

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

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## Not for Brahmins or Transcendentalists Alone: George Washington Peck and Classical Music Criticism in *the Boston Post*, 1844-1847

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“Among a community so musical as our own, it is not to be wondered at that concerts should occupy a prominent place in our winter amusements,” wrote the *Boston Post* in an article on “Winter Life in Boston,” published on December 5, 1845, 1). One of the new breed of “penny papers” that had been established in urban America in the 1830s, the *Post* cited wide support for the city’s leading musical organizations, including the Academy of Music and the Handel and Haydn Society, which were doing much to elevate “the ‘divine art’ among us.” The essay also cited the “liberal patronage” of visiting celebrities as “evidence of the appreciation in which music is held by our citizens, and is credible to their discernment and taste.” A staunchly Democratic paper established in 1831 by Charles Gordon Greene (1804-1886), the *Post* added that “the operatic troupe will shortly pay us another visit, and, judging from their late successful engagement, will, without doubt, meet with a most enthusiastic reception.” The troupe in question would seem to be that led by the British singers Anne Childe Seguin and her husband Arthur Seguin, who toured America with performances of opera in translation, as Katherine K. Preston reports in the *American National Biography*. In addition to these public performances, the *Post* spoke of the city’s array of private musical gatherings, including “the numerous *soirees*, which are given by professors of eminence.” Could there be any doubt that Boston had become a thriving “musical community”?



There is more than a bit of self-congratulation here, for through substantial reviews and educational articles, the *Post* itself was contributing in essential ways to the support for classical music. The paper assumed that the music of Handel and Beethoven--like the writings of Shakespeare and Milton and the paintings of Michelangelo and Rembrandt--constitutes an essential part of the living heritage of everyone, elite or ordinary, rich or poor, college educated or not. Publishing several substantial articles on music each week during the concert season at this time, the *Post* operated on the assumption that only through lively, informative, and discerning criticism in the press would the general public come to support the city’s musical institutions. In turn, those organizations would benefit from searching criticism. Where better in the United States to achieve that great goal of creating an inclusive musical community than in the proud city of Boston with its rich intellectual, spiritual, and artistic heritage?

Scholars who have examined the history of music in antebellum Boston have drawn from such periodicals as the *Harbinger*, *Dial*, and Theodore Hach's *The Musical Magazine*. Among newspapers, it is the *Boston Evening Transcript* that has been consulted. The contributions of the *Post* have not been analyzed. However, since this widely-circulated paper addressed a non-elite readership, its articles on music are especially important for any inquiry into the creation of audiences for classical music. That in turn touches on the larger question of cultural formation in America. A digitized run of the *Post* is available online through the Boston Public Library.

The paper's commitment to classical music may seem surprising, since it was not primarily addressed to the city's upper class, its moneyed class, its college educated class, or its fabled Brahmins. Rather, the *Post* was a leader in the penny press revolution: the creation of dailies selling for only a penny or two aimed at meeting the seemingly insatiable appetite for all kinds of information from a new class of readers, the expanding urban middle and working class. Typically, the established papers, which sold for six cents per-copy, focused on commercial, legal, and political news and commentary. But the penny papers were made possible by steam printing, which dramatically lowered the cost of production. Also, new means of distribution, including the expanding rail network, extended their reach. Further, they depended on advertising, not subscription income, for revenue. All of this enabled them to sell the paper at a price that this new and growing class of readers could afford (Schudson, *Discovering the News*, New York: Basic Books, 1978).

"In this country, the mass of the people are distinguished by possessing means for self-improvement, of self-culture, possessed no where else," the great Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), asserted in a prominent address on "Self-Culture, An Address Introductory of the Franklin Lectures," delivered at Boston, September 1838" (Boston: James Monroe & Co., 1839, 9). Minister of Boston's Federal Street Church, Channing spoke of the way that "the multiplication of books, and their distribution through all conditions of society" was providing an essential means for self-education (31). Not to be neglected was the penny press, which he described as the "new class of daily papers" that "has sprung up in our country, sometimes called cent papers, and designed for circulation among those who cannot afford costlier publications." Like many others, Channing had his reservations. The penny press carried far too much advertising for dangerous patent medicines, and certain of the newspapers devoted too much space to "accounts of trials in the police courts," which had a corrosive effect on community morals. But on balance they served the community in essential ways: anyone "anxious for self-culture, may turn them to account" (43). A subscriber to one of the penny papers himself, Channing claimed that the "progress of the mass of the people in intelligence, self-respect, and all the comforts of life" is "the happiest feature of our age" (55).

