book's purposes. On the strength of what he wrote, however, Hubbard may be judged a musician with broad tastes and a man who saw American music whole in a way very different from those who wrote its history before him.⁶²

Music in America, the third pre-World War I history, bears the marks of a collaborative enterprise even more openly than its immediate predecessors. Arthur Farwell contributed the introduction and two chapters on living composers. His coeditor, W. Dermot Darby, wrote the nine chapters that carry the historical chronicle from the Puritans to the late nineteenth century. And specialist collaborators were brought in for the rest.⁶³ Like Hubbard's *History*, *Music in America*, embedded in a multivolume set, seems to have made little impact on American music historiography, except for its introduction, which some decades later helped to inspire Chase's fresh approach.

Farwell wrote his introduction as a composer involved in American musical life and deeply concerned with its character. Farwell's concern ran in two complementary streams. As founder of the Wa-Wan Press (1901–12), he was an early leader of the movement toward American musical nationalism. As a critic for *Musical America* (1909–13) and supervisor of New York City's municipal concerts (1901–13), he was also active in an effort to bring Americans into contact with music. In choosing Farwell to contribute to *Music in America*, series editor-in-chief Daniel Gregory Mason had selected a man who believed, first, that American composers should seek to address as large a public as possible and, second, that the public, when given a chance to hear good music in the right surroundings, would prefer it over bad.

"Prophecy, not history, is the most truly important concern of music in America," Farwell began his introduction. "What a new world, with new processes and new ideals, will do with the tractable and still unformed art of music; what will arise from the contact of this art with our unprecedented democracy—these are the questions of deepest im-

port in our musical life in the United States.”⁶⁴ The key issue of music in America, in other words, was not its past but its future.

Farwell imagined the history of American music as a three-stage process: “appreciation, creation, and administration.”⁶⁵ By appreciation, Farwell meant the New World’s coming to grips with the music of the Old. Creation meant New World musicians’ composition of music expressing the American nation’s spirit and suited to the needs of her citizens. Administration meant the establishment of a musical life that brought American citizens into contact with the music of American composers.

Farwell believed that, in ideal conditions, appreciation would bring about creation, which would then flourish in close contact with an informed audience recruited through effective administration. But in America, conditions had not proved ideal. Too much energy was still being spent on appreciation at a time when “the evolution, broadly, of America as an appreciative nation has been fulfilled, and it can from now on find no true musical progress except as a creative nation.”⁶⁶ The “creative epoch” of American musical history had begun, Farwell believed, and American composers occupied a favored position. Having benefited from rigorous German training, they had been saved from its hazards by other influences: the diverse ethnic roots of the American people, the “deluge” of modern music from non-German nations, and the unearthing of folk music “peculiar to America.”⁶⁷ The true legacy of American composers, as Farwell saw it, was creative freedom: the freedom to follow or combine these strands of influence in any imaginable way.⁶⁸ That freedom had already led, in “the best of the newer work,” to “a loftiness of ideals, a breadth of outlook, a definiteness of purpose, a freshness of color, a sense of the beautiful and an *esprit* which argue strongly for the future honor of American music.”⁶⁹

Yet, Farwell continued, the administration of American life had not kept pace with composers’ achievements. The institutions of musical culture had concentrated almost entirely upon “the commercial exploitation of foreign artists” (i.e., performers), for the benefit of the rich.⁷⁰ Orchestra, chamber music, and opera in America had fostered “an aristocracy of musical appreciation” and a tone of “retrospective hyper-refinement” at a time when the nation’s “rugged creative strength” most needed support.⁷¹ “Aristocratic” institutions had no interest in what Farwell saw as the primary musical issue of the day: the

interaction between “musical art and democracy.”⁷² “The people of the nation,” Farwell believed, had always received “cordially the work of their own composers.” But the third phase of American music history, administration, could begin only when the barriers erected by “the narrow arena of the concert halls of ‘culture’ ”⁷³ were breached, and “music in all of its forms” was brought “directly to the masses of the people.”⁷⁴ Farwell saw activities directed to that end as a national movement: outdoor drama festivals, municipal concerts of orchestras (*not* bands), concerts given in public school halls, local music festivals, community choruses, low-priced symphony concerts, community pageants, and the growing popularity of the phonograph and player piano.⁷⁵ Each, in his view, was a blow struck for musical democracy.

