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"*My* Business is to Sing": Emily Dickinson's Musical Borrowings

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Abstract
The daily musical activities of poet Emily Dickinson (1830–86)—home performances at the piano, collecting sheet music, and attending concerts—provided a vital and necessary backdrop for her emerging artistic persona. Dickinson's active musical life reveals a great deal about the cultural offerings available to a woman of her time, place, and class. Moreover, her encounters with the music-making of the Dickinson family servants and the New England hymn tradition encouraged artistic borrowings and boundary crossings that had a deep and continuing influence on her writing. Through her engagement with music, Dickinson was able to fashion an identity served by musical longings, one that would ultimately serve a vital role in the formation of her unique poetic voice.

Emily Dickinson's intense love of music and nature is regularly encountered in many of her most beloved poems.[1] Her verse and her correspondence consistently display a musical familiarity and authority that has been well documented by Dickinson

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[1] These poems include "The Bird her punctual music brings" (1881); "Musicians wrestle everywhere" (1861); "The fascinating chill that Music leaves" (1879); "There came a Wind like a Bugle" (1883); "Better—than music!" (1862); "Of all the Sounds dispatched abroad" (1862); and "Why—do they shut me out of Heaven? Did I sing—too loud?" (1861). Ralph W. Franklin, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), nos. 1556, 229, 1511, 1618, 378, 334, and 268, respectively.

scholars; a favorite of composers, thousands of musical settings have been realized from her poems.[2] Yet the significance and context of Dickinson's daily musical activities—her home performances at the piano, her sheet music collecting, and her concert attendance—have not been fully examined or properly positioned as an important backdrop to her life and to her development as a poet. Through her engagement with music, Dickinson (1830–86) was able to fashion an identity served by musical longings, and to cultivate opportunities for musical borrowings and boundary crossings, allowing her to create an enduring musical persona that would ultimately serve a vital role in the formation of her unique poetic voice.

As early as age two and a half, Dickinson displayed musical ability. In 1833 Dickinson's aunt, Lavinia Norcross, wrote to her brother-in-law Edward Dickinson: "I have but a few moments of leisure but I will just let you know that Emily is perfectly well & contented—She is a very good child & but little trouble—She has learned to play on the piano—she calls it the *moosic*."[3] As she grew older, Dickinson's musical engagement extended to the singing schools and services at the First Congregational Church in Amherst. The singing school was an important social and pedagogical community activity, the function of which was to teach the rudiments of amateur music-making. In 1844, thirteen-year-old Dickinson eagerly wrote about her singing master to her brother Austin: "I attend singing school. Mr. Woodman has a very fine one Sunday evenings and has quite a large school. I presume you will want to go when you return home."[4] Dickinson's letters consistently indicate that she was musically engaged, and that she absorbed every opportunity to excel. To her childhood friend Abiah Root she reported: "I go to singing-school Sabbath evenings to improve my voice as a matter of [], & have the pleasure of a glimpse at nearly all the [] and [] in the town. Don't you envy me?"[5] Like many young people of Amherst, she was immersed in the singing school and church repertoire. The hymns and psalm settings of Isaac Watts were chief among this repertoire; they had taken hold in the Jonathan Edwards Church in

[2] For an overview of Dickinson's musical training and discussion of the musical terms and imagery in her poetry, see Carolyn Lindley Cooley, *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters: A Study of Imagery and Form* (London: McFarland & Co., 2003). In a 1993 study Carleton Lowenberg listed about 1600 settings of Dickinson's poems and includes a concordance of musical terms found in Dickinson's poems and letters. Carleton Lowenberg, *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson and Music* (Berkeley, CA: Fallen Leaf Press, 1993).

[3] Lavinia Norcross to Edward Dickinson, 9 May 1833. While Emily Dickinson's mother was recovering from the birth of her third child Lavinia, Emily stayed with her Aunt Lavinia in Monson for a month, returning to Amherst on 10 June. Richard Benson Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 323–25.

[4] Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1958), no. 4.

[5] Ralph W. Franklin, "Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root: Ten Reconstructed Letters," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 4/1 (Spring 1995): 2 and 8. These deletions were made by Abiah Root Strong and editor Mabel Loomis Todd prior to the letter's first publication in 1894. Personal names were often removed from the letters and words deemed indecipherable were replaced by blanks enclosed in brackets. According to Johnson's 1958 publication of the Dickinson correspondence, this letter is no longer extant. Mabel Loomis Todd was Austin Dickinson's mistress and the first to bring out Dickinson's poetry (with Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1890) and selected Dickinson correspondence.

Northampton.[6] These hymns migrated throughout New England and Dickinson's Pioneer Valley and into hymnbooks such as Nettleton's *Village Hymns*,[7] and later Lowell Mason's *Church Psalmody*, both of which the Dickinsons owned.[8]

In 1845, at the age of fourteen, Dickinson was devoted to her musical studies of voice and especially piano, for which she displayed accomplishment and ambition: "I also was much pleased with the news [your letter] contained especially that you are taking lessons on the 'piny', as you always call it," she wrote to Root, "but remember not to get on ahead of me. Father intends to have a Piano very soon. How happy I shall be when I have one of my own."[9] In August of that year Edward Dickinson purchased a piano through his brother William in Worcester.[10] In a letter to Root in August 1845 Emily reported happily that she now had her own piano and was moving forward with her studies:

> I am taking lessons this term, of Aunt Selby who is spending the summer with us. I never enjoyed myself more than I have this summer. For we have had such a delightful school and such pleasant tea[c]hers, and besides I have had a piano of my own. Our Examination is to come off next week on Monday. I wish you could be here at that time. Why cant [*sic*] you come. If you will—You can come and practice on my piano much as you wish to. . . . Are you practising [*sic*] now you are at home—I hope you are, for if you are not you would be likely to forget what you have learnt. I want very much to hear you play. . . . I have the same Instruction book that you have, Bertini, and I am getting along in it very well. Aunt Selby says she shant let me have many tunes now for she wants I should get over in the book a good ways first. . . . I have been learning several beautiful pieces lately. "The Grave of Bonaparte" is one. "Lancers Quick Step"—"Wood up," and "Maiden Weep no More," which is a sweet little song. I wish much to see you and hear you play.[11]

[6] Martha Winburn England, "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts," in *Hymns Unbidden: Donne, Herbert, Blake, Emily Dickinson, and the Hymnographers*, ed. Martha Winburn England and John Sparrow (New York: New York Public Library, 1966), 113–16: "For many decades, the Valley shared in this tradition fostered by Edwards, a tradition of private and social use of hymns, love of Watts, skilled singing, and amazing liberality in the reception of new music as it appeared."

[7] "Trust you enjoy your closet, and meditate profoundly upon the Daily Food! I shall send you Village Hymns, by earliest opportunity." Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 27 March 1853; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 110.

[8] See Lowenberg, *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere*, 125–28, for a listing of the music books and books on music in the Dickinson Homestead library, now part of the Dickinson Collection in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[9] Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 7 May 1845; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 6.

[10] Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 326. Richard Sewall notes that remarkably, Dickinson's talent for music was not recognized and rewarded with her own piano sooner than 1845: "Neither in these years nor at any time thereafter did either parent, or any of the numerous aunts and uncles, give evidence of seeing anything unusual, let alone genius, in Emily. Aunt Lavinia's correspondence might have proved an exception. Edward's household, it seemed, was all too typical of late-Puritan, small-town New England families in their insensitivity to extraordinary abilities in their children, especially those of an imaginative or artistic turn. Life was real, earnest, and mostly 'Prose.'" Another reason for Edward Dickinson not purchasing a piano sooner may have been because a piano and practice time was available to Dickinson at the Amherst Academy where she attended school.

[11] Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 3 August 1845; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 7. "The Grave of Bonaparte," words by Harry S. Washburne, music by Lyman Heath (Boston: Oliver Ditson, [1843]). According to former Brown University curator S. Foster Damon, Americans were divided as to Napoleon's legacy for good or ill, yet the song seems to convey the former in its sentimental tone. "The Lancer's Quick Step," music by F. L. Raymond (Boston: H. Prentiss, [1836]). The piece is dedicated to the officers and members of the National Lancers, and was performed by J. Bartlett's

Dickinson's fondness for the "tunes," as she refers to them, confirms her interest in collecting sheet music, an activity in which both she and her sister Lavinia (1833–99) regularly engaged. Many of the sheet music titles Emily and her sister acquired are identified in the family correspondence, and are included in Emily Dickinson's binders' volume of sheet music which is in the Dickinson Collection at Harvard University (see Figure 1).[12]

The Music Book

Aided by American industrial and economic expansion, along with a growing middle class whose interest in music intersected with the antebellum value of gentility, binders' volumes came into existence as an important and popular cultural artifact around 1830 and flourished through the 1860s. Individually published sheet music titles, collected and bound into a book, were assembled primarily by women during their formative years of musical training, the conclusion of which often coincided with adulthood or marriage. These musical keepsakes contained popular music of the day often commemorating attendance at live musical performances or other events. The sheet music in Emily Dickinson's binders' volume was collected over a period of about eight or nine years (ca. 1843–51, age 12–20) and was likely bound in 1852, when she was twenty-one years old.[13]

Thirty-five percent of the pieces in the Dickinson book contain a date of copyright. An additional thirty percent can be dated by the plate numbers used by publishers to collate their yearly inventory.[14] Containing just over 100 pieces, Emily Dickinson's binder's volume was uncommonly large.[15] Nearly one third of the music book's content spans the years 1843–45, an active period of musical study for

Brass Band, 30 August 1837. An elite cavalry troop led by General Thomas Davis, the National Lancers (based in Boston) would often function as escorts for local officials or visiting dignitaries. Introduced in 1834, "Wood Up" was a quickstep dance tune; it and "The Grave of Bonaparte" were favorites of Abraham Lincoln. These tunes illustrate the widespread popularity of dance as a social activity in antebellum America and sentimental songs as both a recognized expression of popular entertainment and as a conveyor of social conscience.

[12] Additional sheet music titles referenced in the Dickinson correspondence (not included in the binders' volume) are in the Dickinson Collection at Harvard and at the Jones Library in Amherst, MA. Similar material has been located in the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Collection in the John Hay Library at Brown University. There are many titles cited in the Dickinson correspondence that are not in the binders' volume or in any of the above named collections. These titles include: "Long, Long Ago," "Blanche Alpine," "Oh the Merry Days When We Were Young," "Charity," and "Are We Almost There?"

[13] Edward Dickinson advertised in the local paper for mechanics, laborers, and "a book binder of the best kind." [Franklin and Hampshire] *Express* 18 July 1851. Quoted in Jay Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960), 1:207.

[14] D. W. Krummel, *Guide for Dating Early Published Music: A Manual for Bibliographic Practices* (Hackensack, NJ: Joseph Boonin, Inc., and Kassel: Barenreiter Verlag, 1974), 229–40.

[15] The Dickinson Collection online finding aid provides a complete contents listing of the music book (EDR 469): http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/collections/modern/dickinson.cfm. This listing is based on information contained in Carleton Lowenberg's *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson and Music*, 119–24. The evidence as to the average size of a binders' volume is based on those viewed in the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and those surveyed in Petra Meyer Frazier, "American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections, 1820–1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of

Figure 1 Emily Dickinson's music book (EDR 469), index. Used by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

young Emily (age 12–14). In May 1844, she spent a month with her Norcross family cousins in Boston, during which time she was able to purchase a great deal of sheet music from the local music stores. Out of the twenty-three most popular pieces of

Colorado, 1999), 176. The Dickinson binders' volume has been digitized and can be viewed at http://hollis.harvard.edu/?itemid=%7Clibrary/m/aleph%7C010110806.

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Figure 1 Continued.

1843 and '44 listed in Julius Mattfeld's book *Variety Music Cavalcade*, more than half are represented in Dickinson's binders' volume.[16]

The presence of thirty-two waltzes (including nine misattributed to Beethoven) is a clear indication of the waltz craze of the day.[17] These include "Glenmary Waltzes"

[16] Julius Mattfeld, *Variety Music Cavalcade 1620–1969: A Chronology of Vocal and Instrumental Music Popular in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), 63–67.

