

“The Telegraph of the Heart”: American Songs by Augusta Browne

Bonny H. Miller



Bonny H. Miller

“**O** HI! VOICE OF SONG, the interpreter of emotions unspoken by the lips,” wrote composer Augusta Browne in 1849, and she exulted, “Truly is music the telegraph of the heart.”¹ Augusta Browne Garrett (c. 1820–1882) stands out as a skilled musician who was one of the women most active in publishing sheet music in nineteenth century America. Her music was in print a half century before that of Amy Beach and almost a decade before Stephen Foster’s. Browne’s best songs and piano pieces compare favorably in style and craft to music by her contemporaries.

This article describes Browne’s song publications during the central decades of the nineteenth century in examples that only recently have become available in digital resources. To fulfill the requirement for American song on repertoire lists for juries, competitions, and auditions, there is a flood of fine work from today’s songwriters and from those of the twentieth century, but program selections from the nineteenth century are usually limited to pieces by Foster, spirituals from the African American tradition, or songs by such Gilded Age composers as Amy Beach and Clara Kathleen Rogers. Since 2000 the digitization of nineteenth century music collections in the nation’s great libraries has changed the American musical landscape. Songs discussed in this article are found online in the Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection at Johns Hopkins University, the Library of Congress *Music of the Nation* databases of copyright deposits, the University of Michigan holdings in the HathiTrust Digital Library, and the Internet music library IMSLP, which draws on the three former sources.²

A river of song flowed through nineteenth century America, contributing to a land of widespread, diverse musical activity throughout daily life. Participation, not elitism, was the norm during the century before new technologies brought recorded music, player pianos, and radios into the household. Music performed at home covered a breadth of genres and styles, from traditional and folk, to sacred, theatrical, and vernacular songs composed, published, and marketed to a rising middle class. American music scholar Gillian B. Anderson estimates that between 1870 and 1983 sheet music made up on average twenty-four percent of *all* copyright deposits.³ This substantial number points to the tremendous appetite for sheet music and the corresponding vitality of the music publication industry in the United States for more than a century.

Augusta Browne composed as many as two hundred compositions, including songs, piano solos, and sacred music. Born in Dublin, Browne came

to North America as an infant, first to St. John, New Brunswick (Canada), and five years later, to Boston. The family moved up and down the East Coast in search of better opportunities for their music shop and academy. Trained primarily by her Irish-born parents, the child became a polished keyboardist, and “Miss Browne” assumed a role assisting as a teacher in the family music business by the age of thirteen.⁴ Hers is a quintessentially American story: an earnest little girl growing up amidst a struggling family business; a teenager with more than twenty sheet music publications to her credit; a young professor of music who began to compete in the musical life of New York City in 1841; and an entrepreneur who pursued publication of music and prose to the end of her life.⁵

Browne taught piano, organ, voice, and harmony to students from children to young women who had completed their formal education prior to marriage. Like many of her modern colleagues, she worked as an independent music instructor and church organist. She also wrote music columns for the periodical press, in addition to short stories, poems, and Christian devotional literature. Her lively music and prose illuminate a gifted woman whose unfamiliar story emerges as both old fashioned and strikingly modern.

The teenage composer had songs in publication in Philadelphia by 1837. She set poetry from favored British and American authors of the era and sometimes borrowed tunes from well known composers, including William Shield and George Frideric Handel.⁶ By far the greatest number of Browne’s songs appeared during the 1840s. She was at least six years ahead of Stephen Foster (1826–1864) in age and in the timing of her early publications. Both composers grew up surrounded by the traditional songs of Ireland heard as folk songs and as interpreted in parlor settings by poet Thomas Moore and arranger John Stevenson in their *Irish Melodies*.⁷ Foster’s first song in print, “Open Thy Lattice Love” (1844), was similar to parlor songs by Browne and others that were published by the hundreds during the antebellum era. Browne aimed to create appealing music in styles that could compete in a brisk music market. Accordingly, she occasionally followed such antebellum fashions as Swiss or Tyrolian echo songs, maritime songs, and lyrics in Scots dialect. Her songs were invariably “genteel,” meaning that the lyrics were never vulgar or unseemly,

but usually imbued with a moral voice that reinforced personal virtue, morality, and Protestant faith.

