TALKING OVER MUSIC: LISTENING, CRITICISM, AND CULTURE IN
ANNE C. LYNCH BOTTA’S NEW YORK SALON, 1845-1891

by

SARAH TOMASEWSKI

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

Dissertation Adviser: Mary E. Davis

Department of Music
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

May, 2012
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We hereby approve the thesis/dissertation of

_________________________________________
Sarah Tomasewski

candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree *

(signed) Dr. Mary Davis

(Chair of the Committee)

Dr. Francesca Brittan

Dr. Daniel Goldmark

Dr. Katherine Preston

Dr. Renee Sentilles

(date) 3/19/2012

*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.
CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................. vi

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... viii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter

1. ASSEMBLING BOTTA’S NEW YORK SALON ................................................................. 12

2. BOTTA’S SALON AND THE CONCEPT OF CONVERSAZIONE ............................. 49

3. MUSICAL PERFORMERS, PERFORMANCES, AND PERCEPTIONS AT BOTTA’S SALON ........................................................................................................................................ 95


5. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 160

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................ 164
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. First and Second Floor Plan—1850s Row House</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. John Barnet, “I Know a Bank” mm. 75-81</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>Godey’s Lady’s Book</em>, October 1848</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Godey’s Fashions for July 1864,” <em>Godey’s Lady’s Book</em></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Journal des Tailleurs</em>, November 1853</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Nathaniel Parker Willis, ca. 1855 and 1857</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. “Fashions of the Literati,”</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Botta’s Calling Card Invitation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sherwood’s Partial Inventory of Guests at Botta’s Salon</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. <em>Godey’s Lady’s Book</em>, November 1862</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Comstock “Keys of the Speaking Voice” <em>A System of Elocution</em>, pg. 46</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Comstock, “I am Monarch of all,” <em>A System of Elocution</em>, pg. 179</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Doherty, “Sweet is the Gale” <em>An Introduction to English Grammar</em>, pg. 166</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Morris and Russell, “Woodman Spare that Tree,” mm. 15-23 .............................113

23. Advertisement for the “Winner’s Dance Foli” (1882) .............................................118


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The kindness and support of many individuals and institutions have made it possible to complete this dissertation; their assistance has been invaluable.

I am grateful to my professors at Case Western Reserve University and especially to the members of my dissertation committee. I owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor Mary Davis, for not only believing in both me and this project from the very beginning, but also for her generosity, insight, and counsel which has shaped my thinking in innumerable ways. I also wish to thank Francesca Brittan, Daniel Goldmark, and Renée Sentilles for asking important questions and for providing thoughtful commentary and research suggestions. In addition, I owe special thanks to Katherine Preston for sharing her enthusiasm and knowledge of American music, and for her careful guidance which has significantly influenced and informed my work.

Thanks are due to Ken Ledford, Martha Woodmansee, and my colleagues in the CWRU Spring 2011 Arts & Sciences Dissertation Seminar, as well as the CWRU Music Department Dissertation Seminar. As this project developed, members of each group read multiple drafts, provided valuable criticism, and assisted with revisions. I am grateful for the creativity and analysis they brought to this project. Also at Case, I wish to thank the Department of Music and the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities for their generous financial support.

Staff members at various libraries and institutions across the country have also offered assistance. I especially wish to thank individuals at the American Antiquarian Society, New-York Historical Society, and the Bennington Museum and Archives. In addition, staff members at the New York Public Library, the Western Reserve Historical
Society, and the Plainville Historical Society, and individuals at the university libraries and archives at Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, New York University, University of Virginia, and Yale University have been most helpful. Much thanks to John McClintock at the Albany Academies, and to librarians Stephen Toombs and Jeffrey Quick in the Kulas Music Library at CWRU for their attentiveness and assistance over many years.

Special thanks to my Case colleagues for sharing ideas and countless hours working in companionable silence, and to my students for asking new questions and challenging my thinking. To my dear friends Heather Stoll, Adam Booth, Devin Burke, Jenna Bruce, Paul Cox, Christopher Dague, Angel Francis, Katie Frewen, Michelle Gulick, Christi Hostetler, Karen Lohman, Sarah Lohman, Mary Frances McGinty, Anne Milekovic, Amber Redoutey, Donna Rogers, Kelly St. Pierre, Mike St. Pierre, Erin Smith, Matt Smith, and Dwayne Wasson, for being there all along with laughter and lifelines, neighborhood walks and fireside chats. Your thoughtfulness and support mean more than you know.

Above all, I wish to extend heartfelt thanks to my family for their unfailing love and support. To my brother and sister, Anthony and Rachel Tomasewski, and to my parents, Chet and Lynn Tomasewski for their encouragement and for always believing I can. And finally, to Zoe—my constant canine companion who has remained at my side every step of the way.
Talking Over Music: Listening, Criticism, and Culture in Anne C. Lynch Botta’s
New York Salon, 1845-1891

Abstract

by

SARAH TOMASEWSKI

Between 1845 and 1891, Anne C. Lynch Botta hosted one of Manhattan’s premiere salons, holding weekly conversazione in her home, where she welcomed a host of famous writers, musicians, artists, and intellectuals. A prominent socialite and a dynamic social force, Botta shaped the cultural dialogue in New York for a half-century. This project examines the place of music in Botta’s salon: How did Botta’s salon influence musical life in nineteenth-century America? Who were the musicians who attended her salon and what repertoire did they perform there? How was this music perceived and why was Botta’s salon considered a leading cultural center for nearly fifty years? To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore not only the music and musicians connected to Botta’s conversazione, but also music’s relationship to the fashion, literature, poetry, and politics that animated her gatherings. Botta’s salon both reflected and projected a cultural sensibility, and she introduced the United States to a cosmopolitan discourse that remains
fundamental to the debates surrounding American music today. By training a lens onto the relationship between music and Botta’s *conversazione*, this dissertation provides a more comprehensive understanding of music’s value, place, and meaning during this critical period in New York’s cultural history.
INTRODUCTION

For an example of a delightful, informal, almost spontaneous inflowing of the guild of culture—a salon par excellence for this city—one cannot but refer to Professor and Mrs. Vincenzo Botta’s long established literary receptions…. [o]thers strive to keep up the traditions of Mrs. Botta’s salon . . . yet it can never have the same charm in its peripatetic wanderings.¹


When Anne Botta (née Lynch) first moved to Washington Square in October 1845—thirty years old, a published poet, and a well-educated writer, teacher, and artist—she initiated not just a salon, but an institution that sparked a conversation.² From that date until her death in 1891, Anne Botta hosted one of the most popular and influential literary salons in New York City, and for decades she regularly threw open what Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to as her “house of the expanding doors” to writers, artists, and intellectuals from across the United States and Europe.³ These guests filled her parlors with elevated yet informal talk and improvised entertainment; they wrote about her ‘Saturday evenings’ in their diaries, letters, and personal memoirs. So important was Botta’s salon that journalists and historians chronicled and referenced it for more than a century after it ended.

