

The Message Bird

The Message Bird: A Literary and Musical Journal began publication in New York City on 1 August 1849, and continued with numerous title changes until 14 January 1860. This RIPM volume treats those issues published through 16 August 1852, at which time the journal merged with *The Musical Times* [New York] and changed its title, for the fourth time, to *The Musical World and New York Musical Times*. The journal's original title was employed until 1 May 1851. A second title, *Journal of the Fine Arts: An American and Foreign Record of Music, Literature and Art* appeared until 2 February 1852 when a third title—*The Musical World* was adopted.¹ From 16 June 1851 until 2 February 1852 the page heading *Journal of the Fine Arts and Musical World* appeared sporadically.

Published twice monthly all issues contain sixteen pages, generally presented in three vertical columns. From its inception to 1 August 1851, each issue is divided into two parts, the first treating general artistic matters including the fine arts and literature, and, the second, the "Musical Department," devoting attention exclusively to studies, biographies and reviews.² *The Message Bird* was published by M.T. Brockelbank and Company with no mention of an editor until 15 July 1852 when the merger with *The Musical Times* was announced and Oliver Dyer and Richard Storrs Willis were cited joint editors.

The prospectus in the journal's first issue announces its goals:

We desire to exert an influence for the elevation of music and literature among the great body of people. We wish to "Make the songs of our nation," at least so far as to cultivate a general taste for the true poetry, the real music and the higher humane literature of the country.

Literature occupies an important place in the journal. Issues commonly begin with a number of somewhat sentimental poems or literary essays, the quality of which is unexceptional. The more frequent contributors of such texts include Augusta Browne, Augustine Duganne, J. R. Orton, Frances A. Fuller, George P. Morris, Alice Carey, and Thomas Hastings. Interest in sculpture and painting is less extensive; reports tend to deal with current exhibitions in New York City, with occasional editorials calling for, among other things, the establishment of an American art academy.

¹The journal's subtitle—*An American and Foreign Record of Music, Literature and Art*—was maintained along with the new principal title.

²This two-part format was not used from 1 September 1851 to 1 October 1851 or after 1 January 1852.

Musical matters clearly constitute the journal's primary focus. Regular features include biographical sketches of performers active in the United States and European composers, studies of specific instruments, commentary on the role of church music in worship, reviews of concerts and operas (particularly in New York), and news of foreign musical activities.

The beginnings of many historically significant American musical institutions and personalities active in the country's musical life are documented in these pages. The establishment of the New York Philharmonic Society and the New York Harmonic Society, for example, are treated in the early years of *The Message Bird*; the careers of Max Maretzek and singers associated with Italian opera productions at the Astor Place Opera House and Castle Garden are discussed in first-hand accounts throughout the journal. The brilliant and somewhat sensationalized American debuts of Jenny Lind and Marietta Alboni are reported in detail and debated at length by correspondents. Also treated are a number of now obscure concerts such as those of Dodworth's band, the touring Alleghanians and the chamber music soirées of Theodore Eisfeld, as well as performances at Niblo's Saloon, the Broadway Tabernacle and the Apollo Rooms—all of which formed an integral part of the musical life of the period. A series devoted to church music in New York City and Brooklyn provides a regular and detailed critique of choirs, choirmasters and organists of individual churches. Several musical innovations such as Ernest von Herringen's new notational system and Alley and Poole's euphonic organ are also extensively discussed.

The journal's editors conscientiously supported contemporary composers and musical education. Both the phenomenon of conventions promoting the study of music literature and the major personalities associated with these significant meetings, such as William B. Bradbury, are dealt with in considerable detail.

Advertising and music supplements are also found in each issue. The music supplements generally consist of popular salon pieces composed specifically for the journal. Some of the more frequent contributors include the English violinist George Loder, the band instrument authority Allen Dodworth, the English composer William Vincent Wallace, as well as William J. Wetmore, Augusta Browne, Samuel Jackson, and Richard Dunning.

Among those authors who supplied the journal with reports from abroad are Wellington Guernsey based in London, William Henry Fry based in Paris, and Lowell Mason who wrote from a number of cities. Contributors of major signed articles include R.G. Paige (writing on the voice), John Sullivan Dwight (on the oratorio), George H. Curtis (on church music), and Allen Dodworth (on band instruments), with additional articles published in translation by the well-known Belgian critic F.-J. Fétis

writing on the history of the pianoforte, the life of Paganini and the history of the violin. Frequently, authors sign their contributions with initials or pseudonyms. The following table lists those that have been identified.

F.W.N.C.	F.W.N. Crouch
G.H.C.	George Henry Curtis
H.M.	Henry Mason
J.S.B.	J.S. Black
J.S.D.	John Sullivan Dwight
L.M.	Lowell Mason
T.G.	T. Graham
W.G.	Wellington Guernsey
W.H.F.	William Henry Fry
W.M.	Willaim Mason
Singing Sibyl	Victoria Metta Fuller