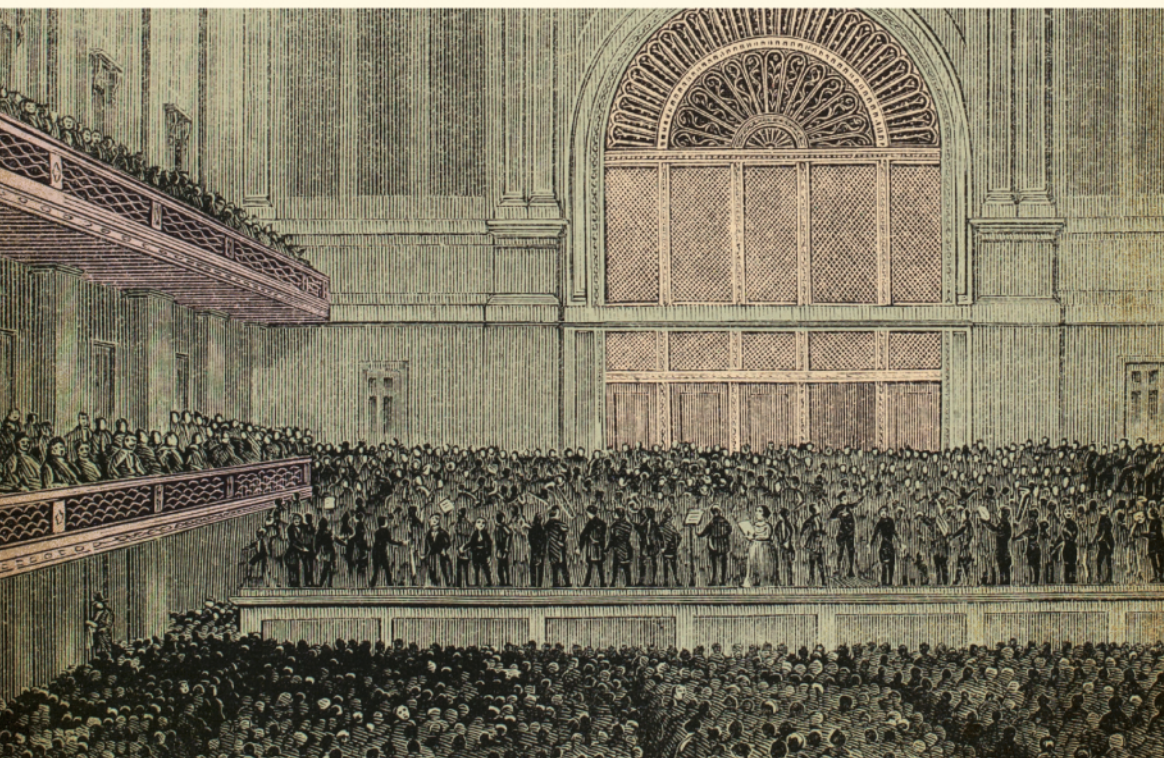


GOOD MUSIC *for a* FREE PEOPLE

THE GERMANIA MUSICAL SOCIETY IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Nancy Newman



Good Music for a Free People



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GERMANIA MUSICAL SOCIETY,

Germania Musical Society, 1852. Photographic reproduction, gift of Patricia Frederick to author.

*Good Music for
a Free People*

*The Germania Musical Society in
Nineteenth-Century America*

Nancy Newman

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“Man muss nach Nordamerika gehen, um seinen Ideen freien Lauf zu lassen.”

(One must go to North America to give free reign to one's ideas.)

Franz Grillparzer to Beethoven, 1826

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Prelude

They stand, they sit, they lean. The faces are expressive, the bodies eager. Some hold instruments, some do not. The frontispiece reproduces one of the earliest known lithographs of an orchestra, and is a notable work of musical iconography. All the more remarkable is its subject, the twenty-one members of the Germania Musical Society, one of the most influential traveling orchestras of the mid-nineteenth century. This image was almost certainly created in 1852, with the orchestra at the height of its celebrity. The Germanians were in Philadelphia to accompany the legendary soprano Henriette Sontag when they posed for fellow Forty-Eighter Peter Kraemer. Does his delineation convey the spirit described by Henry Albrecht (back row, second from right) of an ensemble that lived in “brotherly harmony,” leading “a romantic artistic life?” Who were these men and what did they do? The following pages attempt to answer these questions, to situate the musicians’ activities in the context of their time, and to understand their legacy.

Acknowledgments

One of the best pieces of advice that I received from my mentor, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, was that a book topic should be something you loved because you would have to live with it for a very long time. I can honestly say that has been the case for my research on the Germania Musical Society. The members' courageous decision to immigrate during the 1848 revolutions, their tireless concertizing, repertory of symphonies and polkas, and flirtation with social utopianism still thrills me, as I hope it will my readers.

My fascination with the Germanians was also influenced by my experience as an editorial assistant at the *Chicago Reader* around 1980. The weekly was known for running very lengthy stories about people without name recognition and subjects seemingly without immediacy. When I asked about it, cofounder and editor Bob Roth explained the rationale for pioneering a different kind of journalism. These are the people ignored by the dailies, he pointed out. Yet they are remarkable individuals in compelling situations; alternative papers could provide a forum for their stories. My investigation into the Germanians' activities bears more than a trace of the *Reader's* philosophy. As ordinary musicians in extraordinary circumstances, they managed to alter the course of American music history in surprising and significant ways.

Support for this research was generously granted by the University at Albany College of Arts and Sciences, Brown University, the John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization, and the American Antiquarian Society, where I was a Peterson Fellow. The Dena Epstein Award for Archival and Library Research in American Music provided a much-appreciated travel grant for research in Baltimore and Washington, DC.