[17] According to Cooley, Dickinson "played the popular waltzes of the day and her album contains arrangements of nine of them attributed to Beethoven." However, Michael Broyles and the Dickinson

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by Richard Storrs Willis (1819–1900), best known today as the composer of the 1850 carol "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear."[18] "The Swiss Waltz" with variations by P[eter] K. Moran (d. 1831) is also notable in that Moran, although little known today, was a prolific composer and active performer and music teacher; he was the organist at Grace Episcopal Church and for the New York Choral Society's first concert in 1824.[19]

Ethnicity, as represented in the Dickinson binder by the "Swiss Waltz" and other compositions, reflected both an aspect of the American imagination promoted by the music publishers and Dickinson's own fascination with exotic lands.[20] Comer and Steele's "Favorite Melodies from the Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin, or, The Wonderful Lamp, As Produced at the Boston Museum" was based on an exhibit that Dickinson attended while visiting her cousins in 1846. Closer to home, "The Juniata Quick Step," based on Marion Dix Sullivan's popular 1844 ballad "The Blue Juniata," evokes Native American culture. The song captured the public imagination, echoing the image of the noble savage as portrayed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851).[21] (Considering the song's immense popularity, it says something about Dickinson's devotion to her piano studies that she would prefer and enjoy a more difficult quickstep arrangement rather than the standard vocal ballad.) Finally, race and ethnicity are also represented in the Irish and minstrel content in the Dickinson binder, which will be discussed later.

Also present in the Dickinson book are thirteen sets of variations on popular tunes and operatic arias. Often found in binders' volumes, these were essential ingredients in the amateur piano repertoire, equally important for their pedagogical and entertaining qualities. The four polkas, twelve quicksteps, and nine marches include "Sounds From Home" by Josef Gung'l (1810–89), whose works were widely performed in the United States. Most notably, Dickinson's volume

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Collection finding aid note that these waltzes are "misattributed to Beethoven." See Cooley, *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters* 12–18; and Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 293.

[18] Storrs went on to a successful career as a music journalist and editor for the *Musical Times* and the *Musical World*. Laura Moore Pruett, "Willis, Richard Storrs," *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[19] For biographical information on Moran, see J. Bunker Clark, ed., *Anthology of Early American Keyboard Music: 1787–1830*, Part 1 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 1977), x; and Richard Wolfe, *Secular Music in America 1801–1825: A Bibliography* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1964), 592–93.

[20] Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 8 September 1846, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 13. Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 118–46.

[21] "The Blue Juniata" was the first song written by an American woman to achieve commercial success in the nineteenth century. See "The Blue Juniata," Song of America, http://www.songofamerica.net/cgi–bin/iowa/song/672.html; and Dale Cockrell, *The Ingalls Wilder Family Songbook* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2011), 238. For a discussion of the concept of the "Noble Savage," see Alden T. Vaughn, "From White Man to Red Skin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review* 87/4 (October 1982): 950–53. The presence of "The Juniata Quick Step" in Dickinson's binders' volume recalls her friend since childhood Helen Fiske Hunt Jackson (1830–85), best remembered as the author of *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and the novel *Ramona* (1884), both powerful statements about the U.S. Government's treatment of Native Americans.

contains a march and quick step arrangement of "The Battle of Prague." Composed by Franz Kotzwara (1730–91), it was by far one of the best-known and most widely circulated pieces in the early decades of the nineteenth century; Richard Wolfe cited forty extant editions.[22] Also present in the Dickinson binder is the "Bay State Quick Step," "as performed by the Boston Brass Band," an ensemble that the Dickinsons may have seen. Concertgoers often purchased the sheet music performed by these groups, inspired to recreate the experience of these concerts in the parlor. The size and content of Dickinson's binders' volume affirms that Emily Dickinson participated fully in the social and cultural fabric of her time, where serious musical engagement and accomplishment was supported, enjoyed, and encouraged.[23]

Throughout her teenage years and into early adulthood, Dickinson freely exchanged information about her musical activities with others. As was typical, familiarity with the current repertoire easily found its way into general conversation and enriched correspondence with musical references. A good example comes from Dickinson's second cousins Olivia and Eliza Coleman, who continued to keep her up to date on their activities and music purchases after their move to Philadelphia. In 1846, Olivia Coleman wrote to Emily Dickinson (age fifteen): "We discovered a new Music Store, and I purchased the song 'I'm alone—all alone,' for I am truly alone without you."[24] The varied repertoire in Dickinson's volume not only reflected her broad musical taste, but also revealed her longing for the refinements and human connections she sought in her performing and listening experiences.

"An air of exile"

Dickinson collected the sheet music associated with some of the most important musical virtuosos of her time and offered insightful commentary on some of their performances.[25] The most significant and best-documented professional performance that Dickinson witnessed was by the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (1820–87). On 3 July 1851, Emily (age twenty) along with her father and sister attended Lind's concert in Northampton. In a letter to her brother Austin, she suggested that perhaps Lind herself was more attractive than her singing: "*Herself*, and not her music, was what we seemed to love—she has an air of *exile* in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends—."[26]

For Dickinson it was the setting and the Lind persona—rather than the music—that caught her attention. Judith Pascoe notes that "the singularity of a woman

[22] Richard Wolfe, *Secular Music in America 1801–1825: A Bibliography* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1964), 494–97.

[23] See James Parakilas, "A History of Lessons and Practicing," in *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano*, ed. James Parakilas (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 150.

[24] Olivia Coleman to Emily Dickinson, 8 May 1846, Emily Fowler Ford papers, box 1, folder 2, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

[25] Examples include music composed by Josef Gung'l (as performed by the Germania Serenade Band) and music by the Hutchinson Family, whom she may have seen. These are in Dickinson's binders' volume.

[26] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 6 July 1851; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 46.

taking the place of a male minister [at the front of the church] was surely not lost on Dickinson, whose propensity for imaginative flights from the confines of the church pews is a matter of record."[27] Lind's manager, P. T. Barnum, had chosen the venue wisely. For most of the nineteenth century, women of the stage had to contend with a popular perception of immorality, and Dickinson was certainly aware of this prevailing attitude.[28] Barnum counteracted this perception by successfully projecting an image of Lind as pure as birdsong. What Dickinson perceived as Lind's "air of exile" seems to have succeeded, and would resonate for Dickinson, not just in her letter to Austin, but long after Lind's Northampton performance.[29]

The Dickinsons saw other celebrated performers as well, including the German singer Henrietta Sontag (1806–54) and the Irish soprano Catherine Hayes (1818–61). Hayes toured the United States just after Jenny Lind. Austin Dickinson saw her perform in Boston on Sunday 5 October, and wrote to Martha Gilbert about it the following Friday 10 October: "I like the woman, but dont [*sic*] think her songs compare with Jenny Lind's. I will tell you about it Wednesday."[30] His observation of Hayes's performance is significant; most American concertgoers of this period compared other singers to Lind. Both Hayes and Sontag have largely been eclipsed by Lind; however, Dickinson's binders' volume does remind us of the once enormous popularity of Sontag and Hayes, when audiences enjoyed hearing and performing the repertoire from their concerts, whether Irish and Scottish ballads, or opera arias such as "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls" and "Then You'll Remember Me" from Michael William Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), two pieces typically found in binders' volumes, including Dickinson's.[31]

It should not be a surprise if ongoing research reveals that the Dickinsons, who were typical concertgoers and above-average consumers of sheet music, either witnessed or were familiar with many more star performers than has previously been known and discussed. New England towns of even moderate size—readily

[27] Judith Pascoe, "'The House Encore Me So': Emily Dickinson and Jenny Lind," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 1/1, (Spring 1992): 7. Distractions in church often found their way into Dickinson's letters and poems. See Emily Dickinson to Susan Gilbert, late April 1852; *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 88. See also the poem, "He preached upon 'Breadth' till it argued him narrow—" F1266 (1872).

[28] Dickinson had an interest in the actress Fanny Kemble (1809–93). Her father, however, saw Kemble differently. "Do you still attend Fanny Kemble?" Emily asked her cousin. "Aaron Burr and Father think her an animal, but I fear zoology has few such instances." Emily Dickinson to Louise Norcross, 4 January 1859; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 199.

[29] Although none of the repertoire that Dickinson heard at Lind's Northampton concert is contained in her binders' volume, Lind did perform repertoire such as "Home Sweet Home," "The Last Rose of Summer," and "John Anderson, My Jo." The last two are cited by Dickinson in her correspondence. The first two titles are ubiquitous to binders' volumes including Dickinson's. Gladys Denny Schultz, *Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1962), 236 and 243–44.

[30] Martha Gilbert was the sister of Susan Gilbert, Austin Dickinson's future wife. Millicent Todd Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and his Family* (New York: Harper, 1955), 187–89. In December 1853, Austin Dickinson wrote that he would be attending a performance by Henrietta Sontag. Leyda, *Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 1:288.

[31] See the program files on Sontag and Hayes in the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Basil Walsh, *Catherine Hayes 1818–1861: The Hibernian Prima Donna* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 357. For a list of the most typical titles found in binders' volumes, see Meyer Frazier, "American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making," 192–94.

connected by good turnpikes and served by stages—were visited by touring performers to an extent that is generally unknown today.[32] The overall population of New England and the relatively limited geographical area appealed to visiting performers, many of whom launched tours around New England during the 1830s, '40s, and later. The performance culture in small-town Amherst and its vicinity was rather impressive.

In addition to hearing Lind, Sontag, and Hayes, the Dickinsons attended performances by the most popular bands of the day, including Edward (Ned) Kendall's Boston Brass Band.[33] Kendall helped to popularize the already-mentioned "Wood Up Quick Step," with its famous keyed bugle solo, which the virtuoso Kendall performed brilliantly.[34] A regular feature on many band concerts, the "Wood Up Quick Step" was introduced in 1834 and remained popular long after Dickinson was introduced to it in 1845 by her Aunt Ann Elizabeth Vaille Selby, her piano teacher.[35] Lavinia Dickinson, in fact, noted the family's attendance at Kendall's concert in her diary, which is significant. This was the heyday of the antebellum American band movement, during which time touring ensembles under the leadership of such household names as Kendall, the Dodworths, and Patrick Gilmore inspired the formation of bands in nearly every American city and town.[36] It would have

[32] See R. Allen Lott, *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–8; and Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 253–54.

[33] "The Kendall's Boston Brass Band . . . gave a grand Concert in the evening. . . . The old Church was never filled before with so numerous a throng of bright eyed and gaily dressed ladies." *Springfield Republican*, 10 August 1849. An entry from Lavinia Dickinson's diary, 15 May 1851: "Sunderland Aunts dined here. Walked with Howland, Displeased Mother *therby* [*sic*]. Attended Kendall Concert with Austin & Emilie . . ." Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 1:157, 198. From 1848 until about 1860 Emily Dickinson was often referred to as "Emilie." Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 380n5.

[34] "[Edward] Kendall the renowned Boston bugle virtuoso, presented summer concerts of popular marches, arrangements for band of 'Gems from the Operas,' and flashy solos by the various band members, often overshadowed by Kendall's still flashier obbligatos on the E-flat bugle." Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong,* vol. 1, *Resonances 1836–1849* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 34.

[35] Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert Hazen, *The Music Men: An Illustrated History of Brass Bands in America 1800–1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 5–7 and 115–17.

[36] The Independent Band of New York was formed in 1825 by bandmaster and trombonist Thomas Dodworth, Sr. (1785–1859). His son Harvey (1822–91) took over the band in the late 1830s and secured its reputation as one of the leading inspirations of the American band movement. See http://www.lipscomb.edu/windbandhistory/rhodeswindband_06_19thcenturyamerican.htm#dodworth. According to Vera Lawrence, "The Dodworths significantly augmented and enriched New York's music life over the remainder of the nineteenth century—forming bands, teaching on a grand scale—not only music but dancing—performing, composing, arranging, publishing, and in 1842 becoming founding members of the New-York Philharmonic Society—Allen and Harvey playing the violin, Thomas J. the trombone, and Charles the octave flute." Allen Dodworth was also a successful dancing master. Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 105–6. Doris Kearns Goodwin notes that as children, "Edith [Carrow] joined [Theodore Roosevelt's sister] Corrine, Theodore, and [brother] Elliott in a weekly dancing class taught by the demanding Mr. Dod[s]worth." Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 117. Patrick Gilmore (1829–92), according to the Hazens, "demonstrated to an admiring public the marvelous things that military bands could do. He took over the Boston Brigade Band in 1859, reintroduced a complement of woodwinds to balance the brass, and turned the

been unthinkable for the Dickinsons not to have seen them, especially because their performances were advertised in the local *Franklin and Hampshire Express.*[37] Another appeal of the Gilmore and Dodworth bands was their repertoire of popular music, including arrangements of arias from operas by Bellini, Rossini, and of course Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*. This was precisely the kind of music that appealed to the Dickinson family, and plausibly would have lured them to such concerts.