Greene's Democratic *Post* in Boston and Horace Greeley's Whig *Tribune*, established in New York in 1841, were among the papers that led the way in this self-education revolution. At a time of intense political partisanship, the two papers could not be more different. Greene's paper had little patience for abolitionists, whereas Greeley's *Tribune* came to rally around the antislavery cause. But despite these and other differences, the papers were alike in publishing a steady stream of accessible and substantive articles on scientific developments, reviews of European and American periodicals and books, accounts of notable lectures, as well as informative pieces on art, drama, and, not least, music. In this sense, the penny press became an arena where a new form of literary journalism was forged, one capable of reaching an ever-expanding readership.

In a previous essay I noted that the *Post* achieved remarkable success “in no small measure by making the daily newspaper also a daily literary paper. In addition to critical discussions of books and arts, the *Post* published original poetry, comic sketches, dramatic criticism, familiar essays, and creative works in other forms. Envisioning the potential of a great urban newspaper to reach a national audience, Greene in 1843 created semi-weekly and weekly editions, and a semi-monthly California edition as well” (“The Ultraism of the Day’: Greene’s *Boston Post*, Hawthorne, Fuller, Melville, Stowe, and Literary Journalism in Antebellum America,” *American Periodicals*, 18 (2008), pp. 163-191, 164). The *Post*’s music criticism must be seen, then, as part of its commitment to bringing to the people at large all the resources they would need for self-education. Here was democracy at work.

The great potential of the penny press in this regard was not lost on the Transcendentalist writer Margaret Fuller, who moved from Boston to New York in 1844 to join Greeley’s *Tribune* as its “Star” reporter. On March 9, 1845, she wrote to her brother Eugene, “I am truly interested in this great field which opens before me and it is pleasant to be sure of a chance at half a hundred thousand readers” (*Letters of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Robert Hudspeth (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 4: 56-7). As Wesley Mott demonstrates in this space, before leaving for New York, Fuller had written brilliantly on music for the select readers of the Transcendentalist *Dial*, which never exceeded a circulation of 300. However, in the pages of the *Tribune* she published some twenty-nine articles on music—with a special focus on Beethoven—enabling her to reach a readership numbering in the tens of thousands (Ora Frishberg Saloman, “Margaret Fuller on Beethoven in America, 1839-1846,” *Journal of Musicology* (1992) and “American Writers on Beethoven, 1838-1849: Dwight, Fuller, Cranch, Story” (*American Music*, 8 (1990), 12-88). While we do not have circulation figures of Green’s *Post*, we can say that, as the most prominent Democratic paper in New England, and one with a growing national circulation, it too reached tens of thousands of readers with its lively and informative articles on music.

In “Cultural entrepreneurship in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Boston: the Creation of an organizational base for high culture in America,” the sociologist Paul Dimaggio writes that “When we look at Boston before 1850 we see a culture defined by the pulpit, the lectern and a collection of artistic efforts, amateurish by modern standards, in which effort rarely was made to distinguish between art and entertainment, or between culture and commerce. The arts in Boston were not self-conscious; they drew few boundaries....The two exceptions, the Handel and Haydn Society and the Harvard Musical Association, founded in the 1840s and 1850s respectively, were associations of amateurs and professionals that appealed only to a relatively narrow segment of the elite” (*Media, Culture and Society* (1982, 4), 33-50). Dimaggio is wrong about the founding dates of these organizations—H+H was established in 1815 and the Harvard Musical Association in 1837. He was wrong as well about the appeal of “classical” music, which not only went beyond a narrow segment of the so-called “elite,” but reached a far broader range of the population, including that new class of readers addressed by the penny press. Why should not they too be able to participate in the best that the city had to offer, including music?

Both through articles on music and in the paid ads in the “Entertainments” section of the paper, the *Post* provided its readers with a convenient place where they could now learn about upcoming performances of, say, a Beethoven symphony, or a Handel oratorio, or that visiting opera troupe. They could also discover where the concert would be held, its cost, and where to purchase tickets. Newspapers today, such as the *Globe* in Boston, carry such a paid sections. The *Boston Musical Intelligencer* provides an invaluable service by providing a comprehensive listing of all classical music performances in the city and environs.