Nineteenth century Americans expected songs to be tuneful and accessible, whatever the source, and Browne followed that tenet. Her melodies were built of balanced, regular phrases, usually of typical length (four, eight, or sixteen measures), often with the scheme $a^1-a^2-b-a^2$, where the first phrase (a^1) pauses with a half cadence on the dominant chord, and the paired phrase (a^2) ends with a full cadence on the tonic chord. A contrasting phrase (b) might move to a different key before returning to the final phrase (a^2), typically related to the opening phrase, with a full cadence at the end. When the main melodic phrase (a) was repeated several times with variants within each verse, the tune became easy to follow and remember. The familiar mold offered listeners enough repetition to be immediately comprehensible and sufficient variety to be interesting. Browne added vocal cadenzas, keyboard interludes, and chromatic harmonies to enliven her settings and elevate their musical style. Her songs are well suited to a young, light voice up to the early twenties. Their performance demands more clarity of diction than weight or volume in the voice. She wrote in the average female vocal range between C_4 (middle C) and F_5 , a range of one and a half octaves, but many of her titles can be performed by either sex, and some of her songs present a man’s speech. Most of her songs are strophic, with several verses sung to the same music. A burden—a returning line of text, such as “My Bonnie Bessie Green” in the song of the same title—often concludes each stanza, rather than a full chorus to be repeated at the end of every verse.⁸

“The Courier Dove” is an example of Browne’s song style that is simple yet exhibits grace and elegance. Published in the *Columbian Magazine* in April 1848, the “The Courier Dove” was apparently unique to the magazine, since no regular sheet music imprint exists.⁹ Browne’s style has been described as “attractive, usable period song,” and “The Courier Dove” is an ideal example of these attributes.¹⁰ The lyric melody exemplifies what could be called American bel canto, reflecting the style of vocal writing in Italian opera of the 1820s and ’30s by Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Gioachino Rossini. Browne’s four-measure phrases proceed in a straightforward $a^1-a^2-b-a^3$ plan, adorned with graceful vocal embellishments and a flowing accompaniment that could have come straight out of an art song by an Italian master (Example 1). The lyrics

Andante

Out - strip the winds, my — cour - ier dove, On
pin - ions fleet — and free, And bear this let - ter —
to my love, Who's far a - way — from me.

Example 1. Augusta Browne, “The Courier Dove.”

speak to a common human condition—“my love who’s far away from me”—and the words can be slightly altered to suit either gender (e.g., he/she, him/her are readily interchangeable, as in “if [he/she] should also change”).

This song of a distant or absent amour is a little gem that embodies the parlor of the American past.

Browne sought out household magazines that included music in their monthly issues for readers to play and sing

It bids him mark thy plume where - on _____ The

chang - ing col - ors _____ range But _____ warns him that _____ my _____

peace is gone, If he should al - so change.

The musical score consists of three systems. Each system includes a vocal line in a single treble clef and a piano accompaniment in two staves (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The first system covers the lyrics 'It bids him mark thy plume where - on _____ The'. The second system covers 'chang - ing col - ors _____ range But _____ warns him that _____ my _____'. The third system covers 'peace is gone, If he should al - so change.' and ends with a double bar line. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and block chords in the left hand.

II.

It tells him thou return'st again
 To her who sets thee free;
 And oh! it asks the truant, when
 He'll thus resemble thee?
 Then speed thy flight, my courier dove,
 On pinions fleet and free,
 And bear this letter to my love,
 Who's far away from me.

Example 1 (continued). Augusta Browne, "The Courier Dove."

I've come, I've come from the spir - rits' land, And a treas - ured song is mine; I bear for the wound - ed heart a balm, And a joy for those that pine. The friends that ye bade on earth "good-bye," With cheeks so pale and wan, They are there in the light of a cloud - less sky, They are there in the light of a cloud - less sky, And their all of grief is done.

Example 2. Augusta Browne, “The Reply of the Messenger Bird,” vocal melody, first verse, mm. 6–23.

at home.¹¹ *Godey's Magazine* had been the first monthly magazine to publish her compositions. A Philadelphia music publisher, James Osbourn, provided sheet music to *Godey's*, and thus two of her songs were issued in the periodical during 1841. It amounted to free national distribution of the young composer's songs by the best selling magazine in the U.S. during the first half of the nineteenth century. Browne realized the value of this medium and capitalized on it. Over the next decade, her music appeared ten times in the *Columbian Magazine* (1844–48) and five times in the *Union Magazine* (1847–50). As in the case of “The Courier Dove,” regular sheet music imprints do not exist for some of her magazine songs. She presumably sold the rights for these songs to magazine publishers in exchange for a venue that enabled music distribution, promotion, and name recognition at little cost and even some financial gain.