The most sensational of the touring ensembles witnessed by Emily Dickinson was the Germania Serenade Band, which had arrived for an extended stay in the United States in 1848. The Germanians' exquisite performances focused on the masterworks of Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart, but they offered up more popular fare as well. "Sounds from Home" by Gung'l—one of the marches in Dickinson's binder—was part of their standard repertoire.[38] On 19 April 1853, Dickinson (age twenty-two) attended a performance by the ensemble that concluded the Spring Exhibition at Amherst College, and her account of that concert confirms her predilection for colorful musical performances:

> The Germanians gave a concert here the evening of Exhibition day. Vinnie [Lavinia] and I went with [cousin] John [Graves]. I never heard [such] *sounds* before. They seemed like *brazen Robins*, all wearing broadcloth wings, and I think they were, for they all flew away as soon as the concert was over.[39]

By the 1850s, the importation of European performers—among them the Germanians, violinist Ole Bull, and singers like Hayes, Sontag, and Lind—was a thriving industry. In small towns such as Amherst, access to these star performers allowed audiences to experience a remarkable show of musical refinement and virtuosity. Concert audiences used these experiences as a means of artistic identification, comparison, self-reflection, and inspiration to improve their own home music-making.[40]

After their Jenny Lind experience, the Dickinson family correspondence indicates an increased interest in collecting sheet music and attending live performances. Brother Austin (1829–95), who was teaching in Boston and later attended Harvard Law School, was the sisters' chief source for purchasing sheet music at the local

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group into a first-rate performing ensemble." While in Boston, Gilmore organized the 1869 National Peace Jubilee and in 1872, the World Peace Jubilee, both of which utilized thousands of singers and instrumentalists. Hazen and Hazen, *The Music Men*, 18–20.

[37] See the "Entertainment" section of the local newspaper card file index at the Jones Library, Amherst, MA.

[38] Josef Gung'l, "Sounds from Home" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, [n.d.]).

[39] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 21 April 1853; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 118. This concert is not listed in the chronology of Germania performances in Nancy Newman, *Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010). According to Newman, however, the concert may have been given by an offshoot of the larger Germania Musical Society, a special engagement in between performances in Baltimore on 15 April, and Pittsburgh on 20 April. Nancy Newman, email exchange with the author, 15 October 2012.

[40] Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 74.

Boston music stores.[41] The two sisters' tastes in music were apparently quite different. Emily's requests were almost always for instrumental selections. Lavinia's were consistently aimed at sentimental vocal pieces, and she was constantly hounding Austin to send her new pieces by the latest vocal stars. For example, in a letter to her brother dated 26 January 1852, she wrote,

> The song, "[Oh the] Merry Days When We Were Young" is not the one, I sent for, & I want to have you exchange it, if you will, the one I want you to get is sung by *Mrs. Wood* & not by "Mr. Leffler."[42] I do not want this one any how. I think you can find the right one, at some of the music stores. I'm anxious to have it. Olivia Coleman used to sing it & tis a beautiful thing. Remember that tis sung by Mrs. Wood & no other, the tune begins with these words, "Oh! the merry days, the merry days when we were young."[43]

Lavinia's request for Mrs. Wood's version of "Oh the Merry Days When We Were Young" indicates that she was aware of the star power of the Scottish soprano Mary Anne (Paton) Wood (1802–64), and favored the sheet music edition promoted by the publisher as "Sung with unbounded Applause by Mrs. Wood" (see Figure 2).[44]

Music publishers played an essential role in marketing directly to women a type of vocal parlor music that was meant to encourage refinement through displays of musical talent and taste. On 8 June 1851, Emily sent a report to Austin that suggests her humor, the family dynamic, and Lavinia's musical progress.

> We are enjoying this evening what is called a "northeast storm"—a little north of east, in case you are pretty definite. Father thinks "it's amazin raw," and I'm half disposed to think that he's in the right about it, tho' I keep pretty dark, and don't say much about it! Vinnie is at the instrument, humming a pensive air concerning a young lady who thought she was "almost there." Vinnie seems much grieved, and I really suppose I ought to betake myself to weeping; I'm pretty sure that I *shall* if she dont [*sic*] abate her singing.[45]

Although not included in the Dickinson binders' volume, Lavinia's "pensive air," "Are We Almost There?" (by Florence Vale), is an example of the type of sentimentalized vocal music marketed directly to women.[46] Another example is Henry

[41] Women would often receive sheet music as gifts. That Austin was purchasing music on behalf of his sisters was the accepted protocol. See Katherine K. Preston, "Music in the McKissick Parlor," in *Emily's Songbook: Music in 1850s Albany*, Recent Researches in the Oral Tradition of Music, no. 9 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2012), 14–21. This is a valuable resource for the study of binders' volumes. The binder belonging to Emily McKissick is reproduced in facsimile. It is interesting to note the similarities and consistencies of the binders' volumes of the two Emilys, McKissick and Dickinson, providing additional evidence that the Dickinson binder was absolutely typical for its time.

[42] Adam Leffler (1808–57). Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 29 and 467.

[43] Note from Lavinia Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, Monday noon, 26 January 1852, published in Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 210–11. See also "Musician's File (1800–1950)," Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. This file associates Mary Anne Wood with this and other songs.

[44] "Oh the Merry Days When We Were Young" (New York: Atwill, 1840). This music is not in Dickinson's binders' volume.

[45] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 8 June 1851; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 42.

[46] Florence Vale, "Are We Almost There?" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1845). "Have you seen a beautiful piece of poetry which has been going through the papers lately? *Are we almost there*? is the title of it." Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 26 June 1846; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 12. According to a description furnished by the music publisher: "A young lady had visited the South

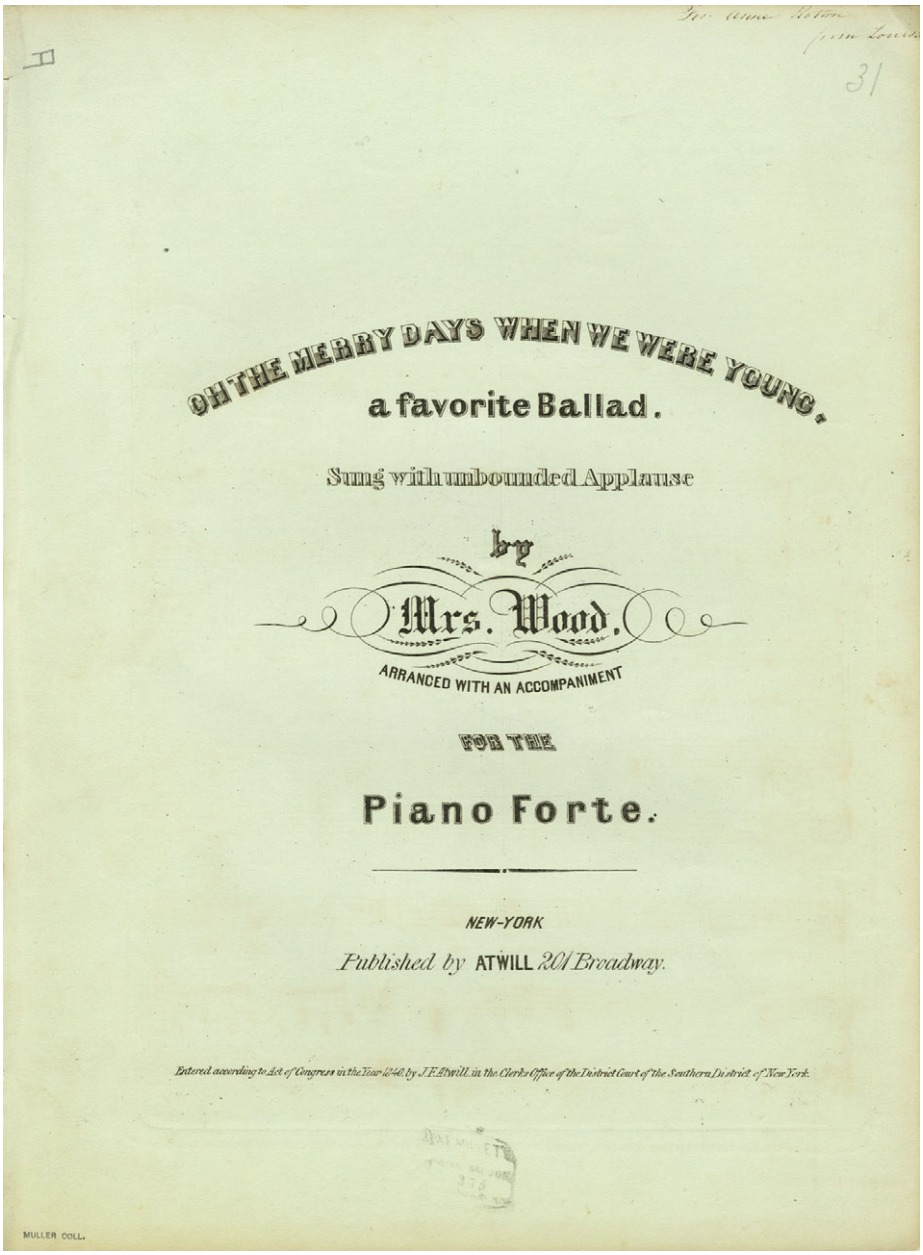

Figure 2 "Oh the Merry Days When We Were Young." New York: Atwill, 1840. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Russell's "The Old Arm Chair," which is found in many binders' volumes, including Dickinson's. Russell's song, set to a poem by Eliza Cook, addresses motherhood and

for her health, but finding that hourly she grew weaker, her friends hurried her home. On the journey she was very much exhausted and continually enquired, 'Are We Almost There?' She died just before reaching home. A friend who accompanied her wrote the song." It is important to note that virtually none of the music titles referenced by Lavinia are in Emily Dickinson's binders' volume.

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the role of mother as the most revered person in the home. The intense expression of sentiment common to these period vocal pieces is emphatically represented in the poem's second verse:

> I sat and watch'd her many a day,
> When her eyes grew dim, and her locks were gray,
> And I almost worshipp'd her when she smil'd,
> And turn'd from her bible to bless her child.
> Years roll'd on, but the last one sped,
> My idol was shatter'd my earth star fled:
> I learnt how much the heart can bear,
> When I saw her die in that Old Arm Chair.[47]

There are other popular sentimental vocal compositions in the Dickinson volume, but Emily tended to collect and perform many more instrumental showpieces than sentimental vocal ballads. These instrumental works include "The Much Admired Sliding Waltz" and a four-hand arrangement by Charles Czerny of "The Celebrated Overture to *Lodoiska*" by Rodolphe Kreutzer. The variation sets on arias from Rossini's *Tancredi* and Bellini's *Norma*, and arrangements from Balfe's *Bohemian Girl* are modifications of well-known opera arias, made accessible to antebellum period American concert audiences, and were meant to be recreated and enjoyed as vocal arrangements or challenging variation sets in the parlor setting.[48]

The presence of this difficult music supports the antebellum culture of refinement where, typically, intensive musical training for both men and women was encouraged; however, this virtuosity had no outlet for women outside the social parlor setting. It would have been inappropriate for Dickinson to position herself beyond that prescribed feminine domestic sphere.[49] From an early age, she seems to have understood and accepted these limitations:

> We enjoyed the evening much & returned not until the clock pealed out "Remember 10 o'clock, my dear, remember 10 o'clock." After our return, Father wishing to hear the Piano, I like an obedient daughter, played & sang a few tunes, much to his apparent gratification. We then retired & the next day & the next were as happily spent as the eventful Thanksgiving day itself.[50]

Dickinson's desire for musical accomplishment is revealed in the avid acquisition of the sheet music that filled her oversized binders' volume and more explicitly in her correspondence. Dickinson expected her sister to improve as well. On Monday morning 12 January 1852, she wrote to her brother: "Thank you for the music Austin, and thank you for the books. I have enjoyed them very much. I shall learn my part of the Duett [*sic*] and try to have Vinnie [learn] her's [*sic*]. She is

[47] Henry Russell, "The Old Arm Chair" (Boston: Geo. P. Reed, 1840).