Three-quarters of a century after the fact, Farwell’s introduction still carries the force of an original vision—especially his claim that in the United States “the musical needs of the American people” were opposed, rather than served, by “the standards of the centres of conventional and fashionable musical culture.”⁷⁶ Yet the introduction had little impact upon *Music in America*, the book that followed it. Even the book’s table of contents exposes the loose fit between it and Farwell’s introduction. Its three-part division, like his, begins with “appreciation.” But that section emphasizes the eighteenth century, while Farwell carries appreciation almost to the end of the nineteenth. Farwell’s second stage, “creation,” occupies the third section and longest part of *Music in America*, encompassing folk music, popular music, and composers in the concert-hall tradition from the 1850s to 1915. Farwell’s third stage, “administration,” is missing entirely from the book, whose second section, called “organization,” deals with institutions, concert life, and music education. As the disparity might suggest, *Music in America* cannot be read as an illustration of Farwell’s thesis, as Ritter’s history was of his introduction or, later, Chase’s was to be of his. Rather, the book is cobbled together from Darby’s historical chronicle (Chaps. 1–9), Farwell’s portrait of the compositional present—which *does* reflect his prophetic introduction—and additional chapters written by collaborators with compatible views.⁷⁷

If Hood and Gould were the first generation of American musical historians, Ritter and Mathews were the second, and Elson, Hubbard, Farwell, and Darby the third. What is most striking about these books, despite the elements they share, is each author’s freedom—imperative,

perhaps—to define his territory. Rather than taking their predecessors' works as a starting point, each saw American music in his own way and considered its history as revolving around a different set of issues and sources. Ritter's process of colonization, Mathews's homage to the burgeoning ranks of American professional musicians, Elson's interest in American composers, Hubbard's acceptance of musical democracy in vernacular styles, Farwell's faith that creative eclecticism and the mass audience would intersect on American shores—none of these central notions overlaps much with the others. In each historian's response to his predecessors lies the pattern we have observed in more recent histories of American music. Earlier histories are consulted for reference, are evaluated, if at all, in only the most general terms, and receive no exegesis. Mathews, Elson, Hubbard, and Farwell, for example, clearly find Ritter's perspective too narrowly cosmopolitan, but none of them really take on the issue. For all of these men, the historian's task is to set a suitable agenda and carry it through, not to debate the premises of other histories. Thus, the writing of American music history was established and carried out in an atmosphere almost entirely free of intellectual debate or even exchange.

One more thing needs to be emphasized about second- and third-generation histories. They were written by men who in one way or another were deeply involved in American musical culture and in fact made their living by serving the needs of some branch of it other than historical study. It is no disrespect to Ritter's, or Mathews's, or Elson's, or Hubbard's, or Farwell's achievements to think of them not as historians in the modern-day sense of the word but as historically minded musicians grappling with the complexity of lives devoted to the pursuit of some musical, rather than scholarly, end. It is precisely their involvement with the musical culture of their time and place that gives energy and immediacy to their historiographical vision.⁷⁸

We now come to the point where some might say that the historiography of American music really begins: to the career of Oscar G. Sonneck (1873–1928). While his predecessors have faded into antiquarian obscurity, Sonneck remains a redoubtable figure: as the man who made a major research collection of the Library of Congress's Music Division, the founding editor of *The Musical Quarterly*, the compiler of many useful bibliographical aids, the inventor of the Library of Congress classification system for music, and the patron saint of the Sonneck

Society for American Music. Much has been written and said about Sonneck in recent years. His works are widely quoted. Everybody agrees that Sonneck was wonderful.⁷⁹ (Praising Sonneck is as much a ritual in our field as abusing Ritter.) And yet his place in the historiography of American music is not quite as clear as might be imagined.