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missed. The Music in Gotham project, established by Adrienne and John Graziano at the CUNY Graduate Center, has provided collegial support and a forum for sharing this research.

During the early stages of my research I found that librarians and archivists were familiar with the Germania Musical Society through materials in their collections even though the orchestra was hardly known within traditional musicology. The staff at the American Antiquarian Society, including Georgia Barnhill, Caroline Sloat, Caroline Wood Stoffel, Lauren Hewes, Jaclyn Penny, and Tom Knoles, were particularly generous in sharing their extensive knowledge of the mid-nineteenth century. As someone with children, I am indebted to those who mailed me materials from far-flung locales, including: John Shepard, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Nancy Mackechnie, Vassar College Libraries; Marla Vizdal, Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University; and James Green, Library Company of Philadelphia. Natalie Palme and Craig Hanson of the Harvard Musical Association and Brown University librarians Rosemary Cullen, Sheila Hogg, Ned Quist, and Carol Tatian were especially gracious in their assistance.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this work to my husband, the composer and cultural theorist Matthew Malsky, and our children, Beatrice and Isaac. This book would not have come to fruition without Matt's love, good humor, and musical insights. And I can now reveal to Bea and Isaac that when they were very young there was a secret room upstairs from our apartment that was mama's office. I may have closed the door, kids, but I was never very far away. Sometimes, I would even take a moment to imagine that together we really could achieve the impossible: our own harmonious microcosm of society.

Introduction

Like many musicological young Turks circa 1990, my initial introduction to the Germania Musical Society was through Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.¹ Levine describes the ensemble as playing a pivotal role in the emergence of the symphony orchestra as a regular feature of American musical culture during the nineteenth century. Its members were a group of young Berlin musicians who immigrated to the United States in 1848 and presented "some nine hundred concerts before approximately one million people" over the next six years.

The facts are not uninteresting, but what intrigued me was Levine's characterization of the Germanians' motivations. Their intention was "to further in the hearts of this politically free people the love of the fine art of music through performance of masterpieces of the greatest German composers." Why would the *freedom* of their listeners have mattered to these musicians? What could *political* liberty have to do with appreciation of the foremost classical composers during "the century of artistic autonomy," as Carl Dahlhaus described it?² The relationship between music—especially absolute music—and political thought had long interested me, and the Germania Musical Society offered a new perspective on this complicated topic.

Following Levine's trail raised an additional set of questions. His main source was a 1953 article by H. Earle Johnson, the only scholarly work devoted to the Germania since the late nineteenth century.³ Johnson discussed the orchestra's departure from Berlin during the 1848 revolutions in terms of the members' adversarial relationship to patronage, the traditional system of musical support in Europe. These "young men . . . shared a prevailing ideal: to live, independent of patronage, under artistic conditions of the highest social and musical order." His characterization seemed contrary to conventional wisdom regarding artistic life on the two sides of the Atlantic. Although it was true that the United States had never sustained a patronage system, was Europe not the locus of the most highly developed musical culture at the time? Why would these instrumentalists abandon the German states for the New World's cultural wilderness?

Part of the answer, according to Johnson, resided in the Germanians' negative view of the effects of patronage on performance. These musicians wished "to offset the common practice of currying personal favor which was inherent in the [social] organization of that day." Patronage was based on "egotism," that is, individual self-promotion. It required musicians to exhibit themselves, as the only possible means of advancement, rather than to focus on the integration

of the ensemble. Members of the Germania, in contrast, desired a musical setting in which they would not be tempted to display individual virtuosity or to make “solo passages unduly conspicuous.” From my perspective, this attitude presented a fascinating paradox: the Germanians sought the freedom *not* to show off. Was the familiar old antagonism toward musical self-display and exhibitionism historically determined? Could it be attributed to something more complex—and ideological—than taste and fashion?

Johnson indicates that the Germanians’ gave their desire for an alternative to patronage a form that was explicitly political. Not only did they seek an environment that was democratic, but they organized themselves accordingly. The members drafted a constitution to serve as the basis for their organization, and agreed to share equitably in rewards and obligations. Aware that in leaving their native land the orchestra became their sole means of support, they pledged to place the welfare of the group above self-interest. The motto, “One for all and all for one,” was adopted. The Germanians thus took the unusual step of linking their individual fates while they grappled with the single most important development in the social organization of modern musical life, the shift from patronage to a market economy. Even more unusual, these rank-and-file musicians articulated their relationship to that shift.

An important source for Johnson’s article was Henry Albrecht’s sketch of the orchestra, *Skizzen aus dem Leben der Musik-Gesellschaft Germania* (hereafter, *Skizzen*).⁴ This memoir, published fifteen years after the orchestra disbanded, is especially significant for its description of the orchestra’s constitution, which is not extant, and of the ensemble’s organizing principles. As I delved deeper into the questions surrounding the Germania, I realized that Albrecht’s tantalizingly brief text opened a portal into a world of music-making that was otherwise obscured.

In the years since Johnson’s article, the Germania Musical Society has typically been characterized as having offered Americans first and repeat hearings of works by major German composers, especially Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Wagner.⁵ Not only did this increase audiences’ familiarity with these compositions, but many of them became a regular part of the repertory. The Germanians also introduced a new standard of orchestral playing to Americans. The integration of the ensemble was admired and emulated by other groups, such as Boston’s Academy of Music and Musical Fund Society. The Germania assisted many prominent European artists, including the singers Jenny Lind and Henriette Sontag; the violinists Ole Bull, Camilla Urso, and Miska Hauser; and the pianists Alfred Jaëll and Otto Dresel. The orchestra thus played a significant role in the transatlantic development of a canon of art music and the professionalization of musical performance.