The *Post*'s principal music critic at this time—and the focus of this essay--was George Washington Peck. As we learn from a fine sketch of his life and career by Kevin J. Hayes in *American National Biography*, Peck, who was born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts in 1817, graduated from Brown in 1837. He travelled to the West, becoming proprietor of two low-cost Cincinnati papers, the *Republican* and the *Daily Sun*. In 1840 he came to Boston to study law with Richard Henry Dana (1815-1882), and was admitted to the Bar in 1843. Realizing that he was a writer, not a lawyer, Peck, began contributing to the *Post*, and in 1843 the paper appointed him as its drama and music critic, with regular columns on music appearing under the title "Music in Boston." Charles Gordon Greene gave him a wide birth. His series "Sonnets for the Sidewalk," humorous treatments of rapidly changing urban life, appeared from time to time in the paper. He may also have published book reviews, discussions of periodicals, and accounts of music and theater abroad. One suspects that he contributed to the paper's "All Sorts of Paragraphs" feature, short items on, well, just about anything of potential interest.

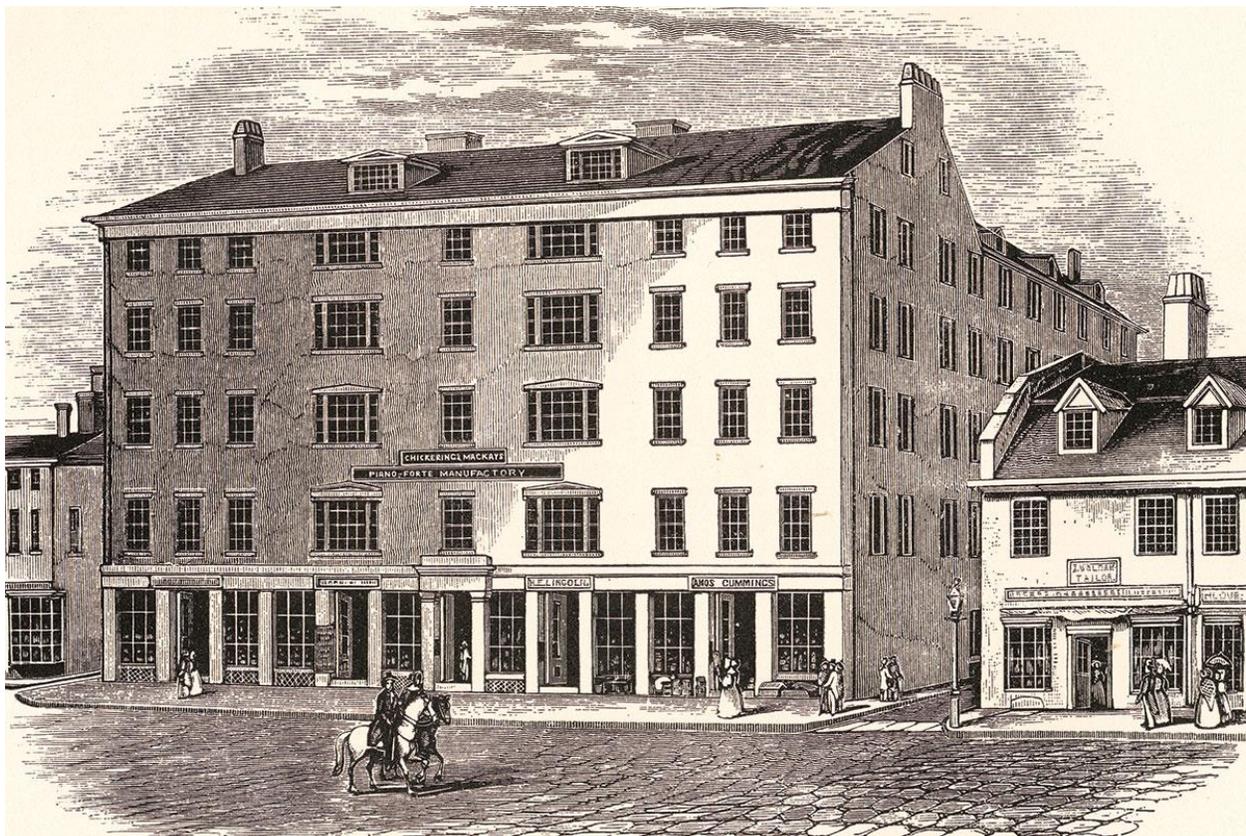
But it was music that seemed to excite Peck's imagination. In September 1845 he established *Boston Musical Review*, a bimonthly, which, sadly, ceased publication in November of that year, after only four issues. It is available online through the American Periodicals Series. Since he republished many of the essays from the *Post* in his *Review*, we can identify him as the author of the *Post*'s "Music in Boston" feature. According to another source on Peck, the *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, in 1845 "he was engaged as a violin player in the orchestra of the Howard Athenaeum," also known as the "Old Howard Theater" (Evert A. Duyckinck and George L. Duyckinck, vol. 2, Charles Scribner, 1856). Although Peck's association with the *Post* was short—he would leave for New York in the fall of 1847—his criticism helped to shape the musical life in Boston at a transitional moment.