These writers, among other things, referred to, commented on, and described the music and musicians once seen and heard at Botta’s since she hosted her first

² When Botta arrived in New York in 1845 she was not yet married; in 1855, at the age of 39, she married Italian scholar, Prof. Vincenzo Botta (1818–1893). After their marriage, Anne Botta kept “Lynch” as part of her professional name, and published under Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta, or more commonly, Anne C. L. Botta. For the remainder of this document, she will be referred to as “Botta,” and her husband, “Prof. Botta.” The exception will be in primary source accounts written between 1815 and March 1854, in which the author knew her contemporaneously as Anne Lynch.
Manhattan gatherings. Author and salon guest Sara J. Lippincott—better known by her penname, Grace Greenwood—wrote to a friend in 1849 that she had “lately had the pleasure of attending” one of Botta’s “delightful Saturday re-unions, where [she] met many distinguished and agreeable persons—authors, artists, musicians, heroes, and exiled foreigners.”⁴ Likewise, in 1893 former salon guest Andrew Carnegie attested to the “literary, musical, professional, and artistic celebrities—the leading ministers, physicians, painters, musicians, and actors.”⁵ Nearly a century later, biographers still noted the presence of musicians in Botta’s salon, as the Dictionary of Literary Biography claimed in 1979, “There were sometimes so many people present that they had to find seats on the rug or on the staircase [and] in the course of the evening someone might sit down at the piano and the guests might dance the quadrille.”⁶ Nicholas Tawa, writing as recently as 2000, noted that “Anne Botta’s New York salon was famous for its weekly gatherings of scientists, writers, artists, musicians, and intellectuals,” but only named a few famous attendees and their varied disciplines without pursuing further investigation.⁷ These references are only a few of the many citations that allude to music in Botta’s salon over the past one hundred and fifty years, without offering much detail. To date, no study has focused specifically on the music heard chez Botta.

By the mid 1840s, literary salons were forming across New York City, and throughout the antebellum period they provided an intellectual space for the city’s

---

leading artists and intellectuals to gather, share ideas, and promote each other’s work. The salons ultimately advanced cultural life in New York and gave women a more prominent voice in the process. Many of these early gatherings were modeled on French salons, although they identified themselves using the Italian term, “conversazione.”8 By 1890, when *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* contributor C.H. Crandall wrote his article, “The Salon Idea in New York,” he chronicled more than fifty examples, and specifically earmarked several as musical gatherings, including those hosted by “the musical Misses Shea,” Dr. and Mrs. R. Ogden Doremus, and Josephine May, whom Crandall explained “plays the piano so exquisitely that the cello virtuoso Mr. Bergner is proud to accompany her. Her musicales and receptions draw a throng of brainy people who might well represent the culture of the city.”9 Held in May’s home on Fifth Avenue and open to both intellectuals and the cultural elite, this salon is in line with others of the period in both tone and purpose. Yet of all of the musicales, salons, and clubs that Crandall included in his article, he devoted the most attention to Botta’s *conversazione*, dedicating an entire paragraph to her while assigning the other hosts and hostesses little more than a mention.10 In keeping with similar accounts, Crandall set the Botta *conversazione* apart from the others and designated it as the ideal.11

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, articles like “The Salon Idea in New York” appeared in periodicals across Manhattan, mourning the loss of the salon while advocating for the institution’s revival in lieu of the burgeoning intellectual

---

8 Discussion of French salons to follow in Chapter Two.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Botta’s affiliation with New York’s literati kept her in the popular press long after most salons had disappeared. Mortimer Smith wrote an article for the *New Yorker* in 1936 called, “That was New York: Anne Lynch’s Salon,” and a little over a decade later, Albert Ten Eyck Gardner published a similar piece in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*. Both of these articles chronicle Botta’s popularity in the nineteenth century, and speak to her guest list and cultural contributions via her poetry, her visual art, and her weekly salon.

Likewise, Botta has remained a presence in the work of literary scholarship. During the first half of the twentieth century, at least three different inquiries were made of New York University requesting information about the Bottas for research projects, none of which were ever completed. Two Master’s theses—“The Life and Letters of Anne Lynch Botta,” written in 1940 by Mary Fenton at Brown University, and “Anne Charlotte Lynch: Her Salon in the 1840’s,” completed by Patricia Orvis at Columbia University in 1958—explore Botta’s early salons yet provide little critical analysis. In 1971 Charles Lombard, then a professor of French at the University of Illinois, wrote an article for *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly* called, “An Old New York Salon—French Style.” Lombard examined various aspects of Botta’s salon through her expansive, cosmopolitan guest list and the satirical pieces her contemporaries wrote about both her and her salon. The following year, Lombard published his book, *French Romanticism on the Frontier*, aiming “to include the

---

12 See “Wanted—A Salon,” *Outlook* (March 10, 1894), 442.
14 These inquiries came from Julia Abbott-Culler (1924), Sara Monforte (1938), and Harriet Fich Zinnes (1944).
15 Beginning in 1955 and spanning several decades, military historian Paul J. Scheips began a study of the Bottas. He did not complete his project, but donated his research notes to Brown University.
writers of the movement in France that began about 1800 and lasted until the 1850s.”\textsuperscript{16} Lombard’s study focuses on French literature and the reaction of a select group of nineteenth-century American intellectuals’ to French Romanticism.\textsuperscript{17} Botta and her circle of writers occupy a prominent position in this study, particularly in discussions of her salon and the influence of French authors on American literature both before and after the Civil War. More recently, literary historian Eliza Richards has explored many of the cultural implications of the literati in Botta’s circle throughout the mid-late 1840s in her book \textit{Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle}, using members of Botta’s circle and their poetry as a lens onto much broader social issues and the literary scene in antebellum New York.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the fact that Botta hosted a number of significant musicians in her salon, including Norwegian virtuoso violinist Ole Bull, impresario and pianist Maurice Strakosch, and Swedish opera singer Christine Nilsson, she remains largely absent from musicological research. Names and affiliations with the musicians, along with a discussion of the aesthetic themes associated with the Botta salon can be found in research completed by Katherine Preston, Karen Ahlquist, Betty E. Chmaj, Ora Frishberg Saloman, and in Vera Brodsky Lawrence’s three-volume collection, \textit{Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong}.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{18} Eliza Richards, \textit{Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe’s Circle} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
This monumental study relies heavily on the musical criticism that appeared in New York newspapers and magazines from 1836-1862, a majority of which was contributed by authors affiliated with the Botta salon, including N.P. Willis, G.P. Morris, John Sullivan Dwight, and members of the editorial staff at the New York Tribune. In fact, Brodsky’s main subject, George Templeton Strong, was himself affiliated with this circle, yet neither Botta nor her weekly gatherings are ever mentioned.