Sonneck was born in 1873 in New Jersey, and his mother took him at the age of two to Germany, shortly after his father's death. He grew up in Frankfurt-am-Main, attended the universities of Heidelberg and Munich, and explored his capacities as a composer. Around 1900 he returned to the United States and began research on music in eighteenth-century America. In 1902, shortly before his twenty-ninth birthday, he was appointed chief of the Library of Congress's Music Division;⁸⁰ in 1917, he resigned that post to join G. Schirmer music publishers in New York as director of publications. There he remained until his death in 1928.

Sonneck's work began to be published directly on the heels of Elson's history, which, by the way, Sonneck called "clever" in 1905 and "fresh and smooth-flowing" in 1909.⁸¹ But it breathed the air of a new planet and a new generation. Whether or not his German university education was responsible, Sonneck was the first to look into the abyss of American musical history and to recognize, define, and illustrate a real historiographical philosophy for music in the United States. He is thought of chiefly, and properly, as a builder: a man who filled an open landscape with soundly constructed, useful monuments. But he was also a destroyer of historiographical illusion. Sonneck's work and writings dismiss as pure fiction the idea that "authoritative" music history can be written from available evidence. Ritter, Elson, et al. had been guided through their histories by Jamesian silhouettes, reflecting their own musical involvement and their different shades of cosmopolitanism. Sonneck cut loose from such devices. In his own researches, he chose to be guided by his scholar's persona, that of the bibliographer who searches for the truth about the musical past in the accumulation of scores and documents that lie, mostly forgotten, on library and archival shelves.

Sonneck's own publications do not include a history of American music. Indeed, his chief scholarly works are either detailed treatments of narrower topics or exhortations for more such work to be done, pronto.⁸² Sonneck was the great cheerleader of American music historiography, if one can call such pessimistic pronouncements as the

following cheerleading. In 1905, writing for the Bibliographical Society of America, he confessed:

It is only with a keen sense of humiliation that I, as an American writer on the musical life of America, lead you for a moment into this “darkest Africa.” What I mean is simply this: we do not even possess a bibliography of books and articles on the music history of our country. . . . Yet we continue to write histories of music in America, though we know, or at least should know, that bibliography is the backbone of history.⁸³

By 1909 Sonneck was plugging local music history as the eventual key to a general history:

Little has been done toward a thorough and accurate description of the music histories of the more important cities, especially those in the West. That job is much too vast for it to be undertaken by any single individual who might set himself up as a history-writing authority on the entire country—although useful and well-meaning attempts in that direction have been made. Only when objective local histories have come into being can the methodically schooled universal historian hope to render an accurate account of all that has passed.⁸⁴

In the same year, in an address to the International Musicological Society’s Vienna Congress, he spelled out some of the dimensions of what he called “musical topography” (*Länderkunde*) while lamenting the scantiness of available research on American musical life. He noted, for example, that one could not find much of anything written on “church music, chamber music, orchestral music, choral music, opera, music in our colleges, the music trades, the manufacture of instruments, the music-publishing industry, musical societies and organizations, municipal and government interest in and subvention of music, [or] folk music.”⁸⁵

As these quotations suggest, Sonneck, like Ritter, believed that American composers had played only a small role in shaping their country’s musical life. For him, the true history of American music was not to be found in the realm of composition and style development but rather in an investigation of the country’s musical topography and how

it grew. No such interpretation was possible, he believed, until the historical record of musical life in specific locales had been reconstructed in detail.

What is Sonneck's legacy to American musical historiography? If, as I said at the beginning, historians are judged on information and interpretation, then Sonneck succeeded spectacularly on the first front and more qualifiedly on the second. In less than fifteen years, while doing many other things as well, he wrote and published five accurate, fully documented books—books upon which virtually all historians of American music have since drawn—on eighteenth-century American secular music, a subject whose very existence earlier historians had ignored. As for his interpretive perspective, Sonneck's work preaches that historians *must* study the founding and development of American musical life, regardless of the artistic value they find in the music of American composers. In its most elementary form, Sonneck's credo was that the history of American music should be approached "in the proper spirit and from the proper angle: from that of *research for the sake of research*, unaffected by forethought esthetic or mercenary."⁸⁶ That belief stemmed from, and helped to feed, his fierce dedication to historical documents. By concentrating upon a remote past, which he approached by using all available materials—newspapers, periodicals, letters, diaries, printed and manuscript music—he worked to reconstruct the circumstances in which his subjects made their music, and hence he discovered a context in which their achievements could be appreciated. If we keep Henry James's earlier comments in mind while comparing Sonneck's work with that of his predecessors, perhaps we could say that Sonneck made it his business to restore the wrinkles to the folds that time had smoothed, to overload outlines until they collapsed under the weight of new evidence, to make holograms of silhouettes.⁸⁷