<b>HARVARD MUSICAL ASSOCIATION.</b>			
<b>CHAMBER CONCERTS—2D SERIES.—To accommodate</b>			
such persons as were unable to procure admission to the series which has just closed, the Directors have concluded to issue a few more tickets for the present series—and a subscription list for this purpose will be open until SATURDAY, January 11th, at G. P. Reed's Music Store, No 17 Tremont Row.			
If Members of the H. M. A. are entitled to one free ticket for the series which they may have, as above;—if they require more they are requested to subscribe their names early, as it will be impossible to provide them after the number is filled.			
Per order.	is 3-4-7-9&11	j3	

In looking ahead to winter arts season on December 5, 1845, Peck had every reason for optimism. For one thing, the Harvard Musical Association had begun sponsoring chamber music concerts, first in Cambridge in 1842, and then, beginning with the 1844-1845 season, in Boston, at Chickering's

Music Room, which had seating for 150 patrons (Paul E. Paige, "Chamber Music In Boston: The Harvard Music Association," *J. of Research in Music Education*, 18 (1970), 134-142; Michael Broyles, *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 260-63). Such was the interest in the Association's second series that tickets had to be rationed. According to the HMA's advertisement published in the *Post* on January 11, 1845, "To accommodate" all those who "were unable to procure admission to the series which has just closed, the Directors have concluded to issue a few more tickets for the present series—and a subscription list will be open until Saturday, January 11th." Since HMA members were entitled to only "one free ticket for the series," they were warned that "if they require more they are requested to subscribe their names early, as it will be impossible to provide them after the number is filled" (*Post*, Jan. 11, 1845, 3). Those coveted tickets could be purchased at G. P. Reed's Music Store, No. 17 Tremont Row. In his study of music in antebellum Boston, *Music of*

*the Highest Class*, Michael Broyles claims that the leaders of the HMA, including John S. Dwight (1813-1893), “believed that music would be best served if such concerts addressed a limited circle, not the population at large. This was the position of the Harvard Musical Association in the 1840s” (Broyles, 265). Similarly, in “Orchestral Programs in Boston, 1841-55, in European Perspective,” William Weber remarked that in “Boston, going to the most respectable churches or concerts was making class lines deeper and more rigid” (“Orchestral Programs in Boston, 1841-55, in European Perspective,” in John Spitzer, ed. *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century*, U. of Chicago P., 2012, 377). However, the placement of this advertisement in a paper addressed to the middle and working-class readers reflects the Association’s impressive commitment to share the glories of chamber music with the population at large. The HMA directors faced a delicate balancing act. It was only fair that Association members would have access to one ticket. Beyond that, however, members had no special privileges. They and non-members alike would be able to purchase the remaining tickets on a first-come-first-served basis. Chickering’s Music Room, then, became a space where all citizens could come together to experience chamber music. This, the first chamber music series in America, was off to a strong start. An “elite” organization had taken the lead in bringing chamber music to the larger Boston community, but one suspects that the HMA directors realized that its policy was in their own interest, since it takes a community of music lovers to support a series of high-quality concerts. Indeed, the Association’s Act of Incorporation from 1845 states, “John Pickering, junior, Henry Gassett, junior, and John S. Dwight, their associates and successors, are hereby made a corporation by the name of the “Harvard Musical Association for the purpose of promoting education in the science and practice of music . . .”