[48] Cooley, *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters*, 12–18. The author gives a brief overview of "Dickinson's personal bound volume of miscellaneous sheet music" and focuses on a few of the more difficult piano compositions. She describes Dickinson's musical ability as exceptional, but provides no context for this within the general pedagogical practices of the day. See also Lowenberg, *Musician Wrestle Everywhere*, 121.

[49] Meyer Frazier, "American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making," 29–30.

[50] Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 17 January 1848; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 20. Dickinson refers to the events of Thanksgiving evening, Thursday 25 November 1847; she would have been sixteen years old at the time. See also Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 1:130.

very much pleased with Charity. She would write you now but is busy getting her lesson."[51] Vinnie was "very much pleased" with Stephen Glover's popular religious song "Charity," which she had recently received from Austin. Perhaps the song was part of the lesson that Emily had overheard. Lavinia must have been having trouble learning her part of the instrumental duet they received from Austin. Two weeks later on 28 January, Emily followed up with this missive: "You sent us the *Duett*, Austin. Vinnie cannot learn it, and I see from the outside page, that there is a piece for *two* hands. Are you willing to change it. Don't be in haste to send it; any time will do! Shall write when I hear from you, more fully."[52]

Music publishers appealed to different segments of the population, marketing various vocal versions, keys, instrumental arrangements, and variation sets. Many pieces in the Dickinson volume are typical of this segmented marketing. For example, although the volume includes some of the most popular vocal music titles of the day—among them Thomas Moore's "Araby's Daughter" and his ubiquitous "Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms," or William Dempster's "The Lament of the Irish Emigrant"—other popular vocal pieces like "Blockley's Beautiful Melody of 'Love Not,'" Moore's "The Last Rose of Summer," and "Auld Lang Syne" appear in the Dickinson binder as quick steps or variation sets, emphasizing Dickinson's interest in challenging instrumental repertoire.

"There's a Good Time Coming"

There are three vocal pieces by the famous Hutchinson Family in Dickinson binders' volume: "There's a Good Time Coming," "The Old Granite State," and "The Little Maid." The Hutchinsons brought their family parlor-style repertoire of temperance, suffrage, and abolitionist songs to audiences around the country. Dickinson may have heard the Hutchinsons at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary as a seventeen-year-old student there in 1848.[53] The Hutchinsons performed in Northampton and had an association with the nearby utopian community of Florence.[54]

It is clear from Emily Dickinson's correspondence that the musician in her did not let anything pass by that might serve as a musical metaphor, either storing it for

[51] Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 210. See also Stephen Glover, "Charity," various editions, ca. 1849. This song was part of a Glover trilogy: *The Christian Graces*. "Charity" is not in Dickinson's binders' book, but her book does contain a waltz arrangement of Glover's popular ballad "The Home That I Love."

[52] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 28 January 1852; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 71. The piece discussed here by Dickinson may have been Charles Czerny's four-hand arrangement of Rodolphe Kreutzer's overture to *Lodoiska*. The duet may not have been exchanged by Austin as this is the only four-hand piano composition in the music book. However, there is no "outside cover."

[53] Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*, 52.

[54] Dale Cockrell, *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers, 1842–1846* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1989), 263–66. One of the founders of the Florence Community was industrialist David Mack who purchased the Dickinson Homestead from Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, in 1833 when Emily was two years old. He had built the house in 1813, but had gone into bankruptcy after founding Amherst College. The Dickinsons shared the house with the Macks until 1840 when Emily's father Edward Dickinson moved his family to a house on Pleasant St. (now the site of a gas station). The Homestead was re-acquired by Emily's father in 1855 after the death of General Mack. In 1965 the house was sold to the Trustees of Amherst College and is now the Emily Dickinson Museum.

later use in one of her poems, or simply to convey and enliven the dynamics of the family's everyday home life, which was generally close, congenial, and often funny. Other musical references similarly refer to the contents of the binders' volume and suggest extramusical meaning. Popular songs such as "Home Sweet Home," "Home as a Waltz," "Sounds from Home," and "The Home That I Love," for example, are all found in the Dickinson binder and substantiate the idea of home as an important ingredient in the Dickinson family's sense of unity and well-being.[55] In a letter of 14 November 1853, Dickinson (age twenty-two) refers to a Hutchinson Family song while writing to Austin, who was due home for a visit:

> Mother got a great dinner yesterday, thinking in her kind heart that you would be so hungry after your *long ride*, and the table was set for you, and nobody moved your chair, but there it stood at the table, until dinner was all done, a melancholy emblem for the blasted hopes of the world. And we had new custard pie, too, which is a rarity in the days when the hens dont lay, but mother knew you loved it, and when noon really got here, and you really did not come, then a big piece was saved in case you should come at night. Father seemed perfectly sober, when the afternoon train came in, and there was no intelligence of you in any way, but "there's a good time coming"! (see Figure 3).[56]

Part of the unity and well being of the Dickinson home was orchestrated by Edward Dickinson himself. He seems to have preferred having his two daughters at home where, as treasurer of Amherst College, he entertained regularly, and counted General George B. McClellan and Frederick Law Olmsted among his guests.[57] The family's home life served multiple functions as both a social and domestic hub and a haven for Dickinson's emerging poetic activities. Lavinia often stated that the family "lived like friendly and absolute monarchs, each in his own domain."[58]

"And we broke up with a dance:" Borrowing from the Dickinson servants

Whereas Dickinson's binders' volume offers palpable evidence of the musical activities at the Homestead, it also provides insight about the impact that the domestic servants had on Dickinson's musical borrowings and boundary crossings. From the time that Dickinson was fourteen years old, Edward Dickinson's desire that his daughter take on the majority of the bread-baking duties in the home meant that she was in daily contact with the household domestic staff of maids, stablemen,

[55] "The standard categories of published parlor songs—love ballads, operatic arias, patriotic songs, laments, comic ditties, mother songs, and hymn-like tunes—suggests clearly that publishers were targeting women; the overarching themes of nostalgia and idealization of the home and the family likewise appealed to "this niche." Preston, "Music in the McKissick Parlor," in *Emily's Songbook*, 14.

[56] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 14 November 1853; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 141.

[57] Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 54.

[58] Olmsted was a frequent visitor to Amherst. He consulted with Austin on improving the college grounds as well as the village green, which at one time was a swamp. See Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 413 and 468.

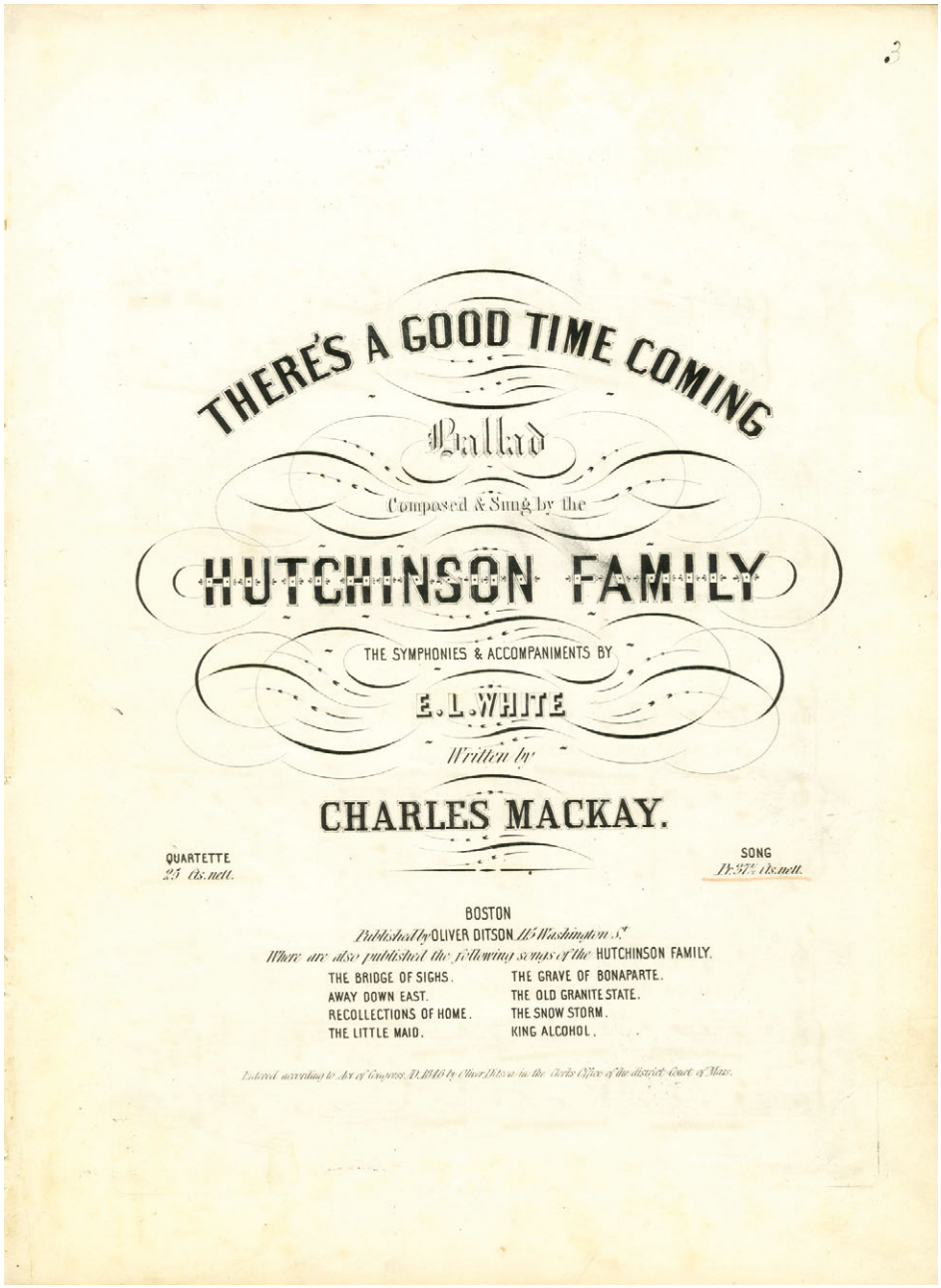

Figure 3 "There's a Good Time Coming." Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1846. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

and groundskeepers.[59] During Dickinson's lifetime, over eighty servants worked for the family, many of them from the local Irish and African American communities

[59] "She makes all the bread for her father only likes hers. . . ." Thomas Wentworth Higginson to his wife, 1870, in Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, II:152. See also Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 25 September 1845; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 8.

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around Amherst.[60] She had a keen interest in the staff and was particularly observant when a new hired hand was first noticed on the grounds, as evidenced in her 1859 poem, "New feet within my garden go":

> New feet within my garden go –
> New fingers stir the sod –
> A Troubadour opon the Elm
> Betrays the solitude.
>
> New Children play upon the green –
> New Weary sleep below –
> And still the pensive Spring returns –
> And still the punctual snow![61]

The activities of the domestic servants and Dickinson's interactions with them are well documented in her correspondence. Dickinson scholar Aíf Murray describes how over time, Emily grew closer to the Irish servants as she went about her daily work in the kitchen. By the 1860s, a steadier presence of domestic help relieved her of some of that work and gave her more time to write poetry.[62]

Of these servants, none was more loved than Margaret Maher. A fixture at the Homestead beginning in 1869, she stayed on after Dickinson's death in 1886, remaining until Lavinia passed away in 1899. Described by Emily as "warm and wild and mighty," Maggie lived a short distance from the Dickinson Homestead next to the Amherst train depot, in a building owned by her brother-in-law Thomas Kelley, who also worked for the Dickinsons.[63] Over time, Kelley purchased additional buildings from Edward Dickinson, which allowed him to create a comfortable residential compound. Upon occasion, Emily (as indicated in this letter from 1854) would visit "Kelley Square," and the homes of the other servants: "Then I worked until dusk, then went to Mr. Sweetser's to call on Abiah Root, then walked around to Jerry's [African American stablemen Jeremiah Holden] and made a call on him—then hurried home to supper."[64] In these settlements around the train depots and the outposts along the Connecticut River, black and Irish laborers experienced a proximity conducive to cultural interchange; vernacular artworks and other sources from this period attest to the fact that these groups freely exchanged and integrated African and Irish traditional dance and fiddle repertoire.[65] The

[60] Aíf Murray, *Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), 18.