At the same time the Germanians helped forge a “classical” canon, they varied their programs with lighter genres, such as polkas, waltzes, and potpourris. The great diversity of their repertory has not been well understood, however, due to traditional musicology’s emphasis on “significant compositions” and dismissal of

popular genres. As a consequence, information on the Germanians' embrace of social dances and other light forms was largely unavailable prior to the present study. Even Levine failed to take account of the totality of their repertoire, despite the fact that their mixing of categories supports his theory of mid-nineteenth-century American cultural eclecticism. My investigation of the Germania reflects his and other recent scholarship on the relationship between high art and popular culture. William Weber, for example, has proposed that the core repertoire of "classical music" became established through the same processes of commodification and mass mediation—including sheet music production, instrument sales, and journalism—that popular entertainments underwent during the nineteenth century.⁶ The Germania's eclectic repertoire was actually typical of the 1840s. During that decade, "private orchestras" in Berlin and other cities extended the audience for symphonic music from gatherings numbering in the hundreds to regular attendance by thousands. Such events attracted audiences heterogeneous in taste, education, and social position, factors that played a significant role in the establishment of the public concert as the primary forum for music-making.

Good Music for a Free People begins by exploring several topics relevant to transatlantic musical culture during the 1840s, including the dramatic increase in the number of German-speaking immigrants to the United States. Chapter 1, "Musical Forty-Eighters," discusses the situation of musicians displaced by the economic, social, and political conflicts of the 1848 revolutions. As the disturbances became widespread, ideological debates were waged over the interpretation of events. Albrecht's writings reflect these debates, as do those of John Sullivan Dwight (1813–93), whose *Journal of Music* is the single most important source on the Germania's reception. Chapter 1 shows how contemporary social theory influenced the Germania as an organization and shaped the musical perspectives of Dwight and Albrecht. The final chapter returns to several of these themes, giving an expanded context for the Germania's formation.

The second and third chapters, "Travels with the Germania," provide a chronological narrative of the orchestra's six-year tour, organized around the tenure of conductors Carl Lenschow and Carl Bergmann. Chapter 2, "Lenschow's Orchestra," includes a complete translation of *Skizzen*, supplemented by discussion of the Germanians' initial two years together.⁷ This formative period began with a farewell concert in Berlin and a summer in London. In September 1848, the members arrived in New York, where they spent a reasonably successful autumn. They tried Philadelphia next, but failed to attract sufficient audiences. The Germanians had decided to go their separate ways when they received a request to play for Zachary Taylor's presidential inauguration in Washington, DC. Concerts during spring 1849 in Baltimore and New England proved quite successful. They concluded their first year by visiting Newport, Rhode Island, a resort community to which they returned every summer through 1856, two years after their official dissolution. The majority of the Germania's second season (1849–50) was spent in the Baltimore area, but in April 1850 Lenschow resigned, leaving

the Germanians without an official leader. They visited New England, upstate New York, and eastern Canada before choosing a recent recruit, the cellist Carl Bergmann, as conductor.

Chapter 3, “Bergmann’s Bond,” recounts the Germania’s activities for the next four years. The orchestra spent most of 1850–51 in Baltimore, then decided to make Boston its new base. The city proved a felicitous choice, and area residents were offered an astonishing array of musical works over the ensuing years. The Germania performed with numerous touring musicians and regularly accompanied the Handel and Haydn Society. Two extensive trips were made beyond New England, with visits to the population centers (and meccas of German immigration) along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. In the summer of 1854, the Germanians appeared with Louis Antoine Jullien’s orchestra at P. T. Barnum’s Crystal Palace in New York. That September, the members decided to disband the organization.

The chronology presented in chapters 2 and 3 is supplemented by a listing of the Germania’s concert dates in appendix A. It includes information on venues, assisting artists, local and national premieres, symphony performances, and original compositions. The musicians’ later activities are summarized in appendix B, a “Biographical Dictionary of Members.” Chapter 4, “The Music of Society,” considers how the Germania’s repertory changed over time through the analysis of over 250 programs, culled from broadsides (playbills), music periodicals, and daily newspapers. This chapter addresses the singular position occupied by the Germania in Levine’s argument about the emergence of cultural hierarchies. It examines the significance of private and promenade orchestras more broadly, and concludes with a close look at the Germanians’ final year, when debates over their programs were rehearsed in the pages of *Dwight’s Journal*. The controversies of that season afford unique insights into contemporary attitudes toward the cultural and social significance of the public concert. Ultimately, the Germanians’ manipulation of their repertory reflects a struggle to define the semiotic arena of the arts and leisure by those who serviced it.

The final chapter, “Albrecht’s Utopian Vision,” is an intellectual biography of *Skizzen*’s author.⁸ It was Albrecht who articulated the Germanians’ desire to encourage an appreciation for the art of music among the politically free people of the United States, who disparaged the deleterious effects of patronage on musical performance, and who reported the members’ embrace of the equal distribution of rights, obligations, and profits. By focusing on his activities before and after the Germanians banded together, we can see how the political and ideological tensions of the 1840s led him to particular ways of thinking about the social situation of musicians.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Skizzen* is Albrecht’s description of the orchestra as a “communistic” organization. If the general backdrop for the Germanians’ founding was Vormärz Berlin, the specific ideological context for Albrecht was the “Icarian communism” of Etienne Cabet (1788–1856).

Albrecht's engagement with this French social utopian has not been explored previously, despite the light it sheds on his idealized view—his utopian vision—of the Germanians' attempt at self-determination.

Chapter 5 also examines how Albrecht's intellectual pursuits were understood by several contemporaries. His modest activities occupied the stage of a remarkable theater. In addition to Cabet and Dwight, Albrecht's contacts included George Rapp's Harmony Society, Frédéric Louis Ritter (the first historian of American music), and the wealthy philanthropist, Joseph W. Drexel. One of Albrecht's notable achievements was his assembly of the largest library of music literature in the United States. We can only imagine how this musician of limited means accumulated these materials as the Germania traveled from town to town. The collection was eventually purchased by Drexel, who bequeathed it to the forerunner of the New York Public Library. Albrecht's holdings thus formed the core of the Library's Drexel Collection, and still exist today as part of it.