General biographical information about Botta and her cultural contributions has appeared in print since 1856, yet curiously despite the popularity she experienced during her life, neither a comprehensive biography nor an autobiography was ever written. Today, biographers and scholars mention her in studies and analyses of other major figures, including Edgar Allen Poe, Ole Bull, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Fredrika Bremer but the most comprehensive and specific source about Botta, remains The Memoirs of Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta as Written by Her Friends—a memorial volume documenting her contributions compiled and edited by her husband following her death in 1891.20 “These recollections,” he explained, “are chiefly composed of essays on her life and character, which, under the forms of letters, reminiscences, characteristics, impressions, and tributes to her memory were written at the editor’s request, by some of her most intimate and devoted friends.”21 Collectively, these submissions contextualize one another, and each of the thirty-four essays represents a thread in a larger conversation. The sketches detail elements of

---

her salon, her work as a writer, and her contributions as an artist; her friends wrote about her life, her accomplishments, and her travels, ultimately celebrating her character and cultural influence. Above all, these essays provide snapshots of contemporary perceptions of Botta and understandings of her influence immediately following her death. Not surprising however, since these submissions came from her friends, they leave a uniformly positive view.

Botta’s salon has likewise attracted attention—from its inception through the twentieth century. Salon culture has piqued the curiosity of scholars and the general public for centuries, and although such gatherings have been recognized as profoundly influential, the paucity of data about them often makes them difficult to understand as both individual initiatives and a collective enterprise. Often seen as social affairs, these gatherings rarely warranted reports in which the proceedings were recorded in meticulous detail. As David Tunley explained in his book regarding salons and singers in nineteenth-century Paris, “[a]lthough . . . mentioned in general terms, details about music in the private…salons [is] not readily available . . . . [and except] for some information in diaries and letters, [music reviews] provide some of the only hard evidence we have of what went on in many of those sumptuous surroundings.”

These observations resonate with our understandings of music in contemporaneous New York salons, with one significant difference: the New York press did not chronicle salon activities in the same way its Parisian counterparts did. In fact, public descriptions of salon culture in New York most often appear in

fictional accounts of the events without repertoire lists, or even performers’ names. Thus, to understand the music and music-making practices at Botta’s salon, it is necessary to explore the social and cultural spaces it occupied; to study the international and interdisciplinary group of guests who were regularly in attendance; and to examine the assortment of ideas and agendas that circulated in her parlors. The musical focus was not the repertoire, but rather the cultural implications attached to it, whether as an immigrant anthem, a cultural signifier, or simple entertainment. In order to understand this music, it is essential to consider it within a series of concentric circles that ultimately provide a more realistic conception of how music functioned for this group of nineteenth-century New Yorkers.

The little information we have regarding the musical repertoire heard and performed at Botta’s salon reveals a great deal about how this highly creative and influential circle perceived of music. As musicologists have noted, throughout the nineteenth century many Americans considered music to be a form of entertainment that garnered classification based on performance venue. Modern constructs of high and low art did not hold sway in the same ways they do today, and the information we have pertaining to the musical entertainment at Botta’s conversazione reflects this attitude.

With the aim of illuminating music’s place in Botta’s salon, each chapter of this dissertation begins with the examination of a cultural ideal that was both part of Botta’s social landscape, and that existed within the context of her salon. When closely examined, these seemingly non-musical ideas—including True Womanhood...

---

and Young America—reveal the underpinning of music, illustrating its value, place, and meaning in Botta’s *conversazione*. I have chosen two broad categories in which to situate music within this history: listening and music criticism, looking to one or both of these ideas in each chapter. Such investigations open new understandings of the ways in which performance, conversation, and printed media intersected, allowing music to attach to contemporary ideologies. Absent a body of scholarship devoted to Botta or American salons, primary source materials provide the basis for my research while secondary source materials from across disciplines are used to situate both Botta and music within broader contexts.

Chapter One begins by assembling a framework for understanding how Botta’s salon fit into cultural and intellectual life in New York City. Situating Botta’s *conversazione* over its nearly fifty year span requires an understanding of her neighborhoods—the people, cultural institutions, and musical opportunities—in both Washington Square, where she lived from 1845-1855, and Murray Hill, where she resided from 1856-1891. The relationship Botta shared with many of New York’s cultural leaders was contingent on her geographical location, and her homes provided the backdrop for her weekly salon. By exploring these physical spaces we can gain a sense of how her salon operated and how music was heard. Primary sources provide a glimpse of the rapidly changing physical appearance of the city over the century, alongside Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace’s *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, and Charles Lockwood’s *Bricks and Brownstone* which collectively provide
the basis for this chapter. No official biography of Botta exists aside from the thirty-three-page summary at the start of the Memoirs as written by one of her former students who became a close friend. In the absence of a more detailed biography, I have included information about Botta’s life to provide a sense of her popularity as a salon hostess, and to reveal the role the arts played in both her personal and public personas. Although few of Botta’s personal papers are extant, a great deal of information can be gleaned from the letters, journals, and memoirs of her close friends.

The subject of Chapter Two is Botta’s salon itself—the guests, its reputation, and its promotion. Here, a liberal and cosmopolitan tone prevailed, facilitating the intersection of disparate influences including the popular nineteenth-century fashion magazine Godey’s Lady’s Book, French salons, the ideals of True Womanhood, and music. Understanding this relationship brings into focus a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the feminine ideal and music in the nineteenth century. It also suggests how musical associations added credibility, sophistication, and fashionability to Botta’s conversazione.