**The Chickering piano factory at 334 Washington Street pictured in 1837. It was the site of the HMA chamber music concerts in 1845. The building burned in 1852.**

On January 28, 1845, Peck reported that the leading symphony orchestra in Boston, that of the Boston Academy of Music, had reached a new level of expertise. Despite having to perform in the “close and damp air” at the Odeon, the orchestra presented an exceptional performance of Beethoven’s 5<sup>th</sup> symphony, reflecting very well on all concerned: conductor, concert master, and “the individual members of the orchestra.” The Odeon had seating for 1,300 patrons. The performance was all the more remarkable, Peck claimed, since the musicians were not allowed the extensive rehearsal time that was available to “the great orchestras of the European cities,” where musicians “are drilled in the ranks to the performance of their particular parts. Compared with them, ours are as regiments of raw militia to disciplined veterans.” There is no evidence that Peck himself had travelled to Europe to witness orchestral concerts or rehearsals. He might have read press accounts of European orchestras—or, as a violinist himself, he might have talked foreign-born musicians who had been subjected to military-like rehearsals. No matter: “Considering all these things we think the Academy’s orchestra not only, as it undoubtedly is, the best we have in point of numbers and skill, but also much better than we could reasonably expect, in the present condition of music in the country.” The concert attracted “one of the best audiences we have ever seen at the Odeon, and the performances went off well, the symphony especially, which we thought went better than at the previous concert.” The first half of the concert, according to the ad printed in the *Post*, as was typical, was given over to shorter pieces—including Beethoven’s “Fidelio” overture, the *Der Freischutz* overture of Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826), a duet from *Norma*, and other vocal performances. The “Fidelio” is described in the advertisement in the *Post* as “One of the richest and most brilliant Overtures ever composed.” Beethoven’s 5<sup>th</sup> was the only work performed after intermission. In all, the Academy offered a program of significant works for a large and receptive audience.

Also in January 1845, the Handel and Haydn Society gave the American premier of Handel’s *Samson*. In “offering our citizens an opportunity of hearing for the first time this great work of Handel’s entire,” Peck wrote, the Society has “performed an acceptable public service, and we cannot but hope that the interest to hear it will amply reward them, and save us the necessity of appealing in [their] behalf to the public generosity” (Jan. 29, 1845, 1). Teresa Neff observes in this space that, by the middle of the 1840s, it was clear that H+H programming had long-since grown stale; too many of its concerts consisted of the old standbys, Handel’s *Messiah*, Haydn’s *The Creation*, and “Selections.” Peck was only too pleased to report that with *Samson*, H+H brought something important to Boston: “Sunday evening Handel’s *Samson* was performed successfully to a full house for the first time in Boston....The choruses went much better than we had expected—for a first performance very well indeed—yet in respect of mechanical precision, firmness, and delicacy of shading, they might be much improved, as they doubtless will be somewhat, at succeeding rehearsals.” Peck is enticing his readers--along with their friends, family, and associates--to attend subsequent performances. They would be able to hear the “Dead March, which...we consider, though it may seem affectation to say so of a composition so simple and so well known, the noblest piece of instrumental music we have ever heard...its expression is solemn, sublime, infinite, far beyond all performance.” Since it appears that H+H was prepared to schedule additional performances of a concert program in response to popular demand, such press notices played a key role in encouraging attendance and supporting the Society. Peck’s reviews of *Samson* and the Academy’s concert provide just the sort of enthusiastic response that brings audiences into the concert hall.

Visiting celebrity artists, such as the violinist Henri Vieuxtemps and Ole Bull, the Norwegian violin sensation, and various singers, were able to draw large crowds as well—all signs of a robust interest in music. Yet such concerts posed a challenge for Peck, since, he complained, the touring celebrities tended to offer programs made up primarily of showy pieces to ensnare the inexperienced. His challenge as critic was to help audiences discriminate, to value substance over display. Unlike writers for *The Dial* or the *Harbinger*—or for such periodicals today as the *New Yorker*, *Boston Musical Intelligencer*, *Gramophone*, or the *New York Times*—Peck was addressing the broadest possible readership, one that included many readers with little concert-going experience. In effect, he was inventing a new profession or cultural function: music critic—and educator--in a general circulation newspaper.

Here are the several functions that Peck as critic performed: a) cheerleader or advocate for classical music, thereby helping to build audiences and support performing organizations; b) critic of weak or inadequate performances; c) critic of the meretricious in choice of repertory and performance style; d) writer of “emotive” criticism, which would serve as a guide to the complexities and emotional depth of such works as Beethoven’s 7<sup>th</sup> or an aria by Handel; e) educator and explainer, an essential function at a time when even the preeminent American college, Harvard, did not offer courses in music. Since his audience included that broad segment of the population who did not have access to private music lessons or musical salons or soirees, Peck recognized the need to publish substantive essays explaining aspects of music history, commenting on the achievements of various composers, and introducing such musical forms as the overture or the symphony. The goal of such writing was to enable everyone to bring an essential knowledge of the art of music--including its history, forms, and styles--with them as they entered the concert hall.