[61] Franklin, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 79. Aíf Murray notes the death of longtime Dickinson gardener Amos Newport in August 1859. Murray, *Maid as Muse*, 156 and 245.

[62] Murray, *Maid as Muse*, 10.

[63] Emily Dickinson to Frances and Louise Norcross, 29 July 1884; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 907.

[64] Emily to Austin, 14 March 1854; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 156.

[65] Lenwood Sloan and Mick Maloney, "Two Roads Diverged: A Dialogue on Irish and Black Contributions to American Culture," presentation given at the Irish Arts Center, New York City, 18 September, 24 October, and 7 November 2012. Sloan and Maloney analyzed images of African American and Irish performers from the antebellum period, focusing on the cultural borrowings that melded Irish and African American dance movements and music. See also Christopher J. Smith, "Blacks and Irish on the Riverine Frontiers: The Roots of American Popular Music," *Southern Culture* 17 (Spring 2011): 75–102.

seasonal migrations of these laboring groups brought their music into the towns and villages, often providing the middle class with accompaniments to their social dancing.

On 22 June 1851 Dickinson (age twenty) wrote to her brother: "Our Reading Club still is, and becomes now very pleasant—the *last* time *Charles* came in when we had finished reading, and we broke up with a *dance*—"[66] "Charles" was Charles Thompson, an African American man who for decades was a janitor for Amherst College and a laborer for the Dickinsons (see Figure 4). Thompson played the fiddle and taught some of the local children his tunes. He was remembered fondly in a pamphlet written in 1902 by Abigail Eloise Stearns Lee, daughter of former Amherst College president Rev. William A. Stearns:

> But it was Charley's musical ability that made us love him, as a companion in the evening, for Charley owned a fiddle, and when he played "Money Musk" or some lively jig, the children could not help dancing. "Just keep your fingers going and bumby [by and by] you'll get it," was his advice to my brother when he tried to play.[67]

Dickinson may have been remembering Charles Thompson and his music in her 1859 poem "New feet within my garden go"—as her "Troubadour opon the Elm," or when describing that "No Black bird bates His Banjo—." These references identify Dickinson's engagement with both the local music-making she heard and with home performances of the minstrel and traditional tunes in her music book (see Figure 5).[68] The popularity of minstrel music as theater entertainment was widespread and easily crossed from the theatrical threshold into the parlor with performances around the piano. The minstrel tunes were bound into the very back of Dickinson's book, out of sight, but perhaps inadvertently awarded a secret pride of place. Their inclusion in binders' volumes is uncommon, but their presence here and Dickinson's accounts of visiting the servants, or of Charles Thompson leading her reading club in a dance, demonstrates that this type of music was in the air, and readily borrowed, adapted, and performed from the oral tradition as well as from published piano editions for parlor entertainment or fiddler's tunebooks for social dancing (see Figures 6 a–b).[69]

Dickinson's awareness and engagement with the music of the servants is also verified by eighteen Irish and Scottish dance tunes and ballads that she collected over the years, and that occupy a distinct presence in her binders' volume. Among these are traditional fiddle tunes, jigs, reels, and hornpipes. The tunes have been fitted

[66] Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 22 June 1851; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 44.

[67] Abigail Eloisa (Stearns) Lee, *Professor Charley: A Sketch of Charles Thompson by A. E. L.* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1902), 8.

[68] According to Cristanne Miller, "Dickinson does anthropomorphize an animal as a black man. In another poem also written in 1863: the line 'No Black bird bates His Banjo—' must allude to African Americans, since no bird plays a banjo and stereotyped black men do, as depicted on sheet music for minstrel tunes Dickinson owned ('It makes no difference abroad'; F686)." Miller, *Reading in Time*, 15–16. Dickinson is likely borrowing from the image on the sheet music cover of the song "Who's That Knocking at the Door," which is in her binders' volume.

[69] There are three minstrel tunes in Dickinson's binders' volume: "Who's That Knocking at the Door," "Old Dan Tucker," and "The Jolly Raftsman." There is also a quickstep arrangement of "Lucy Neal."

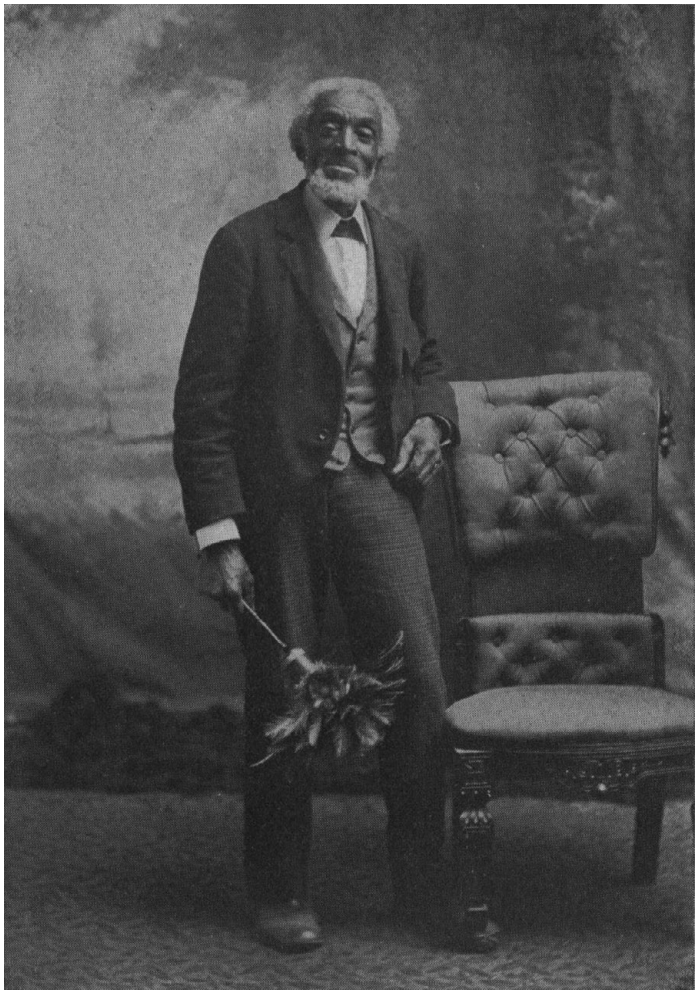

Figure 4 Lee, Abigail Eloisa (Stearns). *Professor Charley: A Sketch of Charles Thompson by A. E. L*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1902. Written by the daughter of Rev. William A. Stearns, president, Amherst College (1854–76). From the Jones Library, Amherst, MA. Used with permission.

out with accessible piano accompaniments underneath the melodies, facilitating lively performances and dancing in the family parlor both around the piano and to the accompaniment of instruments normally associated with this music (fiddle, banjo, and flute) (see Figure 7). Among these tunes in the binders' volume, "Drops of Brandy," Fisher's Hornpipe," "College Hornpipe," "Bonaparte's March Crossing the Rhine," "Durang's Hornpipe," and "Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon," would have all been familiar to the servants and to members of the Dickinson family.

"I can improvise better at night:" Dickinson's Musical Borrowings from an Oral Tradition

The traditional tunes in Dickinson's binders' volume likely inspired her musical creativity. By her twenties, she was already known by family and neighbors to be

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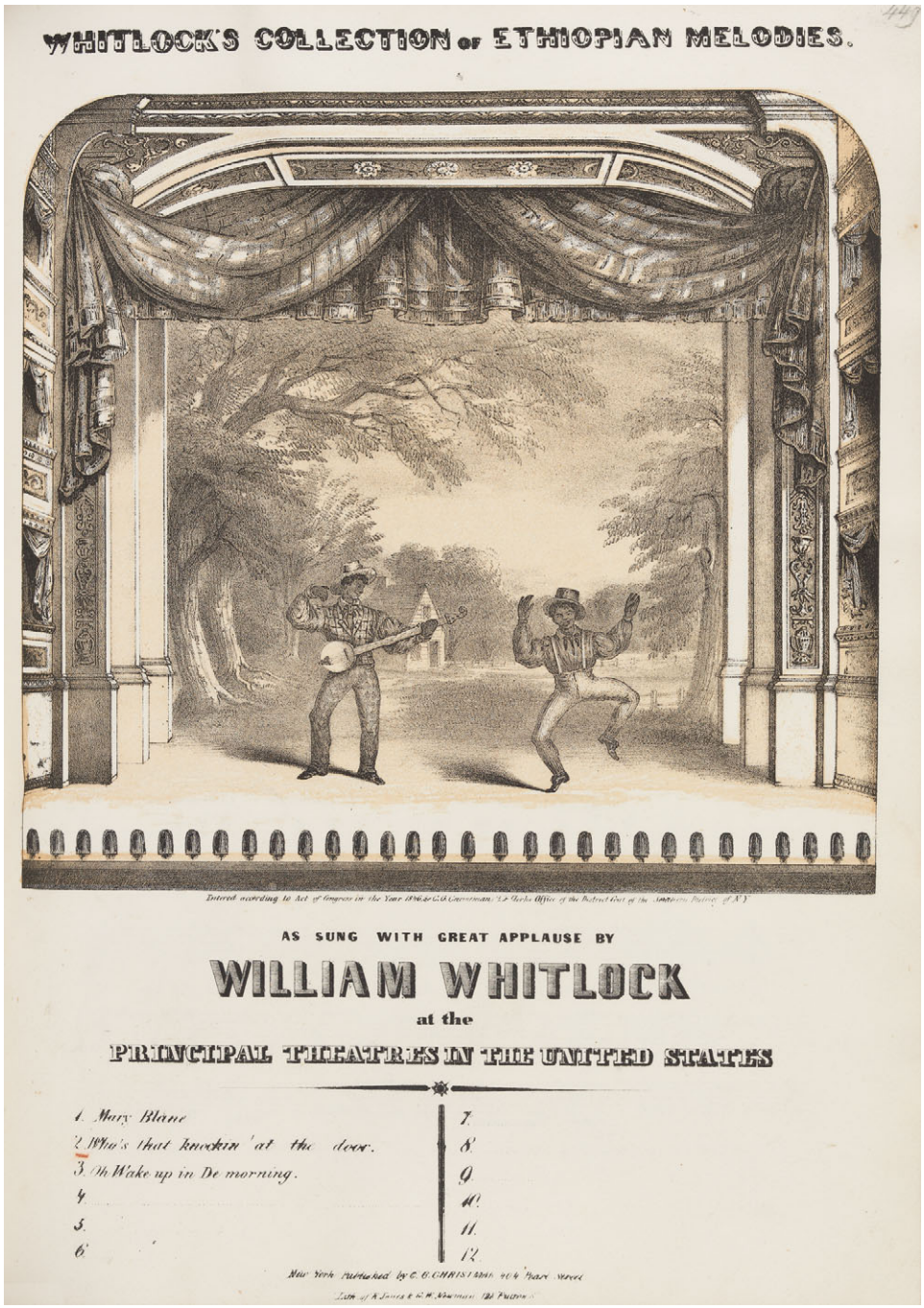

Figure 5 Whitlock, William. *Whitlock's Collection of Ethiopian Melodies*. "Who's That Knocking at the Door." New York: C. C. Christman, 1846. From Emily Dickinson's music book (EDR 469). Used by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

an expert improviser. Her late-night excursions at the piano were described by her cousin John Graves as "heavenly music." John Graves's daughter recounts that in March 1854, when he visited his cousins and stayed overnight, "father would