“The Courier Dove” also demonstrates an example of the copycat phenomenon that pervaded the market driven sheet music industry during the nineteenth century. Every hit song of the era generated a flock

of similar titles by competing composers. There were numerous examples in sheet music from the 1830s and '40s of supernatural birds—even carrier pigeons—bringing messages or love letters from the deceased in “spirit land.” One of the models for this fad was “The Messenger Bird,” a duet by another “Miss Browne,” or Harriet Mary Browne. This British composer, frequently identified as “Mrs. Hemans' sister,” has often been confused with Augusta Browne, who also set poetry by Mrs. Hemans.¹²

The same year that she published “The Courier Dove,” Augusta Browne produced another type of a copycat number, an “answer song,” or song of response to a current popular number. She countered “Miss Browne's” “Messenger Bird” with an American “Reply of the Messenger Bird.” Her “Reply” may have been one among many bird songs, but the lyrics and melody of this lovely setting offer “the wounded heart a balm and a joy for those that pine” through the promise of the reunion in the world to come.¹³ Browne enlarged the final phrase (a³) of the a¹-a²-b-a³ scheme by adding a chromatic extension that repeats the previous words and leads to

an ornamented climax (“cloudless sky”) before bringing the melody downward to its close (Example 2).

This was the same period of years when Stephen Foster achieved wide recognition through his minstrel songs, but he would soon turn away from that style to concentrate on parlor songs and a new specialty that he labeled plantation songs.¹⁴ Foster portrayed African Americans with empathy in lyric songs such as “Old Folks at Home” and “My Old Kentucky Home,” but their texts nevertheless contain troubling words or images associated with slavery and plantation life. This issue can make Foster’s songs problematic to program today.¹⁵ Browne loathed blackface minstrelsy. She asserted that minstrel or “Ethiopian” songs didn’t present the music of African Americans and the vulgar and demeaning lyrics were a hostile insult to people of color.

Why they are called negro-songs is a matter of marvel: the term is a libel on the whole colored race . . . No one at all acquainted with the unique and oft-times real poetry of genuine negro nature . . . could, for one moment, suppose the doggerels attached to these melodies to be correct delineations of negro character.¹⁶

Browne praised the educated speech of African American oratory, a style utterly antithetical to the “buffoonery and profanity” that she abhorred in the lyrics of popular minstrel songs. She urged that “we should strive to raise the intellect, not to debase it.”¹⁷ Music, she believed, should contribute to moral and spiritual uplift.

The year 1848 was a productive one for both Browne and Foster. Their output displayed parallels as well as divergences. Foster published his plantation song “Uncle Ned” and the minstrel favorite “Oh! Susanna” at roughly the same time that the *Columbian Magazine* printed “The Courier Dove.” It was also the year that Foster produced *Santa Anna’s Retreat From Buena Vista*, and Browne composed “The Warlike Dead in Mexico,” both pieces of music inspired by the battles fought in what became known as the Mexican-American War. Foster’s contribution was a high spirited quickstep for piano solo. Browne’s “Warlike Dead” lamented the victims of battle in a slow dirge that used funereal rhythms and chromatic chord progressions to convey the lament, “Toll, toll, toll the soldier’s knell.”¹⁸ The somber G minor introduction opens with hints of military drums and deep church bells (Example 3a).

The pace of the funeral march characterizes the theme of the A section in the song, in which an augmented-sixth chord (E^b-C[#]-G) accentuates the grief of “hearts laid (low)” in m. 10 (Example 3b).

The expanded ternary form of the song (AAABA) accommodates the five verses written by Mary Balmanno (d. 1875), a literary friend who provided texts for several of the composer’s songs. The lyric B section in E^b major sets the fourth verse in melodious contrast to the earlier dirge. A descending 6/8 phrase recalls fallen heroes, and a pointedly dissonant harmony, a half diminished seventh chord in first inversion (F-A^b-C^b-E^b), highlights the word “Mexico” in m. 49 (Example 4) before the return to the solemn funeral march in the final verse.