For all he accomplished, Sonneck's legacy to American musical historiography lacks two things. It lacks any clear demonstration of how his detailed reconstructions of eighteenth-century musical life might be incorporated into general accounts of American music history. And it lacks any hint of the role that music itself, including the issue of musical style and its evolution, might play in such histories. Sonneck, we must remember, was not merely an archivist but a musician who once had aspired to be a composer—a man who cared deeply about music and whose musical judgments lay at the heart of his profession after he went

to work for G. Schirmer. However, his own thoroughly cosmopolitan musical taste seems to have been so firmly rooted in the concert hall of his day that it simply did not come into play in his writings about his scholarly specialty.

Between Sonneck and Chase one more general history was written: the 700-page *Our American Music*, first published in 1931, by the journalist, lecturer, and later librarian, John Tasker Howard (1890–1964).⁸⁸ “This book is an account of the music that has been written in America,” Howard wrote at the outset, “not a history of musical activities, except, of course, where we must have some idea of the conditions that have produced the composers of each era.”⁸⁹ Active himself as a composer of songs and piano character pieces, Howard had also written widely on contemporary American composers, and he followed *Our American Music* with *Our Contemporary Composers* (1941) and *This Modern Music* (1942). With 60 percent of his book devoted to the years between 1860 and 1931, his commitment to American composers of the present and recent past was manifest. (In its concentration upon American composers, Howard’s book comes closer to Elson’s and Farwell and Darby’s than to the others.)

Howard’s work also reflects some of the preachments of Sonneck, to whom he paid tribute in his introduction. His twenty-five pages of classified bibliography were the longest list of writings about American music published to that time, and their later updates remain among the longest published anywhere.⁹⁰ Though in a less systematic way, he picked up where Sonneck had left off in 1800 and concentrated his historical digging upon the nineteenth century’s first half—an age that, in Sonneck’s view, called out more urgently for research than any other.⁹¹ His investigations uncovered documents in the family papers of living relatives of Francis Hopkinson, James and John Hill Hewitt, Oliver Shaw, Lowell and William Mason, and more recent composers, including MacDowell, Parker, Paine, and Ethelbert Nevin.

Howard’s perspective blends contradictory elements: a cosmopolitan musical taste coupled with an ideological commitment to the American composer and a determination to be comprehensive; an author’s persona of tolerant broad-mindedness coupled with an undisguised distaste for musical expression he considered coarse; a belief that, although American composers’ music had been unfairly neglected, it must be judged by the same standards as European art music. Taken together

with the absence of technical discussion—like all of its predecessors, the book carries no musical examples—the tensions among these conflicting needs and beliefs have the effect of separating Howard somewhat from his subject matter. In contrast to Ritter and Mathews, who wrote, so to speak, “from the belly of the beast,” and Sonneck, whose labors to steep himself in a remote past give his work a trenchant force, Howard emerges as a kind of urbane, indefatigable president of the American music fan club. For all of the admirable scope and reliability of his data, and for all his literary skill, Howard’s book carries the lesser authority of a work written to gather and display knowledge rather than the greater authority of one written from the author’s compulsion to find out for himself.

I should like to quote a passage from Howard that shows how the absence of a tradition of scholarly study allows fundamental issues to get plowed under. Having recognized that, after the American Revolution, immigrant musicians from England came to this country and “took largely into their own hands the management and performance of our musical affairs,” Howard finds it “difficult, if not impossible, to . . . determine intelligently whether our musical life was eventually the gainer or the loser” from this development.