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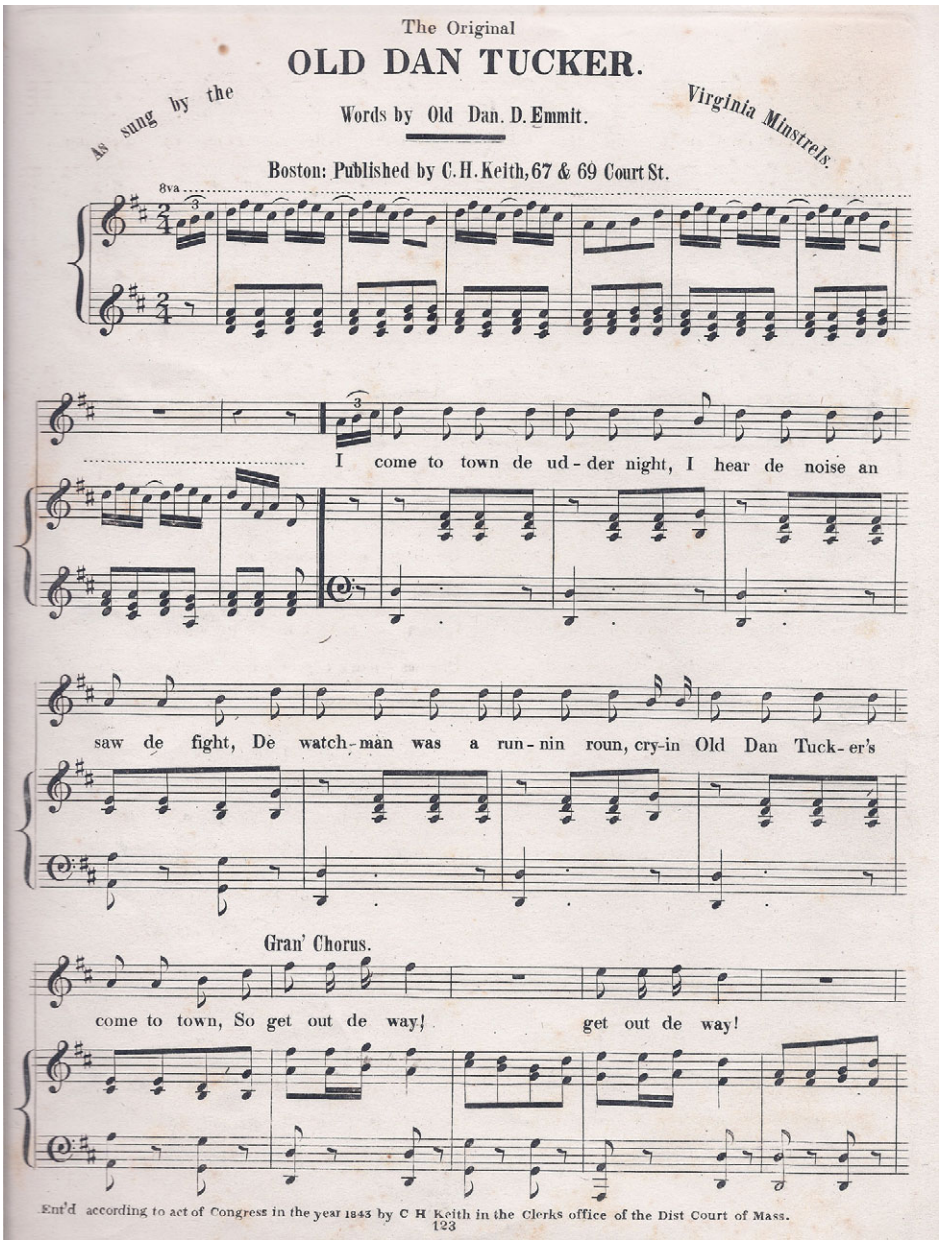

Figure 6a "The Original Old Dan Tucker." Boston: C. H. Keith, 1843. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

be awakened from his sleep by this heavenly music. Emily would explain in the morning, 'I can improvise better at night.'"[70] Dickinson's cousin Clara Newman Turner also recalled that "before seating herself at the piano Emily covered the upper and lower octaves so that the length of the keyboard might correspond to that of the

[70] Gertrude M. Graves in the *Boston Sunday Globe*, 12 January 1930, quoted in Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 1:301–2.

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Figure 6b *Ethiopian Flute Instructor*. Boston: Elias Howe, 1848. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

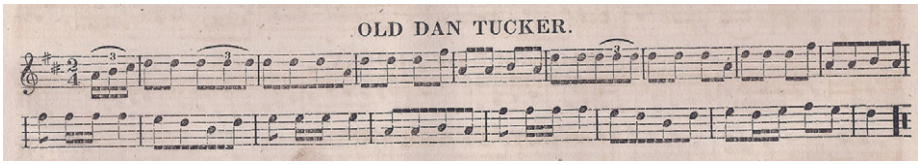
OLD DAN TUCKER.

Figure 6c "Old Dan Tucker." From *Ethiopian Flute Instructor*. Boston: Elias Howe, 1848. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

old fashioned instrument on which she had learned to play."[71] MacGregor Jenkins, a Dickinson neighbor during her lifetime, noted in his memoir that:

> [Emily] went often across the lawn to her brother's house. It was through him, and his handsome wife the "Sue" of her letters and messages, that she kept in touch with the life of her circle, and to a considerable extent with the village and the world. It was here that she would fly to the piano, if the mood required, and thunder out a composition of her own which she laughingly but appropriately called "The Devil," and when her father came, lantern in hand, to see that she reached home in safety, she would elude him and dart through the darkness to reach home before him. This was pure mischief and there was much of it in her.[72]

These anecdotes and observations suggest that the vernacular tunes in her music book, and others she heard firsthand, may have served as a broad canvas for her

[71] Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 153. Hoover, Cynthia Adams and Edwin M. Good, "Piano," *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed. The "old-fashioned instrument" Turner is referring to is likely the square piano, which was in favor in American households until the 1880s and had a range of five to five-and-a-half octaves. See also Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 407; and Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters, with Notes and Reminiscences*, with a foreword by Alfred Leete Hampson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932), 156–58.

[72] MacGregor Jenkins, *Emily Dickinson, Friend and Neighbor* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1930), 36.

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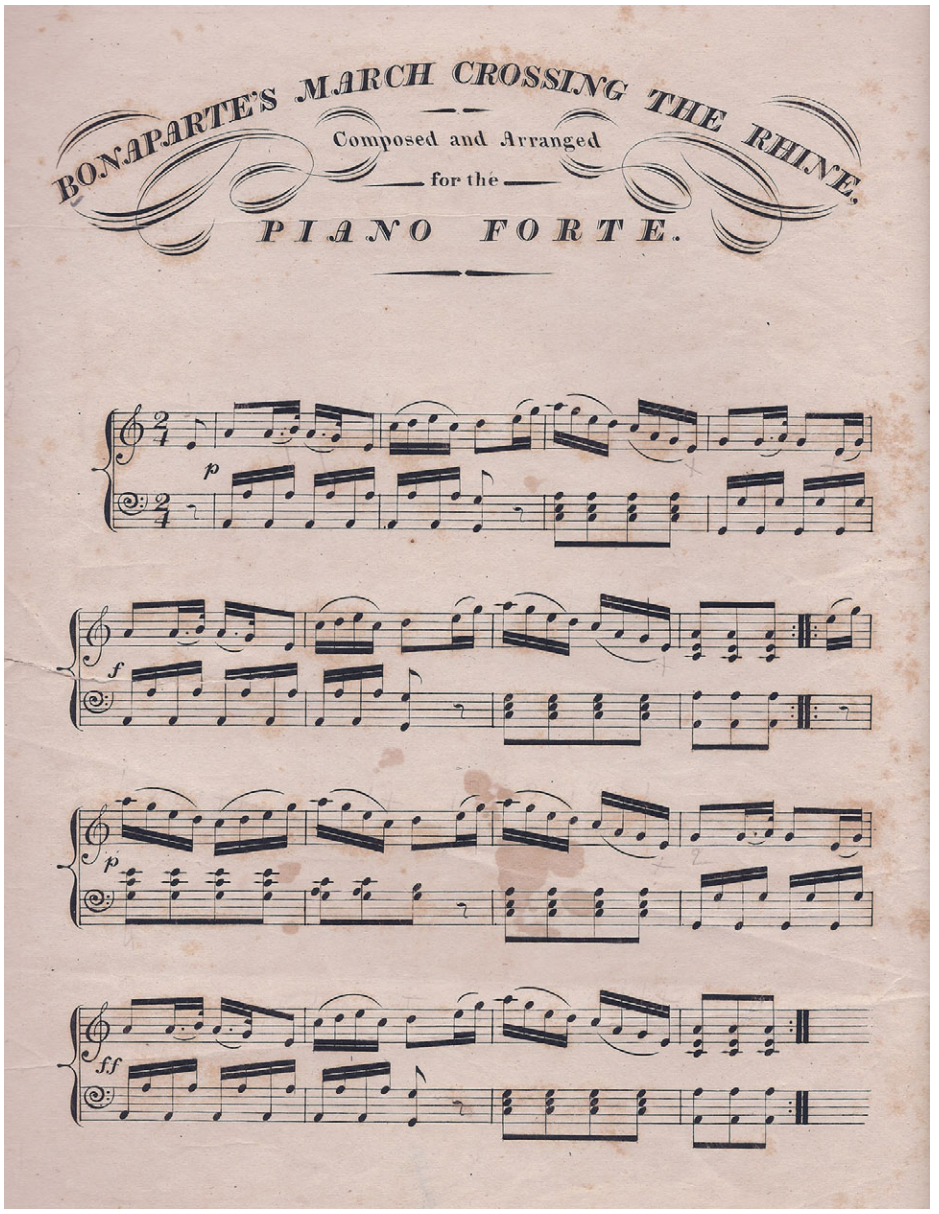

Figure 7 "Bonaparte's March Crossing the Rhine." Boston: Oliver Ditson, n.d. (EDR 469). Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

musical improvisations, from which she would elicit "weird and beautiful melodies all from her own inspiration."[73]

[73] This quote refers to a social evening at Austin's home "The Evergreens," which took place in March 1859. *Mrs. Kate Anthon [as told] to Martha [Dickinson] Bianchi, 8 October 1917*: "The old blissful evenings at Austin's! Rare hours, full of merriment, brilliant wit, and inexhaustible laughter, Emily with her dog, & Lantern! often at the piano playing weird & beautiful melodies, all from her own inspiration, oh! She was a choice spirit! See Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 406–7n4.

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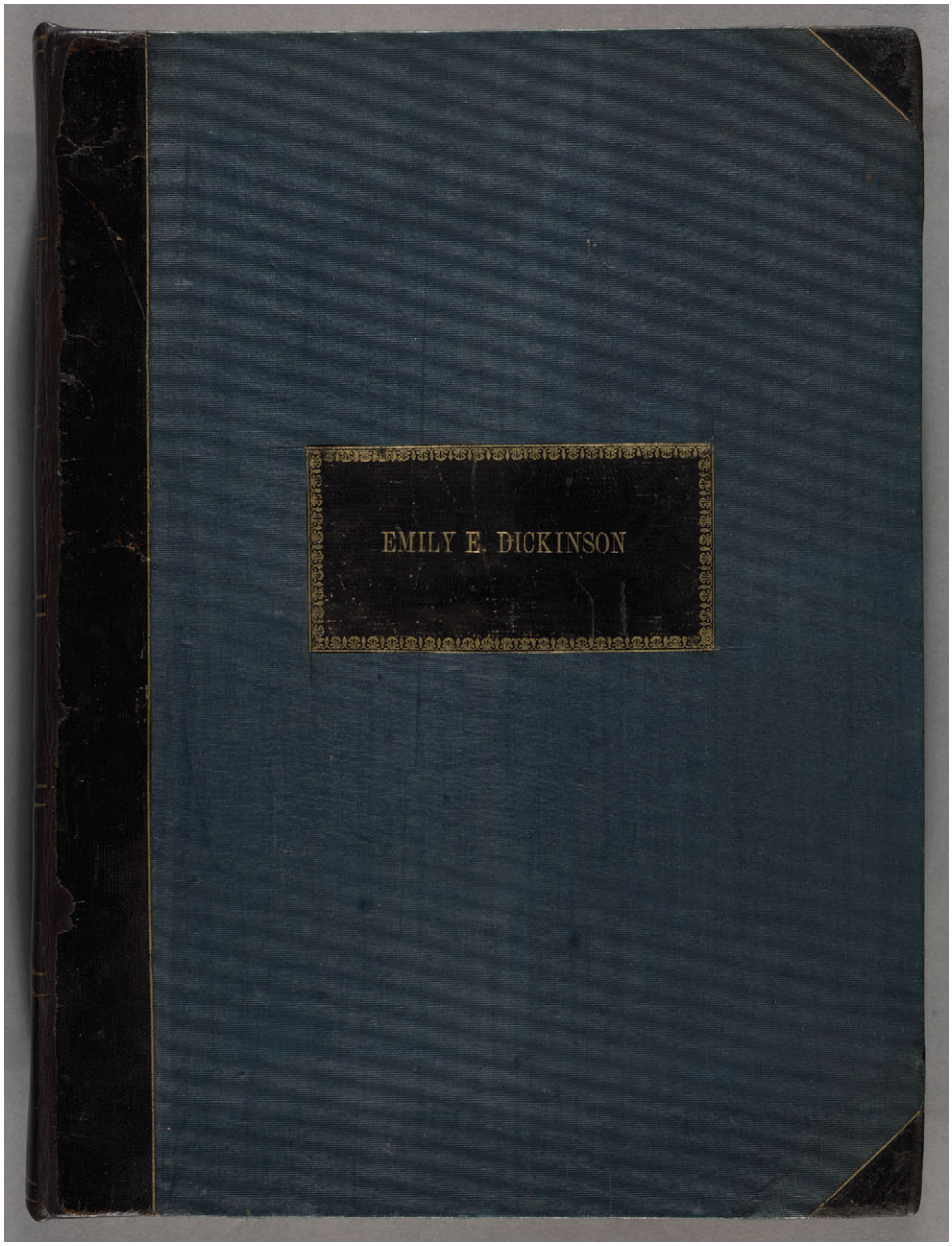

Figure 8 Emily Dickinson's music book (EDR 469), cover. Used by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

"The noise in the pool at noon excels my Piano."