The expression and gravitas of the setting earned compliments in the press. The *New York Daily Tribune* noted Browne’s “beautiful and patriotic song,” and the *New York Morning Courier* pronounced it “a very fine piece of music.”¹⁹ The song was performed in a concert given by the American Musical Institute on February 8, 1848. “The Warlike Dead in Mexico” featured a lavish chromolithographed design in red, blue, green, and gold tones. The 1840s and ’50s were decades of innovation in printing technology. The rainbow hued cover offered vignettes of five battle sites in Mexico (Monterey, Buena Vista, Cerro Gorgo, Vera Cruz, and Mexico [City]), as well as a portrait of the dedicatee, Senator Henry Clay. The cover was a print *tour de force*, as well as a national political statement, and has been retained in special collections across the country.²⁰

The collected papers of Henry Clay contain a letter from Browne in which she asked the well known statesman for permission to dedicate the song to him.²¹ In that letter, Browne described the song—tentatively titled “The Valiant Dead in Mexico”—as “a Requiem to the memories of those brave men whose loss has fallen so heavily upon America,” and she asked, “May I beg, Sir, a few lines from you on the subject, as I am desirous of immediately putting it to press.” Clay’s complete letter of response to the composer does not survive, but the sheet music cover of the song included words taken from his answer to Browne: “I need not say that the affecting subject of the Song touches me both as a Father and I hope a Patriot. H. Clay.” His son, Henry Clay, Jr., had died on February 23, 1847, at the Battle of Buena Vista.

Largo

a)

con anima

b)

Toll, toll the knell, for the hearts laid low, On the blood stained fields of Mex - i - co;

p

Example 3. Augusta Browne, "The Warlike Dead in Mexico"; a) mm. 1-4; b) mm. 9-12.

Our He-roes have fal - len in Mex - i - co. Toll, toll, toll the sol - dier's knell,

Example 4. Augusta Browne, "The Warlike Dead in Mexico," mm. 48-52.

From cover illustration to musical details, Browne aimed high in "The Warlike Dead," which prompted Judith Tick to describe the composer's songs as "too elaborately structured to suit American popular taste," but most of her songs were simpler in style and form.²² Parlor music typically was couched in unassuming, middlebrow style. Melodies adhered to familiar pat-

terns with accompaniments of a limited number of basic chords, sometimes as few as two or three, just enough to harmonize the melody without overwhelming the amateur player. American music consumers desired songs that they could immediately perform, understand, and embrace. Originality was less important than how the tune fit the rhythm and sense of the words. An unforget-

Con Espressione

a)

Bright E-den-land of Na-tions, Proud home of Li-ber - ty,

Moderato

b)

New Eng - land, New Eng - land! How beau - ti - ful thy vales:—

Example 5. Augusta Browne, “A Song for New England”; a) recitative, mm. 1–7; b) aria, mm. 32–37.

table marriage of words and music can stick stubbornly in the ear and the mind and become more than a best seller. Like Foster’s simple, two-note “Doo-dah” from “Camptown Races,” a musical phrase can become part of the national memory. Browne, along with hundreds of other composers of her era, sought that elusive combination of music and words that resonated with Americans and found a place in their shared culture.

Nevertheless, she sought a more cultivated musical style than some of her American competitors, based on a solid grounding in theory and harmony. Her piano accompaniments were more imaginative than simple chords; flowing keyboard patterns, less common chord changes, and more distant modulations distinguish many of her numbers from the boilerplate song sheets of the day. Browne praised the quality of “sensuous Italian melody” in opera of the era, but she did not compose any music specifically for the stage.²³ Instead, she con-

veyed operatic style into domestic parlor performance in manageable degrees. Many of her songs—even the short, strophic settings published in household magazines—contained brief but elegant cadenzas for the singer, sometimes with ornamented echo points between voice and accompaniment.

A few of Browne’s songs were couched in the formal style of Handel’s oratorios or scenes from eighteenth century operas, a style unusual for antebellum parlor songs. She occasionally used the historic style of *recitative* or *parlando* to make a dramatic statement. “A Song for New England” (1844) was a grandiose gesture of civic commendation for the completion of Bunker Tower in Boston.²⁴ The music begins with a lustrous description in recitative (Example 5a) before proceeding to a rolling litany of praise to New England in a strophic aria (Example 5b).

Moderato

p scherzando *f* stacc. *p* *f*

p *leggiero* *ff*

loco Bird of the gen - tle wing, song - ster of air,

stacc. *p* *p*

Example 6. Augusta Browne, “Bird of the Gentle Wing,” mm. 1-11.