The focus of Chapter Three is the way in which musical practices in Botta’s salon were in dialogue with contemporary society. Using descriptions of the musical activities that took place in her parlors, this chapter brings into focus a more comprehensive look at nineteenth century performance practices, standards, and conceptions. Among these is the intricate relationship between poetry and song,

centered on ideas of elocution that played out in Botta’s parlors alongside dancing and the singing of traditional parlor ballads. In total these activities compelled guests to engage with a diverse soundscape that on a larger scale challenged traditional modes of listening. Botta’s salon guests documented their opinions about this music in letters and diaries that still today, shed light onto contemporary understandings of performance standards.

In the fourth and final chapter, I explore a number of cultural initiatives including those espoused by the Young America movement. Many members of Botta’s Washington Square salon circle who identified as Young Americans were cultural critics for New York’s major newspapers and periodicals. Publications including Young America’s Democratic Review, N.P. Willis’s Home Journal, and Richard Storrs Willis’s The Musical World and New York Musical Times, featured articles that aimed to advance cultural life in New York by considering the arts in a context that included political, social, and institutional agendas. The chapter concludes with a case study that examines violinist Ole Bull’s second United States concert tour, considering its relationship to Young America’s cultural agenda.

For nearly fifty years Anne Botta stood at the center of one of New York City’s most enduring and influential salons. She met with members of her circle for entertainment and conversation, and as prominent members of New York society they held significant sway over public opinion. By training a lens onto Botta’s conversazione we gain new understandings of the significance of music in New York’s literary salons, while acquiring greater insight into musical practices and conceptions during this critical period in American music history.
CHAPTER 1

ASSEMBLING BOTTA’S NEW YORK SALON

In 1846 Catharine Sedgwick published an article titled “Varieties on Social Life in New York.” Somewhere between fact and fiction, Sedgwick’s narrative describes a visiting friend’s long night on the town—from 5:00 in the evening until 1:30 the next morning. Her protagonist’s third call of the night takes place at a Manhattan salon hosted by Anne C. Lynch Botta, whom Sedgwick renamed “Miss Evertson” for the article.25

Upon his arrival at her Washington Square residence in November 1845, Sedgwick’s friend recalled:

I was admitted to a rather dimly lighted hall by a little portress, some ten or twelve years old who led me to a small apartment to deposit my hat and cloak. There was no lighted staircase, no train attendant, none of the common flourish at city parties. “Up stairs, if you please, sir—front room for the ladies—back for the gentlemen;” no indication of an overturn or commotion in the domestic world; no cross father, worried mother, or scolded servants behind the scenes . . . The locomotive was evidently not off the track; the spheres moved harmoniously. To my surprise, when I entered, I found two fair sized drawing rooms filled with guests in a high state of social enjoyment. There was music, dancing, recitation and conversation. I met an intimate friend there . . . There were artists in every department—painting, poetry, sculpture and music.26

Nearly twenty years later, in 1864, Bayard Taylor painted a similar scene in his book, *John Godfrey’s Fortunes: Related by Himself: A Story of American Life*. Largely a work of fiction, Taylor’s collection of thirty-nine sketches was modeled on events from his life. He assigned himself the title role, changed the names of his characters and disguised

---

25 Catharine Sedgwick, “Varieties of Social Life in New York,” *The Columbian Magazine* (July 1846): 13. Sedgwick is one of several authors who published accounts of Botta’s salon using alternate names for Botta. Other examples include N.P. Willis’s *People I Have Met* (1850), Bayard Taylor, *John Godfrey’s Fortunes* (1864), *The Trippings of Tom Pepper* by Charles Frederick Briggs (1847), and *Paddy McGann; The Demon of the Stump* by William Gilmore Simms (1863).

many of the street names and locations. Chapter twenty-one, “In which I Attend Mrs. Yorkton’s Reception,” is based on his first visit to Anne Botta’s salon. In the story, Brandagee—a character resembling Irish-American writer Fitz-James O’Brien (1828-1862)—invites Godfrey to accompany him to the Yorkton gathering. “You needn’t dress particularly,” Brandagee instructs Godfrey, “it’s quite Bohemian. Smithers always wears a scarlet cravat, and an old black velvet coat, with half the buttons off.” Godfrey later muses that “this information was rather attractive than otherwise. It denoted a proper scorn of conventionalities, which I had always looked upon as one of the attributes of genius.” But on the night of the salon, Godfrey relates that “[n]otwithstanding Mr. Brandagee’s hint as to costume . . . I put on my evening dress, and sprinkled my handkerchief with jockey-club.” At 7:30 pm he met up with Brandagee, and the two men “set out for the eastern part of Fourth Street.”

The Yorkton Mecca was a low and somewhat ancient brick house, with a green door and window-blinds. Heavy, badly smelling ailanthus-trees in front conveniently obscured the livery-stable and engine-house on the opposite side of the street . . . The bell was answered by a small mulatto-boy . . . He grinned on seeing Mr. Brandagee, said, “She’s in the parlor,” and threw open the door thereto.

Only one gas-burner was yet lighted, but, as the rooms were small, I could very well observe the light-blue figure which advanced to meet us....

“Faithful friend! . . . [Yorkton] exclaimed, holding out both hands to Brandagee. “You are just in time . . .” The furniture was well-worn, and had apparently been picked up piece by piece, without regard to the general harmony . . . . On a small table between the windows stood a large plaster bust of Virgil, with a fresh wreath of periwinkle (plucked from the back-yard) upon its head. On the two centre-

29 Taylor, John Godfrey’s Fortunes, 270.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 271.
tables were laid volumes of poetry, and some annuals, bound in blue and scarlet cloth…

Two gentlemen and a lady entered the room. I recognized Mr. Smithers at once, by the scarlet cravat and velvet coat . . . Clara Collady was a dumpy person of twenty-eight or thirty, with a cheerful face and lively little black eyes. I sought an introduction to her . . . “I like to come here,” she said. “It rests and refreshes me after a week in the school-room . . .” Loud talking, near at hand drew my attention. It was Smithers engaged in a discussion with [the painter] S. Mears. “Classical subjects are dead—obsolete—antediluvian!” cried the former . . . Other guests dropped in, by ones and twos, until the small apartments were well filled, and the various little centres of animated talk blended in an incessant and not very harmonious noise. 33

Both Sedgwick and Taylor offer detailed glimpses not only into Botta’s Washington Square parlors, but also into the culture, popularity, and fashionability once associated with her salon. Soon after Botta arrived in Manhattan in the fall of 1845, she began hosting these gatherings; less than a year later, they were part of the social landscape and at the forefront of the city’s cultural consciousness. Over time, her receptions inspired works of fiction, like the two cited above, as well as short biographies, satires, and a collection of memoirs. Botta’s guests wrote about her “Saturday evenings” in their diaries, letters, and personal memoirs, and journalists and historians chronicled and referenced her gatherings and the activities and events that took place there for over a century. Events in Botta’s life and the places she lived, worked, and traveled significantly affected both the tone she set and the image she cultivated for her salon.