Would our Billingses, our Hopkinsons, and Lyons have sowed the seeds of a truly national school of music, which would have gained in background and in craftsmanship, if its growth had been uninterrupted by the coming of skilled, thoroughly trained musicians whose knowledge and talents paled the glories of our native composers? Or would the crude yet native spark of creative genius have become sterile on virgin soil, where there was not the opportunity for exchange of ideas in a cultured environment?⁹²

Howard’s question is not asked with quite the precision one might wish. In fact, information in his own book shows that the composers he mentions were not the pure “nationalists” the question implies. Hopkinson’s compositions, he notes elsewhere, “show the influence of the contemporary English style,”⁹³ and Billings “probably copied the forms of contemporary English church musicians.”⁹⁴ The way Howard has asked the question suggests that if the foreign invasion had not occurred, Old

World influence already present in the music of these earliest American composers might somehow have been gradually turned off, like a faucet.

These reservations aside, however, the thrust of Howard's query goes to the heart of a fundamental question. Some later writers with a provincial perspective have decried the foreign influence of which Howard speaks.⁹⁵ And yet, was there, within the various provincial practices that existed early in our music history, the potential for technical development, apart from direct European influences, that might have led American music in a different direction? Was provincial psalmody, as Ritter assumed, a dead end because of the incuriosity about technique and craft that its religious outlook imposed? Did any provincial indigenous practices evolve perceptibly *without* contact with European music? Apart from their obvious effectiveness as quoted material in provincial (or "nationalist") contexts, what's the evidence that techniques of Native American music, or African-American, or Anglo-American folk, or of provincial American composers from Billings to Foster to Sankey to Joplin, could be applied successfully to music for the concert hall?⁹⁶ To pursue Howard's question seriously would be to confront head-on the issue of cosmopolitanism versus provincialism. Is the issue, as Ritter believed, chiefly one of artistic seriousness and technical command? Or is it, as Chase seemed to suggest, more social and ideological, with American musicians embracing cosmopolitanism because of their audiences' "aesthetic immaturity?"⁹⁷

In Howard's *Our American Music*, the question is allowed to hang as an unaddressed speculation, functioning as a narrative device rather than a matter that kept the author awake nights. Sixty years later, it's still hanging, for more recent authors, with their own questions, schedules, and agendas, have still not taken it on. Here is such stuff as traditions are *not* made of.

Howard's book, however, played an important role as a catalyst. For, as we return to Chase and the historical present, we find Chase at pains to disassociate himself from the historiographical tradition of Ritter, Elson, and especially Howard. *America's Music* (1955), as noted earlier, marks the ascendancy of the provincial perspective over the cosmopolitan. Howard's spirit of broad-minded toleration, for Chase, leans too much in the direction of genteel respectability.⁹⁸ "My own approach to America's music is not at all respectable—my *bête noire* is the genteel tradition," writes Chase, who turns the subject of American music his-

tory on its head by proclaiming as “the most important phase” of America’s music that music most “different from European music.”⁹⁹ Chase claims as predecessors such specialists as Sonneck, Waldo Selden Pratt, and George Pullen Jackson, who had explored “virtually unknown tracts of America’s musical history,”¹⁰⁰ and Charles Seeger, whom Chase quotes as having written that the New World’s “main musical concern has been with folk and popular music.”¹⁰¹

In reviewing the past, we may have noticed a tendency on the part of some historians to see themselves as spokesmen for losing (or lost) causes, advocates for the historically disenfranchised. What seemed most fragile and needful of protection to Howard, writing in the late 1920s, was the impulse of American composers to transplant music as a creative fine art, maintaining an Old World standard of aesthetic integrity in a New World setting. For Howard, Americans’ ignorance of what American composers had accomplished in the European tradition was a form of cultural impoverishment that *Our American Music* was designed to remedy. But when we move across our historiographical Great Divide to Chase, we encounter a very different situation.¹⁰² As noted, Chase wrote his history in the 1940s and early 1950s as a counterstatement to Howard. Inspired by Seeger, Chase believed he had discovered the wellsprings of American musical distinctiveness among people low in the social order. Spirituals (black and white), the music of blackface minstrelsy, Anglo-American fiddle music and folk songs, shape-note hymnody, songs of American Indian nations, ragtime, blues, early jazz—all genres whose musical worth Howard could not quite bring himself to endorse—were for Chase the heart of American musical achievement. In short, Chase wrote to claim a place in American music history for these unwritten or informal kinds of music-making. Americans risked cultural impoverishment, he believed, if they failed to recognize the worth and, yes, the beauty of these musics. Where Howard had found “cultivated” fine-art music fragile and needful of his advocacy, Chase wrote to plead the case for plain Americans who, in the course of their daily lives, and drawing on the modest resources at their disposal, had succeeded in making and maintaining musics rich in human substance, if often rough and unpolished in manner.¹⁰³