Reconsidering the Past

The influence of the Germanians on American cultural life was felt for many years. Nearly all the members continued to work as musicians after the organization dissolved in 1854. The most prominent include: Bergmann, conductor of the New York Philharmonic for two decades; Lenschow, director of the Baltimore Liederkrantz; William (Wilhelm) Schultze, first violinist of the Mendelssohn Quintette Club and director of the Music Department at Syracuse University; Carl Sentz, cofounder of the Germania Orchestra of Philadelphia; and Carl Zerrahn, long-time conductor of several major organizations in New England, including the Handel and Haydn Society, Harvard Musical Association Orchestra, and Worcester Music Festivals.

By combining empirical and analytical perspectives, my goal is to provoke a new line of questioning about America's musical heritage. Surprisingly little is known about the numerous individuals who immigrated to the United States at mid-century and affected our musical life so profoundly. The precise mechanism by which the "classical," predominantly German, repertory of instrumental works found its way into American concert halls is just beginning to be explored. We have a limited understanding of how the material elements of this repertory, such as scores, parts, and instruments, were conveyed from Europe to the United States. How was the embodied knowledge of performance practice transmitted from teacher to pupil, from professional to amateur, over such distance? A transatlantic perspective is needed to illuminate the lively exchange of musical ideas that occurred in this period.

Before I turn to these topics, a consideration of how Johnson described the Germanians' self-determination is warranted. For Johnson, the 1848 revolutions

were not integral to the Germania's organization and achievements. Although he acknowledged, in picturesque terms, that "fast-moving political crises" accelerated the members' departure from Berlin, he did not dwell on these events. Concerning the Germanians' motivations he surmised, "Their decision to form a new orchestra was taken with purposeful awareness that democracy was"—and here he quotes Albrecht—"the most complete principle of human society."⁹ Albrecht's precise sentiments were somewhat different:

When the bylaws of this association were drafted, the communist principle was chosen as the foundation, since all members of the Germania held the conviction that Communism was the most perfect principle of society.¹⁰

Johnson's substitution of terms has a certain historical legitimacy, in the sense that democracy was considered to be as disruptive and dangerous a proposition as communism in much of Europe when the Germania came into existence. Within the absolutist regimes of Prussia and Austria, government *by the people* was as radical a concept as the abolition of private property.¹¹

Johnson's characterization, however, probably had more to do with the limits of scholarship in the early 1950s. If popular entertainment received scarce attention, ideology was only rarely an explicit focus of American musicology. Surely the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the hearings led by Senator Joseph McCarthy inhibited certain lines of inquiry at the time. And ever since Johnson's article, the Germania has been understood to have been organized according to democratic, rather than communist, principles. Although the two are not mutually exclusive, neither are they perfectly synonymous. Much of the historical specificity of Albrecht's text is lost with the substitution. Whatever the reasons for Johnson's rephrasing, the historical record is undoubtedly made richer when it is rendered precisely.¹²

Chapter One

Musical Forty-Eighters

Many of the more recent German settlers had taken part in the revolutionary movement of 1848 in Europe; but, disappointed by the political turn that revolution had then taken, they immigrated to the United States, and founded new homes in the West. They brought with them their love for poetry and music.

Ritter, *Music in America*

Three ensembles brought not just their love for music but actual performances to New York in autumn 1848: the Germania, the Saxonia Orchestra, and Joseph Gungl's band. Another, the Steyermark Company, had arrived in 1846. Prior to the 1840s, it was virtually unheard of for a large instrumental ensemble to visit the United States. Individual musicians, such as the virtuosi Henri Herz and Ole Bull, had made transatlantic tours, and opera troupes such as the Garcias and Seguins braved the difficulty and expense of crossing the Atlantic. Orchestras, however, were rare. Their extraordinary presence in New York in 1848 was even parodied in a burlesque, "Musical Arrivals," featuring "Jenny and Josef Jing'l."¹

The reasons that large ensembles had not visited were several, but the most significant factor is that independent orchestras were a relatively new phenomenon in Europe. They proliferated only after Johann Strauss Sr. (1804–49) began taking his acclaimed waltz orchestra on extensive regular tours in the mid-1830s. Entrepreneurially minded musicians in cities and towns he visited imitated his mix of dances, opera excerpts, and orchestral compositions. Publishers and journalists scrambled to capitalize on the public's burgeoning appetite for ensemble music. Operating outside the patronage system, such groups made a wide variety of music available to more diverse audiences through low ticket prices. Strauss's corollary in Paris was Philippe Musard (1793–1859), who initiated "promenade" concerts there. Musard's rival Louis Antoine Jullien (1812–60) brought the promenade to London in the 1840s. Like Strauss, Jullien toured regularly and widely; the Germanians would repeatedly encounter him in their travels. In Berlin, the most successful independent conductor was the Hungarian-born Joseph Gungl (1810–89; also "Gung'l").² In 1843, publisher Gustav Bock helped Gungl found a thirty-six-member private orchestra (*Privatorchester*). As with Strauss, leadership of his own orchestra gave Gungl ready-made publicity for his numerous compositions. His performances were well-advertised by Bock, who took over the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* in January 1847.

As many as eighteen members of the Germania had been associated with Gungl.³ Their shared experience is undoubtedly the context for Albrecht's lovely metaphor describing "the ribbon of brotherly friendship" that entwined them.⁴ For Gungl, however, the loss of so many players early in 1848 meant that his organization had to be rapidly reconstituted in order to reach New York in November 1848. The new type of entrepreneurial ensemble posed novel challenges for musicians, as they operated without the stability and imperatives of the patronage system. The disruption of European concert life due to the revolutions was a further challenge, and spurred the Germanians and Gungl's players to go abroad. Many became permanent residents of the United States. It is therefore illuminating to view their story in terms of immigration history, and particularly in terms of the "Forty-Eighters." This chapter addresses how the latter were influenced by contemporary social theory, setting the stage for Albrecht's description of the Germania's formation.