From beginning to end music played a role in Botta’s salon: singing, dancing, and instrumental performances given by amateurs and professionals alike animated her evenings. Botta’s guests both performed music and wrote about it, publishing commentaries and reviews in the press that reached a wide audience. While precise evidence of repertoire and even specific performers is elusive, it is possible to understand

33 Ibid., 271-79.
music’s place in Botta’s salon by considering its history, as well as her own, over its half-century of existence.

WASHINGTON SQUARE 1845-1856

The New York City Anne Botta inhabited in 1845 was radically different from the city she knew at the end of her life. Her first residence, in Washington Square, was in a neighborhood then considered to be on the city’s outskirts. Before it was designated a public park in 1827, Washington Square had been used as a potter’s field, a public execution site, and a military parade ground, and over time it evolved into one of Manhattan’s most important neighborhoods. Between 1832 and 1833 a unified row of thirteen Greek revival mansions was built to line the square’s northern edge, while the south and west sides were lined with long rows of brick residences intended for rising middle-class families looking to escape the congestion of lower Manhattan. By the mid-1840s the young neighborhood shared a visual uniformity and conveyed a sense of elegance—the “houses of the whole square,” described John Fanning Watson in 1846, “[are] constructed ... of fine red brick, and all the window sills, and tops, and doorsteps, of fine white marble. The coup d’œil, gives a sudden impression of summer sunshine.” In 1848 the city invested in an iron fence with gates at the street and corner entrances to protect and enclose the nine-acre park. The following year, gas streetlights were installed,

36 John Fanning Watson, Annals and Occurrences of New York City and State, in the Olden Time (Philadelphia: H.F. Anners, 1846), 363. See also Barry, The Sailors’ Snug Harbor, 57.
and in 1852 a decorative fountain was positioned at the center of Washington Square Park.\(^{37}\)

When Anne Botta moved to this neighborhood, the City University of New York (today’s New York University) occupied the eastern end of the square, anchored by its imposing Gothic revival University Building, which had opened in 1835.\(^{38}\) In 1847, the City University boasted a faculty of seven with an undergraduate student body of one hundred and fifty. At the same time, a growing circle of young Francophiles—specifically writers—joined the university-affiliated academics, scientists and artists, and the families of wealthy merchants, lawyers, and businessmen who had originally settled the neighborhood. A hotbed of intellectualism, youth, and innovation all contained in a park-like setting designed as an urban retreat, this was the perfect place for an artistic salon, and Anne Botta seized the opportunity.

Botta lived in Washington Square for a little over a decade, moving house three times—to addresses at 116 Waverly Place (1845-ca.1846), 109 Clinton Place (ca.1846-1849), and 45 West Ninth Street (1849-1856).\(^{39}\) Each of her homes was above the northwest corner of Washington Square Park, and among the chains of 1830s brick row houses. Botta shared her Washington Square residences with her widowed mother and a


\(^{38}\) Ibid. See also Francis’s *New Guide to the Cities of New-York and Brooklyn, and the Vicinity* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1854), 112.

\(^{39}\) Information regarding the street names can be found in Barry, *The Sailors’ Snug Harbor*, xvii. Today Clinton Place is known as West Eighth Street, and the Clinton Place address may also have been number 127 at one point, before the houses were renumbered. Not one of these original buildings remains standing. See Charles Hemstreet, "Literary Landmarks of New York." *The Critic* (1898-1906) 43, no. 1 (July 1903): 43.
rotating cast of housemates including students, domestic servants, visitors, and family.\textsuperscript{40} Her friend and salon guest Catharine Sedgwick, describing the interior of Waverly Place in “Varieties on Social Life in New York,” drew particular attention to its unassuming character.\textsuperscript{41} Likewise, Botta guest Grace Greenwood recalled the inside of either Waverly Place or Clinton Place as “a modest house down-town,” that was “simple in its appointments, but marked by that artistic elegance which always characterized her surroundings.”\textsuperscript{42} Botta’s cultivated yet unpretentious style and eclectic presentation characterized her houses in Washington Square. This aesthetic continued to define both her home and her salon even after she moved to the more upscale Murray Hill neighborhood following her marriage in 1856—a move that was partially motivated by the influx of European immigrants into the city.

New York City’s population totaled over 312,000 in 1840, and by 1850 this number had increased by over 60%. Waves of European immigrants were largely responsible for the dramatic increase: Irish arrived during the 1840s and Germans and Italians followed in 1848.\textsuperscript{43} Throughout this period, the immigration numbers were staggering: more than 24,000 German-born immigrants moved to Manhattan in 1845; a

\textsuperscript{40} See Sophie Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” in \textit{Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta, Written by Her Friends with Selections from Her Correspondence and from Her Writings in Prose and Poetry}, ed. Vincenzo Botta (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894), 6. Botta may have also taken in boarders at this time. The 1850 United States Census record shows Charlotte Gray-Lynch and Anne Charlotte Lynch living at the West Ninth Street address. Three other names are listed at this residence: [Maryanne] Rooney, age 18, Patrick Rooney, age 14, and Mary Cronly, age 25. All three were born in Ireland, and none attended school within the previous year. Their relationship to Botta is unknown at this time and their respective occupations were not listed in the census. Bureau of the Census, \textit{Median Gross Rent by Countries of the United States}, 1850, prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C., 1850).