To encounter Charles Hamm’s view of American vernacular music is to cross another divide and to enter a world as different from Chase’s as Chase’s was from Howard’s.¹⁰⁴ What makes Hamm’s work startling

is that *his* protective instincts as a historian are called into play not by the obscure, forgotten figures from the musical past who play so large a role in Howard's and Chase's accounts (and those of all other historians as well) but by the most famous American musicians: composers and performers of the music that Americans have most loved and paid money for but whose popular success has made historians view them with distrust. To borrow terms from economics, we might say that, while Howard and Chase concentrate on the supply side—on the makers of the music and what they made and how—Hamm takes his cue from the demand side—from the preferences of singers, players, listeners, and other users of the music.

The economic analogy is appropriate here. For Hamm's unabashed acceptance of the music marketplace as a fact of American musical life—as a possible touchstone, even, of musical significance—leads us to recognize a fundamental assumption in earlier histories. Before Hamm, historians comfortably assumed that music whose chief aim was profit, success, or immediate impact upon the mass market was somehow not an integral part of the history of music. Or let's put the assumption this way: music tailored to the dictates of the mass market, which is governed by financial profit, is marked by traits of musical substance and structure (melody, rhythm, harmony, sound) that separate it from music that deserves scholarly study. Or, to put it even more tendentially, the circumstances of commercial music's origins have, by definition, corrupted and debased it so that it stands outside the purview of serious scholars of the art. According to this assumption, the corrupting forces are evanescence and money. The commercial world's obsession with immediate popularity contradicts the academic world's belief that the power to endure beyond the moment is a truer measure of artistic worth. As for money, it is thought to corrupt by its plenitude, for in the world of commercial vernaculars, money exists in vast, undreamed-of quantities. Where commercial values reign, true artistic values flee. Musical artistry, in other words, cannot stand up to the commercial demands of the marketplace, where the shoddy drives out the good. Therefore, artistic quality must be sought in other genres uncorrupted by commerce.

I've put this assumption in terms that are probably more absolute than present-day musicologists would publicly endorse. But surely something like this belief lies behind earlier histories of American music and

continues to be held today, even though it's been almost a decade since Hamm, in *Music in the New World*, invited Tin Pan Alley, country music, rhythm and blues, gospel, and rock 'n' roll into the mainstream of our music history. It's surely significant, too, that Chase, champion of "the vernacular" that we acknowledge him to be, in his first edition chose vernacular genres that either never had been or were no longer forces in the marketplace. In contrast, Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood, all major commercial venues of the 1940s and early 1950s, when Chase was writing, are conspicuous by their low profile in, or absence from, his account.

Now it's time for a few reflections on our survey. The first is that the provincial perspective adopted in recent histories proves the firm establishment of cosmopolitan values in American musical life. In the time of Ritter and Elson, music in the cultivated tradition was still struggling for a secure foothold. As its champions, many earlier historians were men who battled daily against provincial closed-mindedness. In the recent climate of historiographical opinion, their apparent empathy for the genteel stands out. That empathy has sometimes led us to see them as doctrinaire supporters of Europeanized taste when in fact they were advocates of a more diverse American musical life. By the time Chase wrote, the cultivated tradition's place in the United States could be taken for granted. A network of prestigious institutions—orchestras, opera troupes, schools, conservatories, radio stations, recording companies, publishers—had grown up in support of it. At the same time, the mass distribution of commercial popular music had helped drive older vernacular traditions to remote places of refuge. Steeped in cosmopolitan values, Chase and Company could afford to explore beyond them, discovering freshness and a kind of artistry in the very sounds and attitudes against which Ritter spent a lifetime struggling. The writing of history being a thoroughly cosmopolitan pursuit, there could be no provincial perspective among historians apart from a cosmopolitan academic establishment. Put another way, many of us love the idea of that primitive cabin in the woods—as a place to take vacations.