The Transatlantic Migration

The Germanians reached adulthood during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a time of extraordinary movement of people and ideas across the Atlantic. The contrasts of the period—tremendous hope and utter deprivation—led an unprecedented number of individuals to seek a better life in the United States. Between 1840 and 1860, the total number of immigrants was 4 million, three-quarters of whom were equally divided between the Irish and the Germans.⁵ In the same twenty years, the total population of the United States grew from 17 million to 31 million. Immigration thus accounted for a substantial portion of the general population increase, especially in urban areas. In 1850, when census data on nativity were first collected, nearly 10 percent of the 23 million U.S. inhabitants declared themselves foreign-born. However, this proportion was at least doubled—and often quadrupled—for many of the twenty-five most populous urban areas. Major German settlements were established in cities such as New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago.⁶

Although population statistics amply document people's physical movement, an indication of the period's intellectual ferment is found in the expression of utopian aspirations. According to sociologist Karl Mannheim, the term "utopian" indicates "any process of thought which receives its impetus not from the direct force of social reality but from concepts, such as symbols, fantasies, dreams, ideas and the like," that do not yet exist.⁷ "America" exerted a forceful influence upon the European imagination through literature of all sorts, from travel accounts and colonization propaganda to adventure tales and romantic poetry. Images abounded of a land without a king, heavy taxation, or inherited privilege, promising material abundance, religious tolerance, and social mobility.

As Marcus Hansen observed in *The Atlantic Migration*, the United States became “the common man’s utopia” at this time.

For many Europeans, the republic west of the Atlantic “presented a laboratory of social experimentation from which the Old World could learn much.”⁸ This certainly describes Etienne Cabet, who established a settlement in Nauvoo, Illinois based on “Icarianism,” his new theory of societal organization. And the Germanians imagined they could forge a different way of life for musicians, free of the patronage system and based on mutual support. “Inspired by the wish to lead a life completely independent in individual relations, they resolved to form a concert orchestra that would be viewed as a paragon not only in musical but also in social respects,” described Albrecht.⁹ The Germanians understood their musical society as a microcosm of society at large; their success would provide a model for others. It was not an unusual Forty-Eighter sentiment.

The term “Forty-Eighter” is something of a misnomer, as the majority of German-speakers who left as a consequence of the failed revolutions of 1848–49 arrived during the early 1850s. Still, its evocation of political events makes the label apt. The Forty-Eighters were also called “Greens” in distinction to the “Grays” (or *Dreissigers*), the previous generation of German immigrants. Many of the latter came as a result of the 1830 revolution in France, which sparked uprisings and repressive measures in the German states. In effect, the July revolution set in motion a wave of immigration that lasted nearly three decades. Although a small stream of Germans had immigrated to the United States throughout the colonial and early republic periods, the number soared after 1830. Between 1832, the year of the first major increase, and 1846, the average annual total was approximately 20,000. This figure was dwarfed between 1847 and 1854, when the antebellum exodus from the German states reached its peak. During these eight years, the average number of German-speakers entering the United States was more than 105,000 annually. The total number, between 1832 and 1854, was nearly 1.2 million.¹⁰

Nearly a century later, when the reputation of the German nation was at its nadir, the achievements and aspirations of the Forty-Eighters became the focal point of a new generation. Spurred by Veit Valentin’s *1848: Chapters of German History*, historians such as Carl Wittke transformed the study of German-Americana from a “filiopietistic” practice to a field of intellectual inquiry. Wittke’s objective was to reclaim the legacy of those who had not only “played their part in the movement to make Germany united and free,” but had found it necessary to leave their native land as a consequence. He cast his net broadly when characterizing the Forty-Eighters. Some were true political refugees, who had “emigrated to escape the consequences of their treason,” while many others left for economic reasons at a time of repression and uncertainty. For Wittke, what was important was that they had all “resolved to build their future in a republic across the sea which promised both liberty and bread to the persecuted of every land.”¹¹

We can recognize the Germanians in this description, and the following chapters recount their interaction with other Forty-Eighters, such as Otto Dresel, Pastor Heinrich Scheib, the journalists Heinrich Börnstein, Christian Essellen, and Theodore Hagen, and non-Germans Teresa Parodi and Eduard Reményi. The “Gray” F. W. Thomas, an important purveyor of German literature, published some of Albrecht’s later writings.¹² This short list suggests that the Germanians operated in an environment that was dynamically shaped by immigrants like themselves as well as by native-born Americans.

Recent research on the Forty-Eighters has combined a focus on leaders and achievers with immigration history’s concern for collective experience. (The latter discipline’s very emphasis on mass society as an essential element in modernity is intrinsically related to mid-nineteenth-century developments, as we shall see.) For example, Bruce Levine’s *The Spirit of 1848* examines the relationship between immigration, ethnicity, and class in the context of labor history. His primary concern is with the role played by antebellum German wage earners in the development of American working class political ideology. This perspective allows him to investigate both collective experiences and iconoclasts such as Carl Schurz, Friedrich Hecker, and the communist tailor Wilhelm Weitling.

