



William Batchelder Bradbury in Europe 1847-1849

STILL KNOWN TO countless millions as composer of **WOODWORTH**—an 1849 tune now sung with “Just as I am”—the tunes for “Sweet hour of prayer” and “Saviour like a shepherd” dating from 1859, of **THE SOLID ROCK**, “He leadeth me” and “Jesus loves me this I know” published in 1864, Bradbury saved money from First Baptist church positions in Brooklyn (1840-1841) and Manhattan (1841-1847) so that he might embark on July 2, 1847, with his wife and daughter Emily Maria, for a two-year intensive European study tour. Eighteen months were spent with prime teachers at Leipzig where he arrived September 11, 1847, to begin piano with Ernst Ferdinand Wenzel (1808-1880), voice with Franz Magnus Böhme (1827-1898). A month later he attended Mendelssohn’s funeral. Up to August of 1848 he practiced piano six hours daily on an instrument much used by Mendelssohn (brought back with him to New York in 1849). To make sure that he missed nothing, he not only attended every Gewandhaus concert but also personally met the greatest composers of his epoch—even obtaining whole-page musical autographs from celebrities such as Richard Wagner, both Robert and Clara Schumann, Franz Abt, Niels Gade, Ignaz Moscheles, Ludwig Spohr, Meyerbeer, and Jenny Lind. In addition he met Hector Berlioz at a soirée in July 1848, and conversed lengthily with Franz Liszt at a reception in April 1849 (“Music and Musicians in Europe,” in *The New York Evangelist*, September 7, 1848, and July 19, 1849, page 1 of both issues).

Throughout all this contact with European stars, he remained throughly American and unrestrainedly Baptist. Having decided on an Alpine walking tour in the early summer of 1848, he backpacked in the company of an impoverished young baron from Vienna. Bradbury’s letter dated July 25, 1848, describing the backpacking tour was published in the *Philharmonic Journal*, 1/13 (February 20, 1849), page 97, with the title “Music in the Alps.”

As we were descending my [Austrian] friend became so excited—intoxicated even—with what he had seen, that he commenced singing at the top of his voice some of his national songs. Not wishing to be outdone by a “foreigner” especially in my own profession, I commenced singing Yankee Doodle and Hail Columbia. My companion joined in the chorus with all his former zeal, and would not be satisfied till he had learned both of *our* national melodies, the latter of which he admired very much, “because,” to use his own words, “it sounds so *free*.” This was the only music-lesson I gave on top of the Alps.

Bradbury’s patriotism extended beyond merely teaching Yankee Doodle and Hail Columbia to his walking partner on an Alpine tour in midsummer of 1848. That same year he began studying double counterpoint, canon, and fugue with Moritz Hauptmann (1792-1868), the leading Leipzig theorist. What kind of teacher was Hauptmann? In “Music and Musicians in Europe, No. 21,” *The New York Evangelist*, August 2, 1849, page 1, he described him as the epitome of “true

greatness and true goodness. As a teacher he is patient, faithful, and most thorough. He is small of stature, a little bald, with a high broad forehead, and a countenance lined with the marks of hard study, but beaming with gentleness and amiability."

Bradbury's first double choral fugue composed in March of 1848 still survives in a manuscript given to the Library of Congress by Hubert P. Main April 25, 1916, with the acquisition number 362170. The same collection of original Bradbury manuscripts donated to the Library of Congress contains another Bradbury fugue, for piano on Yankee Doodle. Written for three voices, this mock-heroic exercise is a real fugue that even goes so far as to include strettì. If only as a corrective to the common but incorrect notion that America's first considerable Baptist composer was unlearned, either his fugues or some of his settings of prescribed German choral texts should be heard. How seriously Bradbury took his Baptist beliefs comes clearly into view in a letter that describes his own personal life during the months following his first arrival at Leipzig September 11, 1847. His second daughter was born there. A few days after her birth a Saxon government official came to his house announcing that the newborn infant must be christened and her name registered at once. But as *The New-York Musical Gazette*, II/6 (April, 1868), page 42, later reported the encounter (using Bradbury's diary as information source): "[He] was a thorough Baptist, and not by any means a person to compromise his principles, even at the command of a German official." Bradbury accompanied the official to the registry, on oath explained that his refusal was wholly a matter of conscience, and before leaving the registry told what name had been selected for his newborn but without infant baptism.

Lest this particular episode should suggest that Bradbury lacked the tact needed to win favors from the musical mighty, the contents of his musical autograph album loaned in 1976 to the music division of the Library of Congress by Bradbury's descendant Mrs. Richard Undeland, can here be specified. The oblong album bound in maroon velvet, with Beethoven's image stamped in gold on the front cover and a golden lyre on the back cover, contains autograph musical excerpts, or in some instances complete autograph musical compositions, always dated, by at least 18 of the brightest stars. Wagner accompanied a 21-measure piano-score excerpt from his still unproduced *Lohengrin* with this inscription: "Herrn W^m B. Bradbury aus New York Zum andenken an Deutschland von Richard Wagner. Dresden. 17 April 1849." Robert Schumann only the day before had copied in Bradbury's autograph album a canon for four women's voices, never heretofore published, to a text by Ludwig Uhland. Clara Schumann on April 16, 1849, copied in Bradbury's album an original Fugue in G minor. Ludwig Spohr in Kassel on April 25, 1849, copied "Jesus heavenly Master" from his oratorio known in England as *The Crucifixion* or *Calvary*. Franz Abt at Zürich in August 1848 (while Bradbury was on his Swiss walking tour) copied a *Vaterlandslied für Männerchor* beginning with "Nur deine schönsten Melodien aus tiefster Brust." The Meyerbeer autograph in Bradbury's album is dated at Paris in May of 1849 (overture to *Stresensee*. Andante religioso for harp). Joseph Joachim still in his teens but already hailed as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of the century copied part of an original violin and piano sonata with an inscription at Leipzig dated May 1, 1848. Still further to honor Bradbury, he as well as some other contributors to the autograph album, composed music to English-language lyrics. Ignaz Moscheles copied in Bradbury's album an original prelude and Andante espressivo on the letters B.A.C.H., dating the work April 18, 1848. Niels W. Gade, the Dane chosen as