A second point is that American historians' tendency to plunge in, excluding older histories from their research, has been wasteful. It's

not that earlier historians have been ignored. Rather, they have been reduced to the role of bit players—figures who stand for something, often the ignorance of the past—handy to use as a jumping-off point or to borrow a fact or quotation from but ultimately not worth reading. Little is expected of them. Because their perspectives are thought to be out of date, their contributions have been inferred rather than investigated. The independent spirit that has encouraged historians to hold their predecessors at arm's length has inspired some brilliant results. It has also blocked the development of a scholarly tradition in the field.¹⁰⁵

What effects has European colonization had upon musicians working in America? What are the provincial elements in the music of American provincial traditions? At what points have provincial traditions absorbed cosmopolitan influences without losing their essential character? How does one balance an account of music history between pieces of music and musical topography? Why study music that gives little aesthetic pleasure to present-day ears? How does a historian deal with music created with commercial gain openly in mind? What role might style criticism play in American historical writing? How should historians deal with the phenomenon of popularity? Is it their job, in a society where certified masterpieces are few, to try to create a canon of such works and organize a history around it?¹⁰⁶ These are fundamental questions in American music history. Every one of them is posed, directly or by implication, on the pages of the works we have been discussing. And each is the kind of question with which a tradition of historical study is perpetually engaged. That none have been addressed at any length by general historians, the very people presumably best qualified to discuss them, dramatizes the need to establish such a tradition.

A tradition of historical study would encompass issues brought to the surface by Hood's excavations, Gould's reminiscences, Ritter's prickly disapproval of his adopted land's tastes, Mathews's faith in American musical progress, Farwell's democratic vision, and Elson's and Howard's nationalistic cosmopolitanism. It would grapple with the challenges posed by Sonneck's love of archival evidence. It would explore and debate the premises behind the shift to a provincial perspective in the middle of our own century. And it would hold Chase, Mellers, Hitchcock, and Hamm to account for their emphases and omissions.

But if several generations of dedicated, able general historians have failed to create a tradition—if one has not already evolved of its own accord—is it possible that American music is somehow resistant to such an enterprise? I don't believe so. What has been missing, I think, is an ingredient well within present scholars' capacity to supply. That ingredient is historiography. As this chapter is intended to show, for more than a century historians of American music have been making valuable statements about this country's musical life. Even today, in the midst of a burgeoning academic interest in the subject, these statements remain isolated from each other—like chemical elements lacking a catalyst—chiefly because no one has taken stock of them as a single body of work. Their authors have been too busy with their own visions of American music to bother much about other people's. Indeed, except for a few articles by Robert Stevenson over the past two decades, the history of American music history has hardly been touched.¹⁰⁷ As a result, scholarship in American music has gone forward without ever having claimed its historiographical legacy.

To suggest the potential stored in that legacy, let's take one more look at the four most recent histories. As we have seen, Chase could rightfully claim *America's Music* (1955) as a counterstatement because of its unprecedented emphasis on “folk and popular music.”¹⁰⁸ And Chase's successors have all supported three propositions advanced there: (1) that writers of American music history should explore and dramatize differences between this country and Europe; (2) that one big difference lies in the relative positions of formal and informal music on the two continents; and (3) that America's chief contribution to the world's music lies in our informal genres, our so-called musical vernaculars, to use Hitchcock's word.