But even if such studies make visible areas of experience that remain hidden from a view restricted to individual accomplishment, a group such as the Germania tends to be overlooked. Such accounts cannot accommodate a category as tiny as that of two dozen musicians, or musicians generally, who make up just a small percentage of the population. A relevant example of the conceptual difficulty can be seen in Stanley Nadel’s *Little Germany*, an analysis of the Kleindeutschland neighborhood of New York City. In his brief examination of German singing societies, the Arion Gesangverein is characterized as an “upper class” club sharing the exclusive tendencies of the society from which it seceded, the Deutsche Liederkrantz. Neither the Arion’s repertory nor the names of its participants are mentioned, with the single exception of Leopold Damrosch, who was brought from Breslau in 1871 to give the organization “preeminence.”¹³ Nadel’s discussion is pertinent because Carl Bergmann and Frédéric Ritter were hired as conductors by the Arion during the 1860s.¹⁴ Were these two musicians part of the elite upper class of Kleindeutschland, or part of its service economy? My point is not to judge the Arion’s practices; the same organization was later disparaged by Ritter for its exclusion of women. The point, rather, is that the consideration of musicians as workers tends to be obscured even in class-oriented analyses by social historians.

It is for this reason that Albrecht’s articulation of the Germania’s self-determination is invaluable, reminding us that the orchestra members occupy an ill-defined space between the celebrity of a Damrosch (or the longevity of an ensemble such as the New York Philharmonic) and the anonymity of theater and church musicians. My perspective accords with that of Jacques Rancière, whose examination of the nineteenth-century labor movement attempts

to avoid both the hagiography of leaders and the representation of “popular mentalities.” In *The Nights of Labor*, he refuses to draw a sharp distinction between “those who have been given the privilege of thinking” and “those given to manual labor.”¹⁵ Simply stated, the question is this: is a worker who writes and theorizes still a worker? What is the status of the “nonrepresentative” representative? Does a musician become “upper class” by virtue of working with an “upper class” organization?

The Nights of Labor is also relevant for its examination of the writings of Etienne Cabet’s followers. By directing his gaze to the dissatisfied among Cabet’s disciples, Rancière illuminates the motivations that compelled workers to follow the Icarian flight to utopia (i.e., America). The parallel between the Germanians and Rancière’s shoemakers and tailors is not exact, but musicians bear important resemblances to European artisans of the period.¹⁶ Although the Germanians’ precise economic standing is difficult to determine due to the absence of account books and similar documentation, we see in their working lives an almost inconceivably busy schedule of concertizing, cheap tickets for audiences numbering in the thousands, a repertory calibrated for wide appeal (but not for the lowest common denominator), and composition as publicity and commodity. If we keep in mind the nineteenth century’s great shifts from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial economy as well as from patronage to a market-oriented musical life, we can ask where various types of labor and service are situated, what forms those occupations took, and why they did not take other forms.

Before leaving the topic of immigration, we might consider a mid-nineteenth-century perspective on its causes. An 1846 article in *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* compared the motivations held by individuals from the British Isles and the German states. The writer noted that although their numbers had been comparable since 1840, their reasons for leaving were quite different. In the British Isles, the cause of emigration was typically poverty and overcrowding. For the German-speaker, the motivation was more ideological.

The one great cause of this almost national movement is the desire for absolute political and religious freedom; the absence of all restrictions upon the development of society; and the publication of opinions which cannot be realized at home. The great agitation in society, caused first by the French domination, and then by the convulsive rise against it, has never passed away. In that gigantic struggle, when everything rested upon the popular soul, the bonds of privilege and class were tacitly abandoned, and could never thenceforth be reunited as before. The promises of having constitutional governments, at that time made by the sovereigns to their subjects, have been but partially fulfilled. There is nothing that can be called oppression on the part of the government; . . . but there are many restrictions, and the young, the restless, and the imaginative thirst for their ideal freedom, and many of them seek for the realization of Utopia in America.¹⁷

These observations were made two years before the continent erupted in a series of revolutions that sent the number of immigrants skyrocketing.

The Revolutions of 1848: Political and Social Interpretations

The German term for the period between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the revolutions is *Vormärz*, a reference to the uprisings that took place in March throughout the German states and Austria. The connotation is that of a before and after; Valentin called March 1848, “the great turning-point of German history.” There is some irony to the emergence of a special term for this moment. The revolutions are generally considered to have been unsuccessful in their effort to bring about a new political order; to the bitter disappointment of the participants, new republics were not established. As another historian put it, 1848 was the turning point that “failed to turn.”¹⁸ Instead, the old autocratic systems were reasserted within a remarkably short time. Yet despite their failure to alter the political landscape, the revolutions mark a change in the significance attributed to civil society, in both a practical and theoretical sense. It was during the *Vormärz* that “the social question” was first formulated. As Jonathan Sperber has observed, 1848 was “when ‘the people’ went from being the objects of political rhetoric to the subjects of political action.”¹⁹ The consequences of this transformation are still registered today.

Albrecht’s involvement with Cabet is symptomatic of the widespread interest in new social theory that emerged in the decades prior to the revolutions. The effects of modernization on the great masses of people became a topic of general concern. Schemes arose to address the inequities that resulted from the nascent Industrial Revolution and the reorganization of labor. Contemporary observers began to see social conflict as evidence of political discontent and desire for political redress.²⁰ Conservative or liberal, intellectuals debated whether social or political solutions were more germane to society at large. Ritter’s remark at the beginning of this chapter that participants in the revolution were *disappointed* that it took a “political turn” suggests that their primary goal was to bring about social change rather than governmental reorganization. A brief overview of the revolutions’ political dimension will help clarify this distinction.

The disturbances of March 1848 were actually the last of a series of revolts begun two months earlier in Palermo and Naples.²¹ As a result, the King of the Two Sicilies (Ferdinand II) granted a constitution and established basic civil rights. Meanwhile, February’s street demonstrations in Paris led to the dissolution of the “Bourgeois Monarchy” of Louis-Philippe (r. 1830–48) and the declaration of the Second Republic. The following month, the Habsburgs’ chancellor, Prince Metternich, was forced to flee Vienna, and the dismantling of his autocratic, repressive “system” was begun. Emboldened by these developments, demonstrators faced King Friedrich Wilhelm IV in the Prussian capital, Berlin,

where the Germanians had just formed their association. Within a few days, the king had agreed to abolish censorship, appoint liberal ministers, and abide by a constitution. The speed with which revolutionary activity spread threw all Europe into upheaval. The Germanians spent that summer in London, where they encountered many musicians from the continent. Some were political refugees; all were looking for work.