\textsuperscript{41} Sedgwick, “Varieties on Social Life,” 15.


decade later, there were 98,000 Germans living in the city, and more than 176,000 Irish.\textsuperscript{44} These German immigrants had an enormous impact and by the 1860s their presence significantly shaped New York’s musical offerings and added to the burgeoning cultural life of the city.\textsuperscript{45} Meanwhile, hotels, restaurants, shops, and music halls replaced residences along Broadway, and impresarios added new performance venues to those already in operation in lower Manhattan.\textsuperscript{46}

Botta’s neighborhood served as the focus for the development of such spaces, which included Tripler Hall—a large, opulent music hall and theater that opened in 1850 at the southeast end of Washington Square. Further north, the Astor Place Opera House sat at the intersection of Astor Place and East Eighth Street, just a little over six blocks east of Botta’s residences.\textsuperscript{47} Located in an upper class neighborhood and surrounded by a courtyard and an air of exclusivity, this theater came to be identified with aristocratic snobbery.\textsuperscript{48} Relatively short-lived, it opened in November 1847, operated under the direction of a committee of wealthy patrons, and was funded through subscription tickets.\textsuperscript{49} The theater only remained in operation for five years; it never fully recovered from the tumult caused by the Astor Place riots in May 1849.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 2. See also Reich, “Robert Schumann’s Music in New York City,” in Graziano, \textit{European Music}, 13.
\textsuperscript{46} These venues included Niblo’s Garden, which opened in 1822, several blocks south of Washington Square, at the corner of Broadway and Prince Streets, and Palmo’s Opera House on Chamber’s Street, operating from 1844-1847. For more on women attending concerts at mid-century see Adrienne Fried Block, “Matinee Mania, or the Regendering of Nineteenth-Century American Audiences in New York City,” \textit{19th-Century Music} 31, no. 3 (Spring, 2008): 193-216.
\textsuperscript{48} Ahlquist, \textit{Democracy at the Opera}, 134.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 135.
Brooding hostilities linked to social, racial, and political oppositions of the time—the “Upper Ten Thousand,” versus “the Million;” Americans versus foreigners; Whigs versus Democrats; white versus black; capital versus labor—catalyzed these riots, which took place on May 7 and 10, 1849.\(^5^0\) Escalating class conflicts ignited the tensions between actors William C. Macready, “a silk-stockinged Englishman,” who represented the moneyed leisure class, and Edwin Forrest, a “true-blue son of America,” supported by members of the working class.\(^5^1\) Botta and members of her circle were associated by social status and geographic location with the aristocratic Astor Place crowd and some of its key players, including Macready. Botta had looked to invite him to her Washington Square salon several months prior to the riots. “I hope Macready will be here,” she wrote to poet Bayard Taylor about a forthcoming salon evening; “I shall invite him through someone who knows him if such an individual is to be found.”\(^5^2\)

About six months later, the situation spun out of control when Macready and Forrest performed in competing productions of *Macbeth*; Forrest to acclaim at the Broadway Theater, Macready to ever-worsening critiques at Astor Place. After his May 7\(^{th}\) performance, which resulted in heckling, booing, and protesting from an irate working-class crowd, Macready cancelled further performances, but then reconsidered after petitions calling for him to resume circulated in the city.\(^5^3\) Among these was an open letter signed by forty-one literary and “gentleman” supporters—including Washington

\(^5^0\) Ibid., 133.
\(^5^2\) Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor, letter dated [October- November] 10, 18[48], Cornell University Rare and Manuscript Collections, #14/18/1169 Box 1, Carl A. Kroch Library. The exact date is illegible.
\(^5^3\) See Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera*, 140.
Irving and Herman Melville, both affiliated with Botta’s circle.\textsuperscript{54} The support was enough to convince Macready to schedule a performance on May 10\textsuperscript{th} at Astor Place. In the end, part of the audience comprised of a jeering and violent crowd, took to the streets, joining others in protest. By ten o’clock that night the actor described the area surrounding Astor Place as being “occupied by a mob of enraged [male] citizens battering one another in what appeared to be a gigantic free-for-all.”\textsuperscript{55} The riot left twenty-two people dead and over one hundred wounded.

But the following year, despite the lingering social stigmas from the Astor Place riots, Botta’s salon guest George G. Foster enthused about the theater, describing it as the “resort of our exclusively aristocratic Upper Ten Thousand.” Although this same moniker and the associations that came with it had been in part responsible for the riots, Foster painted the opera house as “one of the most elegant and comfortable theaters in the world,” owing to the lush interior, “the gay and airy effect of its white and gilt open lattice-work, the richness of the crimson velvet sofas and chairs, the luxurious hangings of the private boxes, and the flood of gas-light shed from the magnificent chandelier.”\textsuperscript{56} The theater’s interior space and exterior façade was in keeping with the taste of the upper-class and socially conscious men it aimed to attract—yet Foster maintained that Astor Place Opera House “[afforded] an opportunity of listening to good music to a large class of population,” and that “even fashionable young men about town are not slow in availing themselves of it.” In fact, he went on to spin this aspect of the theater as a “truly democratic characteristic,” that made it “a great favorite with the intelligent and

\textsuperscript{55} Moody, \textit{The Astor Place Riot}, 1–2. See pages 5-6 for Macready’s account of the incident.
ambitious among the great middle class, who nightly fill the spacious amphitheater, and
form by no means the least important portion of the audience.” Foster’s glowing
endorsement was likely an attempt to salvage the theater’s image after the riots. He
remained loyal to the opera house’s targeted demographic, but chose rhetoric that drew
attention away from the wealth and subsequent exclusivity associated with the theater and
its patrons. The Astor Place Opera House, dubbed the “Massacre Opera House” and
“Disaster Place,” never fully recovered after the riots and closed its doors in 1852, at
which point the Mercantile Library Association bought the empty theater and renovated it
before reopening in 1854.58

Although the Astor Place Opera House disappeared, musical life near Botta’s
neighborhood was invigorated by the opening of the Academy of Music at Fourteenth
Street and Irving Place in 1854.59 Patrons of this venue aimed to revive Italian opera in
New York, and in contrast to the Astor Place Theater, the Academy’s organization and
physical structure at least appeared to be designed to serve a broad public image.60 The
enormous 4,000-seat theater became home to the Philharmonic Society of New-York
(founded in 1842) and later housed opera productions featuring renowned artists such as
Adelina Patti and Christine Nilsson.61 Inside this “plain building of red brick” was an
opulent hall suitable for the glittering crowd of increasingly sophisticated New Yorkers.
As James McCabe described in 1881, the theater was “magnificently decorated in
crimson and gold, and its auditorium equal[ed] in beauty and splendor that of any

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 62. For more on the Astor Place riots, see Peter George Buckley, “To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860. Ph.D. diss., 1984 (State University of New York at Stony Brook). See also Harris, Around Washington Square, 63.
59 For more on opera at the Academy of Music see Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 147-56.
60 Ibid., 148.
European opera house.” By concealing the building’s lush interior space behind its unassuming façade, McCabe created a hallowed setting that juxtaposed perceptions of cultural democracy with high art and fashion. Upon entering the theater, the decorated audience assimilated into the venue’s luxurious image; these associations in turn attracted stylish crowds to the house. “The scene during opera nights is very brilliant,” noted McCabe, “the audience being in full dress, and comprising a thorough representation of the élite and fashion of the Metropolis.”62 The installation of these cultural and educational institutions, along with the cluster of libraries, bookstores, art galleries, and churches that sprung up around them, earned Washington Square the reputation as the city’s “Athenaeum Quarter,” suggesting its link to classical arts and letters.63 For Botta, the ambience and opportunities of Washington Square were invaluable, linking her by location to the literary, artistic, and social circles that would form the core of her salon.