Even as the Peck embraced what he saw as the critic’s responsibility to help strengthen musical institutions, he insisted that this function could not be fulfilled if the writer were not at the same time direct and honest in its criticism. On January 1, 1845, for instance, in his “Music in Boston” column, he addressed the need for absolute impartiality, for complete honesty, in music criticism, whatever the consequences. The article is fascinating since it is written directly and explicitly about the several kinds of pressure put on the practicing critic by the partisans of various musical organizations. Peck laments that “there is much more party spirit in relation to music among us than real enthusiasm.” He singles out the supporters of the Philharmonic Society, who had urged him, he claims, to publish only positive reviews of the concerts of their newly formed orchestra, which was now competing with the orchestra of the Boston Music Academy. That was something he refused to do. He criticized the Philharmonic for its choice of repertory, as well as its poor execution. Further, he charged, the new orchestra was drawing support from its competitor, the Boston Academy. The city simply was not large enough to support two orchestras. He refused to relent: “If there ever was a time in the progress of musical art in this country, when truth in relation to it ought to be spoken with plainness and freedom, it is now, while the popular taste is yet unformed” (*Post*, Jan. 1, 1845, 1 ). In fact, the Academy’s orchestra, weakened by the competition, would cease offering concerts in the spring of 1847. Was that demise responsible for Peck’s decision to leave Boston? Or did he simply feel that New York offered a larger market for him as a journalist?

But what was the effect of the unsparing criticism of Peck and others on the development of the Philharmonic Society? Evidently, the message got through. Writing in *The Harbinger* on January 9, 1847, John S. Dwight (1813-1893) noted the extraordinary improvement of the orchestra in just the three years of its existence. In reviewing a concert of December 19, 1846, he praised the remarkable interplay of soloists and orchestra, and the “fine effects” produced by the orchestra itself. For that, he credited the conductor, Schmidt, who, he said, “is somehow gifted with a magnetic control of his orchestral forces; he is felt in everything; he is both law and impulse to them all; and they seem to love to serve him; and this is the absolute condition of good music” Sadly, Sullivan observed, in the Academy’s orchestra there is a notable absence “of that tact, that magnetism, that singular power of inspiring others to co-operation, which nature sometimes bestows in apparently so whimsical and capricious manner (*Harbinger*, Jan. 9, 1847, 77). I

In March 1845, in a review of a concert given by the noted violinist Leopold Herwig and his associates, Peck insisted that “a proper regard for the best interests of music here, requires us to speak somewhat unfavorably” of the performance (*Post*, March 27, 1845, 1). Ironically, just a few weeks earlier, Peck had encouraged readers to attend Herwig’s concert, since it “will doubtless prove” to be most rewarding, since Herwig “is an extremely brilliant performer and understands how to get up a concert so as to make it *tell* (*Post*, March 2, 1845, 1). Peck found the concert disappointing. He reminded readers that he had praised Herwig in the past, so that what follows could not be construed as reflecting any “prejudice against him.” But there was no escaping the fact that Herwig’s playing in this concert was decidedly “in the *ad captundum* style of Ole Bull, and only the better than that because in some respects it did not reach ‘to that bad eminence’ . . . .He intended all [his pieces] to be just what they were, things got up to please common taste. We do not blame him for this, though our position as critic obliges us to state the fact.” Further, the Peck did not shy away from calling out what it considered the limitations of individual musicians, even those, like Herwig, whom it had praised in the past: “as a performer [Herwig] has great execution, though his tone is thin, and his intonation not what it used to be” (*Post*, March 27, 1845, 1).

Regarding choice of works to be performed and performance style, the *Post* insisted that the true artist has a primary obligation to his art—not to trick the audience with mere showmanship. This was an obligation he compared to the responsibility that a voyager from a technologically advanced society has to the inhabitants of a remote island that he happens to visit. He might decide to trick them by offering to them in trade mere trinkets for his own profit—or “he may instruct them to ask more wisely; in one case he is a man who makes a profit of their tastes—in the other he is an ARTIST.”