The events of 1848 were "international" in some interpretations, even pan-European. At the very least, they were multiple; hence the plural, "revolutions." Their causes were multiple as well, and included food shortages, economic impediments, and ideological conflicts. The last of these can be traced to Napoleon's defeat, when the conservators of autocratic power, with Metternich as their guide, became determined to stem the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the influence of the French Revolution. The German Confederation, a diplomatic league of all thirty-nine German states created at the Congress of Vienna (1815), effectively countered all revolutionary impulses. Civil liberties were suppressed with varying degrees of severity throughout the Confederation for the sake of maintaining order and stability. Restrictions on association, assembly, speech, and the press resulted in few opportunities for political participation for the majority of people.²²

The repressive policies of the Vormärz branded a wide range of positions dangerous to the absolutist regimes of Prussia and Austria, the Confederation's major powers. At one extreme were the advocates of republican government, who wanted to abolish monarchy altogether and who pointed to the United States as a successful democracy. A less drastic position was that of "liberalism," which argued that the monarch's powers should be limited rather than eliminated. Liberals viewed constitutional monarchy as the best way to guarantee civil liberties and preserve order. They also typically embraced national unity as necessary for the facilitation of their economic goals in industry and commerce. In contrast to both radicals and liberals, conservative advocates of autocracy were antagonistic to constitutional forms of government. Furthermore, the Prussian and Austrian monarchies could not agree on the terms of national unity, as each desired the superior position in the future German state.

The ideological camps described do not line up neatly on particular issues or with the class divisions of society. For example, both republicans and liberals might support the idea of national unity, but with very different conditions. Similarly, while many middle-class individuals embraced liberalism, there was a wide range of opinion on eligibility for the franchise. The major question concerned property requirements for political participation and representation. Radical intellectuals, many of whom also came from the middle classes, tended to favor broad-based democracy. Most assumed that voting would be the domain of adult males, however; only a small minority advocated truly universal suffrage.

Dissatisfaction with the repressive atmosphere of the Vormärz was exacerbated by the economic crisis of the 1840s. Mediocre harvests early in the decade led to

intermittent food shortages, and in 1845 the potato blight devastated Ireland. The failure of the potato and grain harvests throughout Europe the following year led to widespread famine. Conditions were made worse by questionable distribution practices. In East Prussia, for example, landlords decided to sell their crop abroad, where they could obtain better prices, rather than to the desperate locals. Industry was affected as several years of food shortages and high prices led to a decline in manufacturing. As a result, artisans and craftsmen, already hard pressed by both technological developments and new forms of labor organization, swelled the ranks of the unemployed.²³ By late 1847, the German states were experiencing the most severe economic crisis of the Vormärz.

The relationship between material conditions and outbreaks of unrest has long been a source of controversy. The conservative interpretation is that the uprisings were little more than “glorified bread riots” rather than signs of political discontent. However, the Congress of Vienna’s restoration of monarchical power could not quell “the new social forces of the nineteenth century,” as the historian Theodore Hamerow observed. Despite the “constant exercise of repression . . . the gulf between the system of government and the condition of society grew wider and deeper, until a violent revolutionary upheaval brought a realignment of political forces.” Sperber similarly connects the revolutions to the social and cultural changes of the Vormärz, paying particular attention to the “craftsmen, laborers and peasants, who made up a majority of the European population.”²⁴

Among modern historians, Valentin was the first to analyze the revolution “within the framework of economic change and social conflict, intellectual critique and the crisis of states.”²⁵ His 1931 study, *1848*, conveyed the excitement of the revolutions with sweeping assertions that the events of March demonstrated that Germans everywhere desired liberty and democracy. “They wanted to assemble and vent their opinions, to pass judgments freely and in public, to govern themselves, by elections, by free speech, self-respecting, dignified, law-abiding, and peaceful.” He regarded the Frankfurt National Assembly, which was elected after the Prussian king promised to abide by a constitution, as unique in German history. “Only once, right up to the present day, did freely chosen representatives of *all* the German peoples come together in one chamber; only once did this people, ripened in spirit to a political communal will, find a parliamentary form; they found it only to burst it apart, and themselves be broken anew upon the ruins.”²⁶

As Valentin’s pessimistic words suggest, the dreams of 1848 were largely abandoned within a few years, and the former order quickly restored. By the summer of 1849, both Austria and Prussia had reinstated their absolute power. The former defeated the Hungarian struggle for independence and reasserted Hapsburg imperial authority. In Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV refused to endorse the constitution developed by the Frankfurt Assembly. Traditional power relations were reasserted and reaction took hold. Even in France, which was far more receptive to modernization and representational government, the Second

Republic lasted just three years, ending with the coup d'état of Louis-Napoleon and the establishment of the Second Empire.²⁷

For those who view this period from the perspective of Germany's 1871 unification under Prussia, the events of 1848 appear relatively insignificant. Nationalists typically consider the participants' democratic and liberal efforts as premature steps toward the inevitable triumph of the militarized modern nation-state. Valentin, in contrast, rejected the interpretation of 1848 as merely "a function of the process of German unification." His assertion that the revolutions were "an early example of democratic mobilization and civil society" was viewed unfavorably, however. Branded an apologist for parliamentary government, he was forced to flee Nazi Germany in 1933.²⁸