EARLY YEARS 1815-1855

Anne Botta came to New York with an education and with professional experience as both a published writer and teacher. Born in Bennington, Vermont on November 11, 1815, she was the youngest child of Charlotte Gray Lynch (1789-1873), daughter of American Revolutionary War veteran Lieutenant Colonel Ebenezer Gray (1743-1795), and Patrick Lynch (ca. 1780-1819), a Dubliner who sailed to the United States near the turn of the nineteenth century. 64 In 1803, Lynch moved to Bennington.

---

es, Etc., Etc (Philadelphia: Douglass Brothers, 1881), 578.
63 Barry, The Sailors’ Snug Harbor, xiv.
64 Patrick Lynch was from Lucan, County Dublin. Botta’s former student and friend, Sophie Ewer relayed the events preceding Lynch’s arrival to the United States, explaining: “While [Patrick Lynch] was a student…in the Dublin University [presumably Trinity College], he took part in the Irish Rebellion of 1798.
Vermont, and opened a dry-goods store with fellow Irish immigrant Thomas Trenor.65 Lynch and Gray met in Bennington and married in 1812; not long after Anne was born, the family moved to Pennsylvania, then to Windham, Connecticut.66 Following the unexpected death of her husband in 1819, Charlotte Lynch relocated her young family to Hartford, Connecticut.67 She never remarried and lived with her daughter from 1838 until the end of her life in 1874.68

Anne Botta’s formal education began in 1831, when she entered the Albany Female Academy in New York.69 In addition to traditional courses in reading, writing, arithmetic, and plain sewing, the school offered an extensive program of ancient and

---


66 Patrick and Charlotte Lynch remained in Vermont for three years, where they had two children, Thomas Rawson (1813-1845) and Anne Charlotte (1815-1891). An undated and unsigned letter in the Brown University archives states that Patrick Lynch, “arrived in Cuba about the middle of January 1819. Soon after his arrival . . . he was naturalized and . . . received from the government a grant of 330 acres of land, lying on the Bay of Neuvitas [sic] . . . . This land was a gift from the Crown and held without tax . . . or tribute. He intended to go immediately on to the land…but before completing his arrangements, he took a fever at Havanna and died.” “Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta Papers, 1835-1894, Series 6, Miscellaneous Material,” Brown Archival and Manuscript Collections Online, accessed September 24, 2010, http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository2/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1075928725312500.

According to the 1830 United States Census record, Charlotte Lynch was the head of household in Hartford, Hartford County Connecticut. Other members of the household included: her son (Thomas Rawson), daughter (Anne Charlotte), and mother (Sarah Stamford-Gray). Bureau of the Census, Median Gross Rent by Countries of the United States, 1830, prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C., 1830).

67 Charlotte Lynch was a regular fixture at Botta’s salon. See Mrs. A.H. Leonowens, “A Tribute,” in Botta, Memoirs, 106.

68 Botta attended the Albany Female Academy from 1831-1834 and is listed in the "Albany Female Academy Alumnae Catalogue, 1834-1894" with the class of 1834. John McClintock (Albany Academies Archivist), e-mail message to author, March 2, 2009.
modern history, chemistry, botany, natural philosophy, French, Latin, and Spanish. 

During the winter terms, the Academy presented lectures on chemistry and experimental philosophy, and in the summer, on botany and geology. In 1829, the school issued a circular explaining the academic calendar, curriculum, and application process. “The Institution,” it read, “is designed to be useful and practical…the grand object of education is not so much to store the memory with what others have written, as to strengthen and expand the mind of the pupil, and prepare it for future, higher attainment.”

Botta maintained this intellectual curiosity and educational philosophy long after she left Albany, and her schooling heavily influenced her opinions and creative output as both a writer and an artist. During her time at the Albany Female Academy, Botta studied art (sketching and watercolors), and pursued poetry, winning awards and publishing her poems, including “The Mediterranean,” “To the Sun,” and “Byron Sleeping amid the Ruins of Greece.” These publications introduced readers to her work and earned her recognition within literary circles in both Boston and Philadelphia. “The productions of her pen,” Botta’s longtime friend Henry Sage later recounted, “and her conversation, marked by her thorough knowledge of history and literature attracted during the next two years [1834-1836] the attention of educated men and women; and she received the

---


71 For more on these lectures, see “1829 Circular of the Albany Female Academy and Examination Notice,” transcribed by John T. McClintock. The Albany Academies.

72 Ibid.

73 Botta’s family remained in Hartford while she attended the Albany Academy. She lived in a boarding house, earning money for her expenses by writing original pieces and working as a copyist. Thomas Lynch procured the copyist positions for his sister. Henry W. Sage, “Early Recollections,” in Botta, Memoirs, 35.

74 Ibid., 36.
courtesy and homage of [Nathaniel Parker] Willis, [George Pope] Morris, and many other eminent men of those days.”

Part of Botta’s appeal was in what Dr. Wallace Wood described as her “ability to see the unity amid the variety.” The first thing one observed about her mind, he recalled, “was its quick interest in the highest and greatest things… she seemed ever to see the universe and humanity, and to conceive of them as wholes; [this was] a mind not learned nor laborious, yet truly philosophic.” Botta’s friends later referred to her as an anachronism and spoke to the maturity of her mind and the youthfulness of her spirit. She was nineteen years old when she graduated from the Albany Female Academy in 1834, and she remained at the school for the next two years working as a teacher before accepting a governess position in Shelter Island, New York.