Browne’s settings may not equal the artistry of Franz Schubert or Robert Schumann, but they are comparable to lieder settings by their contemporaries Franz Abt (1819–1885) and Robert Franz (1815–1892). In “Bird of the Gentle Wing” (late 1830s), Browne introduced apt text painting through birdlike chirps with crisp grace notes and staccato attacks in the introduction (mm. 6–7) to delineate the “Bird of the gentle wing, songster of air” (Example 6).²⁵

Death was a constant that lurked in nineteenth century homes and music. The “white plague,” as tuberculosis was known, took all ages, including two brothers of the composer. Such untimely deaths found catharsis in parlor songs. In 1844 Browne composed “A Thought

of the Departed” as a gesture of condolence dedicated to a friend, Miss Elizabeth Cox.²⁶ The serene melody in this requiem song contrasts with chromatic chords in the introduction and postlude that signify the anxious emotions of sorrow and loss. The song melody does not conform to a simple pattern like a-a¹-b-a¹. The asymmetrical structure of phrases follows the five-line stanzas published by Mrs. Balmanno in a small collection of her verses printed in England in 1830.²⁷ The five phrases could be described musically as a-a¹-b-b¹-c.

Thou art in thy grave—beloved! [a]

Thou art in thy still cold grave! [related melodically; a¹]

Thy gentle heart hath ceas’d to beat [b]

Thou art in thy grave be - loved! Thou art in thy still cold

grave! Thy gen - tle heart hath ceas'd to beat; Nor canst thou hear though wild winds

meet Or tem - pests round thee rave.

f *dim.*

Example 7. Augusta Browne, "A Thought of the Departed," mm. 5-14.

Nor canst thou hear though wild winds meet [related melodically (i.e., sequence); b¹]

Or tempests round thee rave. [c]

The five-line stanza presented a musical challenge for the composer, but Browne was able to incorporate many expressive details within a compressed musical space in this "Requiem." Each of the five elastic phrases differs

from the others yet grows seamlessly out of the preceding phrase (Example 7). The melody leads upward to an expressive climax at the end of the fourth phrase, followed by a gentle scalar descent to the tonic.

Browne also created duets for her students to perform together or for one student to sing along with the teacher. A more ambitious duet, "The Fisher-Boy's Song," was performed by English tenor John Braham

Allegretto non tanto

first my years began Ho

first my years began Ho

Tempo Primo
Con spirito animato

Hey the sea the dark blue sea The Fisher's joyous life for me!

Hey the sea the dark blue sea The Fisher's joyous life for me!

Example 8. Augusta Browne, “The Fisher-Boy’s Song,” mm. 42–48.

(ca. 1774–1856) and his son Charles during an extended American concert tour in 1842.²⁸ Example 8 from “The Fisher-Boy’s Song” shows a cadenza that demanded skilled singers such as the Braham duo of father and son.

The subject of fishing might seem an unladylike pursuit for an urban woman like Browne, but an earlier song, “The Sun has Set,” was subtitled “A Boat Song,” and she would turn to sailors again in “The Seaman’s Night Song,” a maritime song aptly published in Boston.²⁹

The preceding examples demonstrate ways in which Browne incorporated sophisticated details in vernacular music for the domestic market. She published fewer songs after 1850, but two of these numbers were probably tributes to her husband, John W. B. Garrett, a painter who died in 1858 after just three years of marriage. Both “Autumn of Love” (1866) and “Forever Thine” (1872) were satisfying ballads with smooth melodies presented in regular a-a-b-a phrases and

Andante
Con molto espress.

For - ev - er thine! what - e'er this heart be-tide; For - ev - er thine, wher - e'er our lots be cast; —

Fate, that may rob us of all wealth be-side Shall leave us love, till life it-self be past.

Example 9. Augusta Browne Garrett, “Forever Thine,” mm. 7–14.

accompaniments with varied keyboard patterns and chord progressions (Example 9).³⁰

The solid craftsmanship in these works contrasts with some songs in which Browne was guilty of awkward vocal writing and misplaced textual accents. Both faults may have stemmed from being first and foremost a pianist, even though Browne also offered voice instruction. These obvious blunders should have been avoided, but misplaced accents and uncomfortable leaps were probably the result of a strong melodic idea that the composer favored despite a momentary mismatch with the words of the text. In her choice of lyrics, she embraced the high blown style of Victorian-era poetry that relied on tortuous word order to fulfill the desired rhyme pattern and metrical scansion. As N. Lee Orr noted of earlier American music, “While we may smile now at the precious, mannered and genteel style of [their] songs . . . and poetry, these were exactly the aesthetic qualities that appealed to nineteenth-century audiences.”³¹ Verse with

convoluted syntax was characteristic of much antebellum American and English poetry, but what is comprehensible when read or even when spoken can become difficult to grasp when sung. Parlor songs may seem like transparently simple music, but communicating their texts successfully is a challenge. Not only diction, but the sentimentality of Victorian-era poetry is difficult to deliver persuasively to millennial listeners.