Hamerow, writing after the Holocaust, reflects similar concerns. He speculates as to whether a parliamentary body like the Frankfurt Assembly, had it persisted, could have averted the tragedy of the Third Reich. Both historians viewed the revolutions as the expression of dissatisfaction among various social factions. A power vacuum was created when these factions failed to coordinate their goals, allowing reaction to set in and the emergence of a militaristic nationalism. During the Vormärz, however, the nationalist concept was still fluid; the "policy of blood and iron" carried out by Bismarck was not necessarily inevitable.²⁹

The Germanians appear relatively free of nationalistic concerns of either a political or musical nature. Albrecht, like many influenced by the new social theories, tended to speak of "humanity," rather than the nation. He described the orchestra's intention of performing "unsere grössten Instrumental-Componisten" for Americans. Later writers have assumed this expressed the chauvinistic "our greatest *German* composers," but "our" could also mean "European," as his list includes Berlioz and Liszt.³⁰ And despite the members' eventual choice of the name "Germania," their repertory was not restricted; French and Italian opera, for example, are well represented on programs. This catholicity can be attributed as much to the Germanians' origins in Berlin's private orchestras as to the taste of audiences in the United States. Like the singing societies of this period, private orchestras were by no means openly nationalistic or political.³¹ During the Vormärz, the continued existence of such organizations depended on their distance from activities that could be construed as challenging existing power relations. Nevertheless, private orchestras can be understood in retrospect as having contributed to the reconfiguration of political authority through their role in the formation of the "public sphere."

Social Theory in the 1840s: Europe and the United States

If historians such as Valentin pioneered the interpretation of the revolutions as the culmination of the social forces and dislocations of the 1840s, the Frankfurt School was in the vanguard of a similar reassessment of philosophical trends.

Martin Jay has concluded that “to trace the origins of Critical Theory to their true source would require an extensive analysis of the intellectual ferment of the 1840’s, perhaps the most extraordinary decade in nineteenth-century German intellectual history. It was then that Hegel’s successors first applied his philosophical insights to the social and political phenomena of Germany, which was setting out on a course of rapid modernization.” In their quest to understand the origins of Marxist thought, members of the Frankfurt School systematically examined the earliest attempts to integrate philosophy and social analysis. Herbert Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution* is a particularly clear example of this objective.³²

Critical theory’s engagement with this period is relevant to the Germanians in several ways. First, Albrecht’s involvement with Icarian communism locates him within the world of pre-Marxian social theory. Second, the Germanians’ origin as a private orchestra situates it within a formative stage of the “culture industry,” Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s term for the institutions and practices that shape the commodification of popular and serious art.³³ The culture industry’s historical origins are found in the period around 1848, as Andreas Huyssen has shown.³⁴ Finally, the concept of the “bourgeois public sphere,” developed by second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, provides a compelling way to understand how various cultural activities had a political effect despite their disavowal of political authority. The repressive conditions of the Vormärz, which prohibited the majority of individuals from direct political involvement, caused many social activities to appear in retrospect as a rehearsal for political participation. From this perspective, we can consider the role that music—specifically, concerts of instrumental music—played in constituting new perceptions about public life and class relations, about freedoms of assembly, association, speech, and the press. Paradoxically, music’s autonomy from political life was the very feature that had political consequences.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas describes the “basic blueprint” of the public sphere as follows:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing the relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*).³⁵

Individuals earned their right to participate in the public sphere through rehearsal within the audience-oriented intimacy of family life, where domestic music-making was a favored pastime. Outside the home, unfettered discussion of the arts, particularly literature, but also theater, visual arts, and music, played

a significant role in the usurpation of power that resulted in the eventual ascendancy of the middle class. Active participation in musical life through the public concert helped the middle class to gain self-consciousness. "Private" orchestras, which were not organized through the patronage system, were thus private in Habermas's sense of the term: outside the public authority represented by the traditional power structure. The audience that gathered to listen to music for itself—the ideal public of "music lovers"—helped release music and musicians from their former service to the church and state.³⁶

In a perfect world, the public sphere would have achieved the dialectical synthesis of individual and collective interests that the Frankfurt School regarded as utopian. As Rose Subotnik has pointed out, Adorno viewed the compositions of Beethoven's middle style period as having come closest to the aesthetic expression of such a synthesis. In these works, Beethoven glimpsed the genuine coincidence of "his individual artistic interests and the artistic interests of society." Beethoven's accomplishment should be understood as prophetic, rather than reflecting reality, because such a reconciliation had not been reached. His middle-period compositions thus criticized society by calling attention "to the ongoing lack of wholeness or integrity in the human condition." At the same time, the "dynamic effect of harmonious totality" in his style promised "that a synthesis of individual and society could actually be achieved."³⁷ Beethoven's accomplishment resides in his works' momentary projection of such a synthesis. Their utopian dimension was the possibility that this synthesis could become reality.

Adorno was notoriously cryptic on the precise features of the "utopian moment" in music, in keeping with the Frankfurt School's general antagonism toward such representations. The concept's value was primarily in its negative function, its facilitation of the capacity to imagine things as other than they are. The Frankfurt School refused "to describe 'the realm of freedom' from the vantage point of the 'realm of necessity.'"³⁸ Their unwillingness to give positive definition to utopia has been the source of considerable speculation. One need go no further, however, than Marx and Engels's contempt for the utopian schemers of their own time. Etienne Cabet was one such schemer.

European Social Theory

To enter the world of Cabet and Albrecht is to become immersed in socialist and communist philosophies before Karl Marx and Marxism dominated these topics. Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier are well-known theorists of alternative social systems and experimental communities whose ideas play a role in the Germanians' story. Cabet's contributions to the ideological debates of the period might be less familiar today, but they exerted considerable contemporary influence. It was Cabet, for example, who coined the term "communist" (*communiste*), employing it in several publications of 1840–41. He