In his role of cheerleader, Peck, in an article on “The Academy of Music,” published on Nov. 16, 1844, expressed the “hope,” that the Academy’s next concert “will be attended [by] as full an audience as these concerts have attracted in former years and especially last winter. No society has labored more to diffuse among us a knowledge of good instrumental music, and as lovers of the art we feel greatly interested in its continued success.” Here the “we” of the critic’s voice expands to become the voice of the entire Boston musical community. All music lovers have a stake in the success of the Academy, whose orchestra, he claimed, was the best in Boston. He proceeds in the second paragraph to explain the history of the overture, its function and structure. Looking back to Lully and Gluck, he writes that “Nothing can be more beautifully simple than some of these old compositions.”

After reviewing the work of such now obscure composers as Niccolò Piccinni (1726-1800), Niccolò Jommelli (1714-1774), and Georg Joseph Vogler (1749-1814), he concluded with a discussion of the overtures of Beethoven, notably “Egmont” and “Prometheus,” which he ranks with Mozart’s the “Magic Flute” and “Don Giovanni,” which “are considered the best ever written” (*Post*, 1). All of this served as preparation for the upcoming concert. The first half included six short pieces, including the Egmont overture, which would be given its Boston premier. Readers could look forward to hearing Beethoven’s 7th, performed after intermission.

Early in his stint on the *Post*, on November 26, 1844, Peck published a compelling article on “The Music of Beethoven,” which opens with the assertion that “Beethoven’s music is remarkable for its boldness, richness and depth. It aims at the most novel and striking *effects*, and at the same time it is every where marked by the clearest expression of deep rejection and intense pain” (*Post*, 1). He returned to the subject the next February, commenting on the “many points of resemblance” between the compositions of Beethoven and the writings of Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825), the German Romantic writer. It is doubtful that many *Post* readers were familiar with Richter, but the comparison nevertheless is illuminating. The works of both are characterized by an “obtrusive singularity.” That leads to a concession: the listener coming to a Beethoven symphony or overture for the first time might well be put off by a “seeming determined eccentricity that is offensive.”

Even the music critic of the *Post* has had that experience. However, before long “this impression wears off, and we discover beneath a wonderful depth and richness; every fibre in the harmonic thread has a voice; the most dissimilar ideas are combined; while one main current is sweeping on, a thousand voices surround it—some shouting, some whispering, others positively asserting the most contrary things imaginable; remote expressions of grief blend with loud songs of proud triumph; every where the strain is so full that the mind can hardly keep up with it. Whoever has listened to the andante of the fifth symphony will understand our meaning.” Peck invites concertgoers to open themselves to Beethoven’s “*boldness of design*.” He then offers several illuminating paragraphs comparing and contrasting Beethoven’s style with those of other composers, including Handel and Haydn.

What may have been most useful for those *Post* readers coming to Beethoven for the first time is the critic’s admonition that listening to his work demands concentration, attention, and effort. Peck, however, seeks to guide the listener to a “depth and richness” which will transport him or her to quite another place. The essay also includes a discussion of different performance styles of Beethoven, with Peck arguing, as he did in the earlier article, that the tempi taken in most performances have been too fast. Beethoven must “be played slow and with minute attention to precision and expression in every part. Otherwise we only get the main stream” (*Post*, Feb. 3, 1845, 1). In asking his readers to explore the depth of Beethoven’s music, Peck, like Dwight and Fuller, helped advance the cause of instrumental music in Boston.

**SAMSON,**  
AN ORATORIO,  
THE WORDS BY MILTON :  
THE MUSIC COMPOSED, A. D. 1742, BY HANDEL.  
TO BE PERFORMED BY THE  
**Handel and Haydn Society,**  
AT THE MELODEON,  
On Sunday Evening, Oct. 12th, 1845.

THE PERSONS.

SAMSON.	HARAPHA, of Gath.
MANOAH, the Father of Samson.	MESSENGER.
DALILA, his Wife.	CHORUS OF ISRAELITES.
MICAH.	CHORUS OF PHILISTINES.

Performance to commence at 7 o'clock. —

The audience will please refrain from any expression of applause. —

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**PART I.**

OVERTURE.

SCENE BEFORE THE PRISON IN GAZA.

**RECITATIVE.** *Samson, (Blind and in Chains.)*  
This day a solemn Feast, to Dagon held,  
Relieves me from my task of servile toil;  
Unwillingly, their superstition yields this rest,  
To breathe Heav'n's air, fresh blowing pure and sweet.