After Dickinson's volume was bound (see Figure 8) and as the 1860s approached, she avidly began hearing and collecting music of a different type. Dickinson had attained substantial musical experience and expertise, and was entering a watershed period of self-assessment. Between 1861 and 1864 Dickinson produced a staggering

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number of poems—708. In many of those poems she began to employ her music in the form of metaphors, borrowings, and boundary crossings that would assist her in making the transition from pianist to poet.

In an April 1862 letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911), an abolitionist and writer who had become a mentor to Dickinson, she had alluded to her musical and poetic transformation. "You ask of my Companions Hills—Sir—and in the Sundown—and in a Dog—large as myself, that my Father bought me—They are better than Beings—because they know—but do not tell—and the noise in the Pool, at Noon—excels my Piano."[74] To Dickinson, the concept of "noon" was an established biblical-based reference to the prevailing force of nature, the daily apex of which occurred when the sun was at its highest. It was at that hour that the cacophony of nature was most active and alive to her.[75] She often used musical metaphors to describe these noises; and as her poetic voice emerged, she increasingly began to recognize that the musical backdrop that was beginning to inform her verse was far superior to the sounds and textures of her own "Piano." Consider her 1861 masterpiece "Musicians wrestle everywhere":

Musicians wrestle everywhere –
All day – among the crowded air
I hear the silver strife –
And – waking – long before the morn –
Such transport breaks opon the town
I think it that "New life"!

It is not Bird – it has no nest –
Nor "Band" – in brass and scarlet – drest –
Nor Tamborin – nor Man –
It is not Hymn from pulpit read –
The "Morning Stars" the Treble led
On Time's first afternoon!

Some – say – it is "the Spheres" – at play!
Some say – that bright Majority
Of vanished Dames – and Men!
Some – think it service in the place
Where we – with late – celestial face –
Please God – shall ascertain![76]

[74] Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 25 April 1862; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 261. The persona and work of the fledgling poet seemed beyond Higginson's grasp, and he encouraged her to delay publishing her poems. Dickinson seemed willing to accept his assessment of her poems, yet her reply to one of his critiques (from 1862) is telling: "If fame belonged to me I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the Chase—and the Approbation of my Dog, would forsake me then—My Barefoot Rank is better." Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 7 June 1862; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 265. It was also during this creative and transitional period that Dickinson's relationship with her lifelong friend Helen Hunt Jackson resurfaced. Jackson had become acquainted with Dickinson's work through Higginson, a mutual friend. Jackson, in contrast to Higginson, was relentless in her efforts to persuade Dickinson to publish: "You are a great poet—and it is wrong to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud," she wrote Dickinson. "When you are what men call dead, you will be sorry you were so stingy." Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 2:245. Dickinson finally consented, and her poem "Success is counted sweetest" was published in the 1878 anonymous volume *A Masque of Poets*, published by Roberts Brothers.

[75] For a discussion of Dickinson's "noon," see Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 680.

[76] Franklin, *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 229.

"Musicians wrestle everywhere" reaches back to her past musical experiences, conjuring the Germanians "in brass and scarlet" and the tambourines of minstrel music, both of which resonate from the music in Dickinson's binders' book.[77] Hymns such as "Morning Star" led by the choir's treble voices remind us of the *Village Hymns* of her youth, which also would prove vital to the development of her emerging poetic persona.[78] The musical memories Dickinson would incorporate into this and other poems date to a time when her verse was still embryonic, not yet a discernible vehicle for her powerful musical metaphors, with their foreshadowing of New England Ivesian borrowings and rhythmic discords. Those memories with their attendant musical longings and borrowings, which begin appearing in 1859, would be released full force in the early 1860s, vibrantly capturing the gamut of dialects available to her.

With the cascade of poetry that ensued during this period, Dickinson may have been channeling her love of music into her poetry with some urgency. She understood but kept silent about the fact that there would be no professional outlet for her as a musician. This may shed light on the feelings behind a passage in her April 1862 letter to Higginson: "I had a terror—since September—I could tell to none—and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground—because I am afraid—."[79] There may have indeed been an important decision for Dickinson to make at that time, one to which she would finally achieve closure a few years later.

Biographer Richard Sewall observed: "That, at a certain point, she made a professional decision about music is suggested in Clara Bellinger Green's memory of [a] conversation [she had] with Dickinson: "She [mentioned] her early love for the piano and confided that, after hearing Rubinstein [?]—I believe it was Rubinstein—play in Boston, she had become convinced that she could never master the art and had forthwith abandoned it once and for all, giving herself up then wholly to literature."[80]

> The Show is not the Show
> But they that go —
> Menagerie to me
> My Neighbor be —

[77] As suggested earlier, Dickinson may have heard "Sounds from Home" by Josef Gung'l performed by the Germanians; which was also in her music book. Early in 1865, Dickinson wrote to her cousin Louise Norcross in Boston: "I am glad to the foot of my heart that you will go to Middletown. It will make you warm. Touches 'from home,' tell Gungl, [*sic*] are better than 'sounds.'" Emily Dickinson to Louise Norcross, 1865; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 305.

[78] Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 408.

[79] Much has been written about the source of this "terror," which occurred in September of 1861. Most often cited is an acute eye condition that required her to spend considerable time in Boston under the care of a physician. Another reason cited was Dickinson's relationship with her sister-in-law Sue, or thirdly, a mental disturbance where her enormous output of poetry at the time may have served as therapy. There is wide agreement, however, that this was a transitional period for Dickinson. See Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 204; Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 2001), 437; and Connie Ann Kirk, *Emily Dickinson: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 79–80.

[80] Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 409n6. This story recalled by Clara Bellinger Green was published in *The Bookman*, November 1924. According Leyda, the event recounted here by Green would have taken place in 1877, five years after Rubinstein's concert in Springfield. Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 2:272–73.

Fair Play –
Both went to see –[81]

Anton Rubinstein made an acclaimed American tour which featured concerts in nearby Springfield on 21 October 1872 and an added "farewell concert" on 8 May 1873.[82] Dickinson's poem "The Show is not the Show" was written at the end of 1872, providing us with some evidence that she may have been part of the menagerie of concertgoers who saw Rubinstein perform. Unlike her experience with Jenny Lind, this poem admittedly seems to have engaged her in the local excitement generated by Rubinstein's scheduled concerts and perhaps aided in her own assessment of the changes she had experienced during the previous several years.

At the time of Rubinstein's October 1872 Springfield concert, Dickinson wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson using powerful musical imagery to describe the change of season then taking hold in Amherst. She may have used this imagery to describe her own transformational assessment as her musical longings were being re-articulated and applied to her poetic voice:

> When I saw you last, it was Mighty Summer—Now the Grass is Glass and the Meadow Stucco, and "Still Waters" in the Pool where the Frog drinks.
>
> These Behaviors of the Year hurt almost like Music—shifting when it ease us most.[83]

The fact that the music "hurt" provides affirmation that her "Piano" had been supplanted by the shifting metaphoric musical elements informing her poetry. In late May 1873, Dickinson's correspondence with her cousins Frances and Louise Norcross of Boston offers striking imagery indicating that she may have been a witness to the great pianist the previous October: "Glad you heard Rubinstein. Grieved Loo could not hear him. He makes me think of polar nights Captain Hall could tell! Going from ice to ice! What an exchange of awe!"[84] Here, Dickinson may be articulating the tension of "going from ice to ice," and the feeling of release in those shifting "behaviors." For an accomplished musician such as herself, this concept of tension and release would have been an essential ingredient to good music-making.

One of the ways in which Dickinson may have achieved the same tension and release of "shifting behaviors" in her poetry was by borrowing from her New England hymn tradition. The hymn and scriptural references in her correspondence

[81] Franklin, *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 1270.

[82] "Rubinstein Concert Haynes Opera House," *The Springfield Republican*, 15 October 1872; "Among the arrivals at the Haynes House yesterday. . ." *The Springfield Republican*, 22 October 1872; "Rubinstein Farewell Grand Concert," *The Springfield Republican*, 5 May 1873; *Springfield Republican* online, the Jones Library, Amherst, MA. The *Republican* stated that there would be a single Springfield performance given by Rubinstein on 21 October 1872. A "farewell concert" was later scheduled for 8 May 1873. See also R. Allen Lott, "Anton Rubinstein in America (1872–1873)," *American Music* 21/3 (Autumn 2003): 291–318.

[83] Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, late 1872; Johnson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 381.

[84] Emily Dickinson to Frances and Louise Norcross, late May 1873; Johnson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 390. Charles Francis Hall (1821–71) made three expeditions to the Arctic. The last was in 1871 from which he did not return.

attest to the fact that although she gradually withdrew from attending church services, Dickinson's firm foundation in the Christian hymn tradition sustained her. It has been thoroughly argued that hymn meter and popular ballad meter may have served as an underpinning for a good deal of Dickinson's poetry.[85] As first elucidated by biographer Thomas Johnson, Dickinson "did not have to step outside her father's library [which included hymn books] to receive a beginners lesson in metrics."[86] Johnson notes that when these meters are employed, Dickinson's poetry most often affirms the use of common meter (CM), which could be aligned with any number of hymn texts or set to any number of corresponding tunes with which Dickinson would have been intimately familiar. Dickinson may have been thinking of the Watts hymn, "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past" when she wrote her poem, "This is my letter to the world," in 1863 at the age of thirty-two. Both texts employ common meter, and like Watts, Dickinson accesses the divine, not through an orthodox rhetoric but through her own daily experience.[87] With its familiar meter, we are invited to participate in the poem's sense of conformity that satisfies the "hymnness" to which Dickinson aspired. However, within that context Dickinson's text freely presents an opportunity for rebellion against that conformity. In this case Dickinson asserts that the natural world around her is not only central to her reality, it is also feminine *and* divine. At the conclusion of the poem, Dickinson asks for tender judgment, a request that resonates far beyond the poem itself. On the surface, the poem's dissonant rhythms may (in recalling Dickinson's words) "hurt almost like Music—shifting when it ease us most;" but underneath, there is indeed a hymn tune embedded in this verse.[88] Like the Watts hymn text, Dickinson's poem aligns itself with the tune "St. Anne." When Dickinson's text is made performative, the parallel to New England composer Charles Ives (1874–1954) is striking. As musicologist J. Peter Burkholder points out, "using another work as a model was common for all types of music in the nineteenth century." Like Ives, Dickinson crossed boundaries in the melding of the sacred with the secular, or in harvesting a dissonant tonality and applying it to her poetic voice. Her re-casting more than emulates the Watts hymn. Dickinson may have surpassed Watts, as the hymn tune's presence underneath a new "shifting" secular lyric text above invites a "faith," not

[85] Victoria Morgan aligns the dissent of Watts's hymns with Dickinson's poetic use of hymn meter as utilizing "a traditional means of Christian devotion as a form of dissent." Victoria N. Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture: Tradition and Experience* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2010), 30 and 87–94. On the contrary, author Judy Jo Small states that "all in all, the influence of the hymn forms on her prosody has been greatly exaggerated, and "the actual number of poems that have been shown to refer directly to any particular hymn is extremely small." Judy Jo Small, *Positive as Sound: Emily Dickinson's Rhyme* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 42.