Love, affection, loyalty, family, faith, and death were perennial topics of parlor songs and ballads. Browne’s lyrics were sentimental, but less so than many of her songwriter colleagues. Her titles often featured active verbs or animated words such as “Wake!” “Speed!” “Vive!” “Haste!” Although Browne complied with the genres and styles considered suitable for women to compose, she often pushed away from the insulated domestic sphere. She partook of the fervent piety and emotional expression of her time, while bypassing the maudlin sentimentality that pervaded much sheet music

for the parlor. Her songs avoided the Victorian stereotypes or tropes of doting mothers, cherubic babies, and other topics closely associated with women. Browne did refer to some current events in songs of response to the Mexican War and the 1848 revolutions in Europe, but she did not contribute to the flood of songs about Civil War battlefields, soldiers, deaths, or loved ones at home. The Civil War (1861–65) was an anxious time for Browne, whose two brothers served on the Union lines in Virginia and Maryland, while she took charge of her elderly parents and the family home in Brooklyn, New York. Both brothers survived, but one suffered a crippling leg wound. The composer turned to prose publication during the war years and never again wrote songs in large numbers.

Browne composed a few hymns and anthems, but she published many more settings that were religious but not intended for specific liturgical use. Earnest domestic songs were as likely to be performed in church halls and assembly rooms as in the parlor. Such settings as her “Song of Mercy” and “Song of Christiana” were advertised as “calculated either for the home circle, or for the Sacred Concert.”³² The texts were verses from John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a seventeenth century allegory of men and women as they struggled through earthly life toward the Celestial City. Browne called it “the most precious book of the ages,” and many nineteenth century Americans read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a parable of their own journey toward a land of promise in the United States.³³

To the composer and many in her era, good music was art that was serious, refining, and morally uplifting. Lowell Mason had argued successfully to incorporate music into the curriculum of Boston’s public schools in 1838, asserting that the benefits of music to children were intellectual (the “science” of music), moral (socializing and devotional), and physical (promoting good health).³⁴ Worthy art was expected to manifest a moral dimension that could improve and elevate its audience; thus, it was no surprise to antebellum audiences if a parlor song presented a lesson in morality or virtue, however squeamish modern audiences may feel about such unabashed preaching. “The moral tone,” writes Derek Scott, “is precisely what makes the Victorian ballad differ in character from the songs that came after.”

Modern listeners “tend to shy away from the moral didacticism found in the previous century’s ballads.”³⁵

Even when sorrow and loss were the subjects, optimism, faith, and hope were the bright keynotes of Browne’s music and mission. In an 1845 essay, she praised music as “the heavenly art, whose watchword as she upward points, is ‘Excelsior’.”³⁶ Meaning loftier or ever upward, “Excelsior” is the motto for New York State, where the composer lived and worked from 1841 until the end of the Civil War, but the word meant more to Browne. During the time allotted to us on earth, she wrote, “our watchword must be Excelsior! our aim, perfection, or else we miserably forego the loftiest privileges of our immortal birthright.”³⁷

CONCLUSION

Browne used typical musical styles of her era but went beyond them with variants that sidestepped hackneyed clichés of many parlor songs. With small but telling details in the text or music, she resisted prevailing notions about women’s composition without making an outright challenge that might offend societal norms and create negative consequences for her reputation as a teacher of girls and young women. Browne conformed as much as she had to, while simultaneously pushing against gendered expectations for a woman musician.

This composer’s songwriting and skillful piano figuration illustrate the melodious tunes and spirited keyboard music found in American homes during the mid-nineteenth century. We immediately recognize the sound of the parlor in Browne’s musical language and stylized, Victorian-era lyrics. What makes her songs sound American? The square cut, accessible melodies, but also the optimistic spirit that pervades her music, a feeling far removed from the melancholy or *Angst* of German songs by her European contemporaries Clara Wieck Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel.