**CHORUS of the Priests of Dagon.** (See Coll. vol. 4, p. 147.)  
Awake, awake, the Trumpet's lofty sound,  
The joyful, sacred Festival comes round,  
When Dagon king of all the earth is crown'd.

**RECITATIVE.**  
*Samson.*—Whom have I to complain of but myself!  
Who, heav'n's great trust, could not in silence keep,  
But weakly to a woman must reveal it?  
*Micah.*—Matchless in might! once Israel's glory, now her grief,  
We come, (thy friends well known,) to visit thee,  
*Samson.* Welcome my friends.  
*Micah.*—Which shall we first bewail, thy bondage, or lost sight?  
*Samson.* O loss of sight! of thee I most complain,  
O worse than beggary, old age, or chains!  
My very soul in real darkness dwells!

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Music of Beethoven,” Peck promised to resume such educational essays in the near future. Above all, he wants his readers to “regard our musical articles as having some slight connection” with each other. He writes with “one purpose...for the more general understanding of music” (*Post*, Feb. 3, 1845. 1).

Even as he wrote for the general reader, Peck wanted something more: a venue that would attract knowledgeable readers, those who would demand substantive articles. That led to the creation of his short-lived bimonthly, *Boston Musical Review*. His purpose in establishing the *Review*, Peck explained, was “to aid in the progress of music, to quicken enthusiasm, and communicate knowledge respecting it” (*Boston Musical Review*, Vol. 1. Oct. 1, 1845, 40). After only four numbers, we saw, he was forced to suspend the *Review*. According to the biographical profile of Peck in the *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, in this endeavor, he received “the aid of the Hon. S. A. Eliot, and a few other known patrons of music.” Samuel Atkins Eliot was the leader of the Boston Academy of Music—perhaps the most influential figure in Boston music at the time. We do not know if Peck as a critic was thereby compromised, if he did accept funds for the bimonthly. But we do know that the Academy’s orchestra ceased performing in 1847. Boston could not support two orchestras, and the Academy lost out in the competition with the rapidly improving Philharmonic.

Along with Beethoven, Peck held the work of Handel in highest regard. Writing about the second performance by H+H of *Samson* early in 1845, he enthused, “We come away from every performance of *Samson* more and more charmed with the music. It is throughout a wonderful combination of graceful tenderness and majestic strength. In no other music have we heard such a constant stream of natural melody...What is most astonishing is the perfect freedom and openness, as well as force, of the expression.” Peck unrolls sentence after sentence of appreciative, emotive criticism—criticism that serves as a kind of guide for those just beginning their acquaintance with Handel. After several such paragraphs he ends abruptly, not because he has run out of ideas, but “for want of room, not because we have exhausted...ourselves.” He would write “a new and interesting notice of *Samson* every week, so long as the H+H think proper to repeat it” (*Post*, March 22, 1845, 1). In concluding that second essay on “The

In that same year, 1847, Peck left Boston for New York. He served for a time as night editor of the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* and then joined the *American Review: A Whig Journal*. He wrote for a variety of newspapers and periodicals, and published two books, *Aurifodina; or, Adventures in the Gold Region* (1849), under the pseudonym Cantwell A. Bigby, and *Melbourne, and Chincha Islands: With Sketches of Lima, and a Voyage round the World* (1854), which Hayes considers “an important contribution to 19<sup>th</sup>-century travel literature.” Afflicted by consumption, Peck, a bachelor, returned to Boston, where he died in 1859. Hayes comments that Peck “should be remembered most as a consummate man of letters whose wide reading, musical knowledge, sense of humor, and acute judgment made him a demanding, though fair literary critic (*American National Biography*). Peck is to be remembered as well as a pioneering music critic writing for the daily press in Boston, a writer who helped to educate the public, supported the city’s musical institutions, and demanded excellence. In doing so, he helped to make Boston a thriving “musical community.” that it became in the 1840s. If somehow Peck were to come alive today and witness the Boston musical community of 2017, he would be quite overwhelmed by the brilliant chamber concerts, the resident and visiting orchestras, the choral organizations, and the several groups devoted to modern music. He might well agree that, with the exception of grand opera on the scale of the Met of New York, Boston may well claim to be the best city for music in the United States. Making brilliant use of the resources a democratic means, the penny press, Peck in Boston and Margaret Fuller in New York reached tens of thousands of readers with their articles on Beethoven and other composers. They shared a great goal of broadening and democratizing the appeal of classical music, thereby helping to create inclusive musical communities.

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