Basic to all three premises is the notion that American music has developed in separate binary streams: popular/classical, or light/serious, or informal/formal, or functional/artistic. In a signal contribution to the field, Hitchcock has characterized the Great Divide as a split between “vernacular” and “cultivated” musical traditions. He describes the vernacular as “music not approached self-consciously but simply grown into as one grows into one's vernacular tongue, music understood and appreciated simply for its utilitarian or entertainment value,” and the cultivated tradition as “a body of music that America had to cultivate consciously, music faintly exotic, to be approached with some effort,

and to be appreciated for its edification—its moral, spiritual, or aesthetic values.”¹⁰⁹ These definitions give Hitchcock’s terms a flexibility missing from other familiar pairs. The others assert, or at least imply, *properties of music*; Hitchcock’s suggest *attitudes toward it*. The difference between properties and attitudes is crucial to the writing of music history. Where properties of works are the issue, one has the sense that the way a work is composed dictates the way it will be performed and received: What is important about a piece of music is what the composer puts into it. Where attitudes are also considered, however, performance and reception gain in historical significance. A historiographical model that assumes the composer as determining agent leads to a history of composers and their works (i.e., Howard’s *Our American Music*). But a model in which performance and reception are also studied invites an account in which the *use* of musical works, including the spirit in which they are performed, may be as important as their original properties.

Though neither he nor his successors have said it in so many words, Chase followed the second model. As he wrote in 1955, his list of admired American musical genres endorses “folk and popular music”—or, as Hitchcock put it, “the vernacular tradition”—over music composed for the concert hall. But that endorsement led Chase to a historiographical stance more complex and interesting than he ever acknowledged. With public fanfare, Chase overturned the aesthetic hierarchy upon which earlier histories had been based. But at the same time, he tacitly restored something that Howard had ceremoniously discarded: Ritter’s and Sonneck’s belief that American music history had been shaped more by performance than by composition. From the time of the publication of *America’s Music*, Chase’s claim has been understood as a dramatic reordering of musical values. Less obvious, however—indeed, perhaps invisible outside a historiographical perspective—has been that claim’s challenge to the notion that composers are the inevitable first agents of music history. Chase’s list of seminal kinds of American music makes that point on its own: spirituals, blackface minstrelsy, Anglo-American fiddle music and folk songs, shape-note hymnody, songs of American Indian nations, ragtime, blues, early jazz. More than compositional types, these are genres that depend upon ways of performing music. All involve performance styles that take over, recast, and assimilate the compositions their practitioners sing and play.

Thus, from a historiographical point of view, Chase’s work rec-

onciles the new with the old. While staking out a fresh perspective tailored to the peculiar shape of American music-making and a postwar view of American culture, he also reaffirms the insight of earlier historians that a composer-centered history can tell only part of the story. Chase and his successors, we now recognize, have been responding, each in his own way, to challenges posed by unwritten and informal American music-making. Perhaps the next generation of American historians will take up the covert side of their approach, considering performance as a complementary, sometimes dominant force and following that part of the story wherever it leads.

Chase's *America's Music* carries the force of a statement written with powerful questions in mind. What would "a new world . . . do with the tractable and still unformed art of music?" Arthur Farwell asked in 1915. And what would arise from the contact of music "with our unprecedented democracy"? Chase answered these questions very differently from the way Farwell did; Mellers, Hitchcock, and Hamm have all made their own responses; and so, doubtless, will the next historians who address them. But where, in the first place, did Chase find the questions that he was to answer with a force and originality that invigorated a somewhat complacent field? He found them in an earlier general history. Here, if more is needed, is ample testimony to the worth of a barely tapped legacy.

Historiography can function as the collective memory for a field that has never set much store by memory. Its value for the task at hand is its unwillingness to allow unanswered questions asked by earlier historians to be ignored. Voices raised in the wilderness are taped and replayed in public by historiographers. The power of historiography lies in its recognition that a historian's perspective is not simply the interpretive framework within which information is delivered but an integral part of the information itself. Thus, historiography demonstrates that agreement with an earlier historian's perspective cannot be the basis for judging or using earlier work. The key, instead, is analytical appreciation: an attitude of watchful empathy that accepts what the work offers without condemning it for what it lacks. Historiography assumes that any historical account is valuable to the scholar who can read it in an attitude of analytical appreciation. By offering

an analytical appreciation of earlier historians' work, historiography can help to create the chain of dependence upon which a scholarly tradition is built. And then, perhaps, the various accounts of the development of our country's musical landscape will be recognized, like the itineraries of European explorers of old, as complementary routes to understanding the experience of a New World.