Browne’s songs illuminate their time and place in a long-ago America. Her works circulated as part of a vibrant, competitive business in sheet music, but every aspect of her professional life entailed gendered societal constraints within the culture of her era. The styles of the songs that Browne composed and published nevertheless represent significant categories of music in nineteenth century America; moreover, hers are exemplary works

of their period that exhibit musical thought and sophistication. A song by Augusta Browne makes a fresh and worthy addition to a recital or repertoire list alongside more familiar numbers.

NOTES

1. Augusta Browne, "An Olive Leaf for the Message Bird," *The Message Bird* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 1849): 37. Browne was personally acquainted with Samuel Morse, whose pioneering message by telegraph, "What hath God wrought?" was sent from Washington to Baltimore on May 24, 1844.
2. Digital sources cited are the Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, <https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu>; *Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1820–1860* (Library of Congress), <https://www.loc.gov/collections/american-sheet-music-1820-to-1860/>, and *Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1870–1885* (Library of Congress), <https://www.loc.gov/collections/american-sheet-music-1870-to-1885/>; the HathiTrust Digital Library, www.hathitrust.org; and IMSLP (Petrucci Index), www.imslp.org. Another valuable resource is the Sheet Music Consortium, incorporating entries from many academic special collections, <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/sheetmusic/>.
3. Gillian B. Anderson, "Putting the Experience of the World at the Nation's Command: Music at the Library of Congress, 1800–1917," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 115, n. 16.
4. "The Logierian Musical Academy," *Boston Courier* (July 27, 1833).
5. For more about Browne's life, see Bonny H. Miller, "Augusta Browne: From Musical Prodigy to Musical Pilgrim in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 8, no. 2 (2014): 189–218; and Bonny H. Miller, *Augusta Browne: Composer and Woman of Letters in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020).
6. Browne was careful to acknowledge borrowed material on the title pages of her published scores in songs such as "The Voice of Spring," based on music by Daniel Steibelt; "The Orange Bough," based on Handel; and "To Inez in Heaven," based on Franz Schubert (but misidentified as Beethoven). Of these songs, only "The Voice of Spring" (Philadelphia: G. Blake, n.d.) is available through the Sheet Music Consortium.
7. Ten volumes of *Irish Melodies* were issued serially in Dublin and London between 1808 and 1834.
8. "Bonnie Bessie Green" (New York: Hewitt & Jacques, 1841) is digitized at irishsheetmusicarchives.com (accessed May 10, 2017).
9. *The Columbian Magazine* 9, no. 4 (April 1848) is in the HathiTrust Digital Library, but the pages for "The Courier Dove" are not very clear. A transcription by the author is available in IMSLP.
10. Judith E. Carman et al., eds., *Art Song in the United States, 1759–1999: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 61.
11. For more about this publishing practice, see Bonny H. Miller, "Ladies' Companion, Ladies' Canon? A Century of Women Composers in American Magazines," in Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds., *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 156–182.
12. See Judith Tick, *American Women Composers Before 1870* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 150. Augusta Browne invariably used her given name or initial "A." to distinguish her music from the better known British composer, Harriet Mary Browne Owen, whose sheet music typically indicates "Miss Browne" without any first name. Publishers usually identified the composer as "Mrs. Hemans' sister" on the title pages of Harriet Browne's songs to take advantage of the celebrity of Felicia Browne Hemans, one of the most popular poets of the period. The presence of a phrase such as "Mrs. Hemans' sister" or "music by her sister" confirms that a sheet music imprint is Harriet Browne's music rather than Augusta Browne's.
13. Augusta Browne, "The Reply of the Messenger Bird" (Philadelphia: A. Fiot, 1848) is available in IMSLP, HathiTrust, and the Library of Congress *Music for the Nation*.
14. Stephen Foster, letter to Edwin P. Christy, dated May 25, 1852, cited in full in JoAnne O'Connell, *The Life and Songs of Stephen Foster: A Revealing Portrait of the Forgotten Man Behind "Swanee River," "Beautiful Dreamer," and "My Old Kentucky Home"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 139–140; see also Steven Saunders, "The Social Agenda of Stephen Foster's Plantation Melodies," *American Music* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 275–289.
15. A few editions revise the lyrics to remove objectionable terms; see Stephen C. Foster, *Stephen Collins Foster: Sixty Favorite Songs*, Steven Saunders and Joanna R. Smolko, eds. (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2009).
16. Browne, "Negro Minstrelsy," *Home Journal* (January 14, 1854).
17. *Ibid.*
18. Augusta Browne, "The Warlike Dead in Mexico" (New York: C. Holt, Jr. 1848) is available in the Library of Congress *Music for the Nation* and the Levy Sheet Music Collection.
19. "New Music," *New York Daily Tribune* (March 11, 1848); *Morning Courier*, March 15, 1848.