[86] Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), 84–86. Johnson discusses Dickinson's use of hymn meter: most often Dickinson employs common meter (alternating eight and six syllables per line), and similarly ballad meter, followed by common particular meter (8–8–6/8–8–6) and a few in short meter (two lines of six syllables).

[87] Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture*, 83–94.

[88] Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, late 1872; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 381.

in religion, but in the *action* of capturing what Dickinson referred to as the "fuller tune,"[89] a divinity of performance to which Dickinson (and Ives) aspired.[90]

> This is my letter to the World
> That never wrote to Me –
> The simple News that Nature told –
> With tender Majesty
>
> Her Message is committed
> To Hands I cannot see –
> For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
> Judge tenderly – of Me[91]

As her poetic aspirations fully emerged, Dickinson's intimacy with the New England hymn tradition may have assisted her in navigating some difficult waters. Should she have identified herself to her family and to the world as a secular poet, she would have been branded an outlier, positioning herself well beyond the orbit of her country town of Amherst. In affirming that "*My* business is to sing," she could align herself within the occupational boundaries of the Christian feminine hymnists of her day, and thereby justify her poetic calling.[92] Both the Christian tradition and the natural world held her, together comprising a duality that would allow her verse to conform to *and* rebel against tradition, sometimes simultaneously. Dickinson once wrote to her cousins, "Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray."[93] This statement is emblematic of her ability to set a strong conviction against, as she put it, a *scalding* fear and resolve it through musical metaphors and borrowings.[94] Although Dickinson loved to "buffet the sea," she also understood

[89] According to Small, "As a teenager, Dickinson wrote to a friend [Abiah Root], 'you know how I hate to be common.' The statement is a telling one, for it marks a trait in her temperament that proved to be permanent: cultivation of an elite self defiant of conventional authority. Her deliberate separation from the common would extend to stylistic revision of traditional practices of the literary establishment. Her peculiar rhymes in particular are part of a 'fuller tune' that she set out to give to the sounds of her poetry." Small, *Positive as Sound*, 29. This statement would certainly also apply to her revisions of traditional hymnic practices to suit her own poetic voice. Dickinson's use of the "fuller tune" appears in the 1861 poem, "I shall keep singing!" See Franklin, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 270.

[90] J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Borrowing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 34–38. Cristanne Miller refers to Dickinson's stanzaic and metric forms as arising from the "intersections of elite and popular, printed and sung, religious and secular short-lined forms prevalent in the 1840s and 1850s." Miller, *Reading in Time*, 50.

[91] Franklin, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 519.

[92] "Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! *I* can't stop for *that*! . . . '*My* business is to sing!'" Emily Dickinson to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, summer 1862 (?); Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 269; Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, 389. These hymnists included Phoebe Hinsdale Brown, Eliza Lee Follen, and Julia Ward Howe. See Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture*, 119–49.

[93] Emily Dickinson to Louise and Frances Norcross, late January 1863; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 278.

[94] Here "scalding" refers to the 1861 poem "I shall know why." At the conclusion of the poem Dickinson assures herself that at the end of time Christ will explain everything and that "I shall forget the drop of anguish / That scalds me now – that scalds me now!" Franklin, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 215.

well "the cordiality of the Sacrament."[95] She drew on the Christian tradition to articulate her belief in the divinity of the natural world, while her keen aural intelligence for music, ballad, hymn, and song guided her to a safer shore where her poetry could reside.[96] Dickinson scholar Cristanne Miller writes: "While there is ample evidence that Dickinson wrote with the rhythms of hymns in her ears, several aspects of her verse suggest that a more accurate formulation would be that she wrote in relation to song. Song in this context includes the hymns and ballads she sang, the poetry she read, and the popular music she played on the piano."[97]

"She has an air of exile"

Dickinson's musical engagements reveal that she was equally at home in the sacred and the secular, the weird and the beautiful, and the parlor and the kitchen, where her eyes and ears were exposed to a variety of Hibernian accents and black dialects, both spoken and sung. Just as she may have sung from her father's hymn books or improvised on the traditional tunes in her binders' volume, Dickinson extended her daily conversations with the Irish servants into some of her verse. Traces of ephemeral Hibernian dialect, functioning as dialogic commentary, are melded almost unnoticed into the meter of this 1865 poem (italics mine):

> Each Second is the last
> Perhaps, recalls the Man
> Just measuring unconsciousness
> The Sea and Spar between –
>
> To fail within a chance –
> How *terribler* a thing
> Than perish from the chance's list
> Before the Perishing![98]

[95] "The cordiality of the Sacrament extremely interested me when a Child, and when the Clergyman invited 'all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, to remain,' I could scarcely refrain from rising and thanking him for the [,] to me[,] unexpected courtesy, though I now think had it been to all who loved Santa Claus, my transports would have been even more untimely.'" Emily Dickinson to Mrs. Clara Newman Turner, late 1884; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 926. Here Dickinson refers to a childhood experience dating to about age seven or eight (1838). See also Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 1:39.

[96] Dickinson had experienced eight religious revivals that swept through Amherst during 1840–62 and through them all remained unconverted. The revival of 1850 claimed nearly all of the Dickinson family except for Emily. At that time she wrote to Abiah Root: "My rebellious thoughts are many, and the friend I love and trust in has much now to forgive. I wish I were somebody else—I would pray the prayer of the 'Pharisee,' but I am a poor little 'Publican,' 'Son of David,' look down on me! . . . The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea—I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but Oh I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness—Christ Jesus will love you more—I'm afraid he dont [*sic*] love me *any*!" Emily Dickinson to Abiah Root, 1850; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 39. For a discussion of the revival of 1850, see Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 50–56.

[97] Miller, *Reading in Time*, 49.

[98] Franklin, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, no. 927. See also the following poems in Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, nos. 369, 846, 927, and 1218. See also Murray, *Maid as Muse*, 129.

Indeed, Dickinson's commitment to music and performance is clearly articulated throughout her life and work. By the close of the 1860s and for the rest of her life, this commitment may have manifested itself in a different but more sustainable form. It was around this time that Dickinson adopted a simple white housedress as her daily costume; perhaps it assisted her in achieving the same "air of exile" she had observed years before in Jenny Lind.[99] Whereas Dickinson's musical borrowings were an agent in the development of her poetic persona, the white dress visually branded that persona, eventually becoming recognizable as part of her unique and enduring identity. The housedress was moreover a symbol of her social and artistic boundary crossings as she worked and wrote alongside the servants of the Homestead, whose music she performed from her music book.[100]

Elizabeth Phillips states that Dickinson "enjoyed being enigmatic and dodging the inquisitive."[101] Contemporary usage of the word "dodge" can be traced to the musician Ossian E. Dodge who deceptively tried to associate himself with Jenny Lind by securing a winning auction bid of $625 for the first choice seat at Lind's first Boston concert in September 1850.[102] Accounts of this and other shrewd promotional tactics instigated by Lind's manager P. T. Barnum were widely circulated in the press. Eventually Lind put an end to Barnum's auction stunt just before her Northampton performance.[103] As an avid reader of *The Springfield Daily Republican*, Dickinson was certainly aware of Barnum's shrewd business activities. The sheet music cover of "Ossian's Serenade" issued by Dodge depicts his introduction to Lind by Barnum in an after-concert parlor setting, an event which never took place.[104] The fact that Dickinson may have owned a copy of the sheet music to "Ossian's Serenade" indicates that she may have identified herself with the image of Lind and her white dress as depicted on the cover of the sheet music, and adopted that as her own (see Figure 9).[105] With the memory of Ossian Dodge's

[99] Pascoe, "'The House Encore Me So,'" 7–9. Pascoe discusses Dickinson's "performance poems." In her analysis of the poem "Publication is the auction," Pascoe connects the white dress worn in concert by Jenny Lind to Dickinson's own "literary performance" also utilizing a white dress. Contemporary images of Lind often portray her in the white dress, and descriptions of Lind's white dress have been noted by those who attended her concerts. On the cover of Jenny Lind's program in New York's Metropolitan Hall for Tuesday 18 May 1852, a concertgoer wrote the following description: "Jenny Lind was dressed in a heavy white silk under white lace dress with a large green bow—quilt on her bosom and green flowers in her hair. The dress was made very low in the neck, broad white chiffon with long ends around the waist gold chain circled around her neck, numerous bracelets." See the Jenny Lind program files in the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. See also Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 14–19.

[100] Murray, *Maid As Muse*, 115. Murray suggests that "[Emily] used her [Irish] maid [Maggie] to draw a line between herself and her peers; those who might make claims on her, Emily limited her contact to those familiar enough to use the back door."

[101] Elizabeth Phillips, *Emily Dickinson: Personae and Performance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 2.

[102] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 37–39; Jenny Lind program file, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Music Division.

[103] Pascoe, "'The House Encore Me So,'" 8–10.

[104] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 14–19.

[105] "I should also like two other pieces, 'You & Me,' & 'the Ossian Serenade.'" Note from Lavinia Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, Monday noon, 26 January 1852, published in Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 210–11.

Figure 9 Dodge, Ossian E. "Ossian's Serenade." Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1850. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

stunt still in the air, Dickinson's "dodging the inquisitive," and her performance persona signified by the white dress, may have inadvertently assisted in promoting herself during her lifetime as the Amherst "Myth." As Mabel Louis Todd reported to her parents in 1881, "I must tell you about the character of Amherst. It is a lady whom the people call the Myth. She is a sister of Mr. Dickinson, & seems to be the

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climax of all the family oddity. She has not been outside of her own house in fifteen years. . . . No one knows the cause of her isolation, but of course there are dozens of reasons assigned."[106]

By her late thirties, Dickinson was already developing an intimate relationship with her own poetry and persona. It is likely she did not want or need contact with others that might offer her publicity or notoriety. Instead, she seems to have demanded intimate contact only with those who intersected with her daily activities: her family, her correspondents, and the Irish and African American servants.

"I play the old, old, tunes"

Emily Dickinson's fondness for the domestic servants and groundskeepers was sustained through the end of her life. Her final request was that her body be borne from the house to the cemetery by the Irish servants to whom Emily had entrusted her daily activities. These servants had given her a space for work, musical and linguistic dialects for borrowing, and thresholds for crossing. She identified with them as belonging to an outlier class, eager for assimilation yet wanting to retain their Irish identity. Emily did not reject the cultural structures of her own class or faith; rather, in stating "Mine by the right of the white election," she freely borrowed from them, claiming a personal ownership and a faith in the tunes and dialects that were part of the fertile surroundings of her beloved Pioneer Valley."[107]

Emily once wrote to her cousin John Graves "I play the old, old tunes yet, which used to flit about your head after honest hours—and wake dear Sue, and madden me, with their grief and fun—How far from us, that spring seems—and those triumphant days."[108] The "old, old tunes" in Emily Dickinson's music book offer new perspective on understanding how Dickinson's daily musical encounters informed her unique poetic voice. Dickinson participated fully in the musical and cultural activities of her time and place, where she was encouraged to develop her craft, sharpen her ear, and hone her musical sensitivity. That the level and intensity of these musical activities were typical for her time allowed her unfettered and joyful engagement in the fluid expression and thorough integration of music into her correspondence, her improvisations, and eventually into her poetry, in which she found a voice for music that she could articulate outside the restrictive parlor setting. Captured in her binders' volume were her longings for musical engagement and her ambition to excel in that sphere. In turn the volume represented the musical borrowings and boundary crossings that served the realization, application, and expression of her poetic voice. "The thing itself"[109]—in this case the binders' volume—serves us not only as a precious keepsake of past musical activity at the

[106] Mabel Loomis Todd to her parents, November 1881. Quoted in Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 2:301.

[107] "Mine by the right of the white election," F411.

[108] Emily Dickinson to John Graves, late April 1856; Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, no. 184.

[109] Sewell, *Emily Dickinson*, 406–9. Sewall coins this phrase as he discusses Dickinson's poetic "metaphors that grew out of a lifetime's association with the thing itself [i.e., music]. She had shifted from the old music to the new, but the old lived on as part of her poetry."

Homestead but as a tool for unlocking, understanding, and contextualizing the musical and cultural practices and activities of an era, and their relationship and engagement in the vibrant musical life of a great American poet whose "business was to Sing!"

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