Mendelssohn's immediate successor in conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra, began Bradbury's album with a piece for oboe and piano. Mendelssohn himself, who had died only weeks after Bradbury located at Leipzig, enters Bradbury's album with a letter to C. F. Becker, the collector of musical manuscripts at Leipzig who became Bradbury's close personal friend. Couched in the gracious terms that were Mendelssohn's wont, the letter dated Leipzig February 1, 1841, was bequeathed to Bradbury April 20, 1849. Translated into English Mendelssohn's letter reads: "Highly honored Sir - Does your extensive library perhaps contain either the piano or orchestral score of the Mozart aria, of which I enclose the first violin part? And, if so, would you be so kind as to loan it to me for a couple of days? I would be ever so indebted to you and beg most humbly that you excuse the bother, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Leipzig February 1, 1841." The German original reads: *Hoch geehrter Herr—Besitzen Sie in Ihrer reichen Bibliothek vielleicht von der Mozartschen Aria (wovon befolgend die ersten Violinstimme) den Clavier Auszug oder die Partitur? Und wenn Sie in diesem Fall gütig genug wären mir dieselben für ein paar Tage zu leihen? Ich wäre Ihnen dafür sehr verbunden, und mit der Bitte die Belästigungen zu entschuldigen bin ich Ihr ergebenster Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Leipzig d. 1. Febr. 1841.*

When deeding this letter to Bradbury, Becker wrote in English: "These lines of the glorious Master are bequeathed to his honored Friend, Mr. W. B. Bradbury from New York, in friendly remembrance." Like page after page of inscriptions elsewhere throughout the album these lines testify to Bradbury's own unique genius at winning influential friends wherever he ranged. In 1836 when he was only 20 Lowell Mason's recommendation had won him his first professional appointment—a church music post that he held 18 months at Machias, Maine (this was the town at which James Lyon, 1735-1794, of *Urania* fame spent his last 23 years). Again it was Lowell Mason's highly enthusiastic recommendatory letter to Cyrus P. Smith, mayor of Brooklyn, that won Bradbury entrée to the most influential circles of that city when he arrived fresh from Dover, New Hampshire, to become choir leader of First Baptist Church on Nassau Street in Brooklyn. Immediately upon arrival Bradbury found himself in the midst of controversy caused by the introduction of an organ shortly before he was called. His predecessor had added weight to the stone of stumbling and block of offense by playing it fortissimo to accompany congregational singing. Bradbury on the contrary chose soft stops. The leader of the anti-organ forces not long thereafter assembled his group and announced to Bradbury: "If the organ is to be played like *that* we do not object to it" ("Sketches of American Composers. William B. Bradbury," *The New-York Musical Gazette*. II/3 [January, 1868], 17-18). Bradbury's tact in winning over the opposition and his skill in adding already established leaders to his endorsers came even more clearly into view when in 1841 he published in cooperation with Charles Walden Sanders *The Young Choir* (New York: Charles Dingley and Smith & Wright [144 pages]). Envious carpers went to his publishers while the collection was still in proof complaining that it contained numerous mistakes in harmony. At once Bradbury found the right way to defuse the complaints (*The New-York Musical Gazette*. II/5 [March, 1868], 33). From his publishers, the 25-year-old Bradbury marched to the home of the paladin of New York church music, Thomas Hastings, his senior by 32 years. Hastings made the needed corrections on the spot, and soon thereafter agreed to sponsor Bradbury's 1844 collection, *The Psalmodist*, by adding his name on the title page as second compiler. To the same

year belonged two other Bradbury cooperative collections, *The Young Choir Companion* and *Singer's Companion*. To 1847 belonged *Flora's Festival* and *The Sacred Choralist* (cooperative endeavor with Hastings, George F. Root, and Timothy B. Mason). After all these publication successes, seven uniquely successful years at First Baptist in Brooklyn and Broadway (Baptist) Tabernacle in Manhattan, Bradbury at the age of 31 was willing to pull up stakes, sail with his wife and first child for Europe, and put himself under the tutelage of the severest German taskmasters. Yet in the face of all this evidence to the contrary, writers on American music history of a certain stamp still insist on ignoring him or in shaming him for his success in setting certain texts which by present standards are sloppily sentimental. His unparalleled success is nowhere better summarized than in the sentence that began the front-page article on him in *The New-York Musical Gazette*, VII/5 (May, 1873): "The name of William B. Bradbury is perhaps more widely known among the masses of the American people, as musical author and teacher, than that of any other man."