20. See, for example, <https://library.uta.edu/sheetmusic/items/show/153> (accessed December 10, 2019).
21. Augusta Browne to Henry Clay, November 25, 1847, Henry Clay Memorial Foundation papers, 1777–1991, University of Kentucky Special Collections.
22. Tick, 153.
23. Augusta Browne Garrett, “Wanted, an Organist,” *Frank Leslie’s Sunday Magazine* 9, no. 3 (March 1881): 326.
24. Augusta Browne, “A Song for New England” (New York: Firth & Hall, 1844) is available in the Levy Sheet Music Collection.
25. Augusta Browne, “Bird of the Gentle Wing” (Philadelphia: G. Blake, n.d.) is available in the Levy Sheet Music Collection, and the Indiana University digital collection *IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana*.
26. Augusta Browne, “A Thought of the Departed,” or “Requiem” (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1844), is available in the Indiana University digital *IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana* and the digital Temple [University] Sheet Music Collection.
27. Mrs. Balmanno, “To the Memory of a Friend,” in *Poems* (London: n.n., 1830), 19.
28. Augusta Browne, “The Fisher-Boy’s Song” (New York: Firth & Hall, 1842) is available in HathiTrust.
29. Augusta Browne, “The Sun has Set” (Philadelphia: G. Blake, n.d.); Augusta Browne, “The Seaman’s Night Song” (Boston: C. Bradlee, 1845).
30. Augusta Browne Garrett, “Autumn of Love” (Cleveland: S. Brainard & Sons, 1866) is available in HathiTrust; Augusta Browne Garrett, “Forever Thine” (New York: J. L. Peters, 1872) is available in the Library of Congress *Music for the Nation*.
31. N. Lee Orr, “John Hill Hewitt: Bard of the Confederacy,” *The American Music Research Center Journal* 4 (1994): 31.
32. “New Music,” *New York Chronicle* (June 12, 1851). Augusta Browne, “Song of Mercy” (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1851) is available in the Library of Congress *Music for the Nation* and IMSLP; Augusta Browne, “Song of Christiana” (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1851) is available in the Library of Congress *Music for the Nation*.
33. Augusta Browne Garrett, “Hints for a Sunday-School,” *Frank Leslie’s Sunday Magazine* 5, no. 2 (February 1879): 149. Browne’s songs are settings of texts spoken by women in Part II of Bunyan’s work.
34. Lowell Mason, *Manual of the Boston Academy of Music* (1834), reprinted in Michael L. Mark, ed., *Music Education: Source Readings from Ancient Greece to Today*, 2nd ed. (New York,

London: Routledge, 2002), 70–75; and the Boston School Committee *Report of Special Committee, August 24, 1837*, also reprinted in Mark, 75–86.

35. Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65.
36. Augusta Browne “The Music of America,” *Columbian Magazine* 4, no. 1 (July 1845): 38.
37. Augusta Browne, *Hamilton, the Young Artist* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1852), 49.

Bonny Hough Miller holds MM and doctoral degrees from Washington University in St. Louis. She has performed widely as a pianist and has taught at universities in Missouri, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Virginia. A recipient of the AMS Janet Levy Award for Independent Scholars, Miller has presented papers and lecture-recitals at many national and international conferences. Her research has been published in the *Journal of the Society for American Music*, *Notes*, *Piano Quarterly*, *NATS Journal*, and *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*. Her biography of American composer Augusta Browne is forthcoming in *Eastman Studies in Music* in 2020.

the VOICE Straw

YOUR COMPLETE STRAW PHONATION VOCAL KIT

FEATURES:
STAINLESS STEEL STRAWS
MULTIPLE DIAMETERS
MULTIPLE LENGTHS
LATEX FREE SILICONE ARTICULATION CUPS

BENEFITS:
BRIDGES THE AERODYNAMIC & ACOUSTIC PRESSURES
RELIEVES TENSION, STRAIN & BREATHINESS
RELIEVES CRACKING & FLIPPING
AND MUCH MORE!

ORDER YOURS TODAY!
WWW.VOICESTRAW.COM
DISCOUNT CODE: NATS
BULK & WHOLESALE
CONTACT: SUPPORT@VOICESTRAW.COM