She lived on Shelter Island from 1836 to 1838; soon after her arrival, she took up writing more seriously, and produced a number of poems, travel pieces, and critical essays. In January 1838, near the end of her tenure, Botta started “Leaves from the Diary of a Recluse”—a sort of public journal tracing her final four months on Shelter Island—with entries ranging from thoughts on life and death, to her reactions to poetry, literature, and historical texts. The journal reveals a thoughtfulness, depth, and manner of expression that speaks to both her writing skills and her intellect. Themes of isolation and solitude underpin the entire work, summed up in her final entry: “April 7th. Tomorrow I shall leave this ‘abomination of desolation’ forever. It will cost me some pain to do so.

---

75 Ibid.
notwithstanding it has scarcely afforded me a happy moment for the last two years that I have vegetated here. Perhaps I shall be like the old prisoner released from the Bastile, [sic] who went back and begged to die there. This is the last page of my journal: I close this and my exile together.”

That year Botta left Shelter Island and moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where she continued working as a both a teacher and a writer. In 1841 she published *The Rhode Island Book*, a collection of edited poems and essays by Rhode Island citizens. That same year, she began hosting weekly literary gatherings. These were Botta’s first efforts at creating a salon, and she depended on her connections from Albany, Hartford, and Philadelphia, set into motion by the visibility she gained from her publications. By 1843 Charles T. Congden had already declared that “the best literary society of Providence…was to be found in the parlors of Miss Lynch.”

Botta’s next moves were to Philadelphia and ultimately New York, where she settled in October 1845. Her early career presented both professional and social opportunities that catalyzed the start of her New York salon. “Diary of a Recluse” and several of Botta’s poems were published that year in a gift volume edited by Eliza Leslie, which also included contributions by many of the writers who would become involved in Botta’s Washington Square circle, including Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Anne Botta, “Leaves from the Diary of a Recluse,” in Botta, *Memoirs*, 373.


81 Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 5. Between 1840 and 1841, Botta’s brother and sister-in-law had returned to Hartford, CT, where their son, Thomas R. Lynch Jr. (1841- c.1886) was born.
and Henry T. Tuckerman. Her connection to the Albany Female Academy led to employment in New York as a member of the faculty at the Brooklyn Female Academy, where she taught English composition. While teaching, Botta supplemented her income by selling her prose and poetry, acting as her own literary agent, promoting her efforts and soliciting works for publication. In 1848, for example, she wrote to her friend and poet Bayard Taylor, then an editorial assistant at *Graham’s Magazine*, regarding several sonnets she wished to sell to the *Union Magazine*, asking him to serve as an intermediary, stating “The Sonnet which I enclose also I should like to have go into the Union Maga. Provided Post will pay me 5 dollars. If he will not you can return it to me.” Assertive in her business dealings, Botta wrote to Taylor later that year demanding compensation for a publishing error when an earlier draft of her poem “Battle of Life” went to press in the November issue of *Graham’s Magazine*. Botta admonished, “[i]t is well for you that I did not write you this note two days since for I should have scolded you fiercely for publishing the Battle of Life from the old copy in the Mag. instead of the corrected one which I gave you & which is very much improved. I find today that my anger has evaporated. But the sorrow remains—I wish to receive damages however in the form of a

---


83 Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 5. Alonzo Crittenden, who was President of the Brooklyn Academy, served as principal of the Albany Female Academy when Botta was both a student and a teacher there. He left the position in 1845 to work at the Brooklyn Academy. The Packer Collegiate Institute, “Portraits on the Wall: A Brief History of the Packer Collegiate Institute,” accessed October 26, 2011, http://www.packer.edu/page.cfm?p=434. The school was renamed the Packer Collegiate Institute in November, 1854. Ibid. For more on Botta’s modest means and commute to the Brooklyn Academy, see Kate Sanborn, *Memories and Anecdotes* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), 75.

84 Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor letter dated Sunday Eve. May 14 n.d. [ca. 1848] Cornell University, Rare and Manuscript Collections, #14/18/1169 Box 1, Carl A. Kroch Library. See also Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor letter dated Wednesday, March 29 n.d. [ca.1848], in Cornell University, Rare and Manuscript Collections.

draft of 20 dollars from the publisher of the Mag. Will you request him to send it to you for me as soon as convenient. I do not know the technical form of proceeding.”

In addition to these individual poems and essays, Botta published an illustrated collection of her work, entitled *Poems*, in 1849. Many of the artists affiliated with her circle, including F.O.C. Darley and Thomas Rossiter, produced the original images for the publication, which sold well and was reprinted in 1851 and again in 1881.

Botta’s reputation as a poet and author helped to make her salon popular, important, and newsworthy. Her initial Washington Square gatherings, which began in fall 1845, attracted media attention as early as July 1846; poems read at her 1848 Valentine’s Day party appeared in N.P. Willis’s *Home Journal*, and other enthusiastic commentaries about her work, which she called “puff pieces,” generated publicity for both her writings and salon. “I have not thanked you for the magnificent puff you gave me in the Tribune,” Botta wrote to Taylor in 1848, “[N.P.] Willis is going to copy it… in the H.J. [Home Journal] next week. [Rufus] Griswold insists…that I wrote it myself!”

By 1849, Botta’s salon was prominent enough that it was the focus of an entire chapter of George G. Foster’s panoramic book, *New York in Slices*—originally a serial feature that ran in the New York *Tribune*—in which he described one of her evening receptions. Botta protested that the depictions were not all favorable, as she explained in a letter to Taylor: “I understand that Foster is publishing the slices. The one on the *Literary Soirées* evidently refers to *us*. Some persons who visit me have seemed to dislike

---

86 Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor letter n.d. [ca. 1848]. Cornell University, Rare and Manuscript Collections.
89 Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor letter n.d. [ca. 1848]. Cornell University, Rare and Manuscript Collections.
it & requested me to ask Mr. Foster to suppress it. If it had been more flattering they might have been less fastidious. Will you see Mr Foster for me & ask him if he can omit this chap. I went to see him yesterday but he was not in & I do not know where his office is or I would send him a note." Botta was likely writing to Taylor on behalf of Griswold, G. P. Morris, and N. P. Wills; “some [of the] persons,” who complained to her about their unflattering portrayals. Griswold was identified by name in Slices, as were Botta’s guests Grace Greenwood and Lydia M. Child, but Foster gave only a physical description and character sketch for others, masking their identities. These lightly facetious depictions both poke fun at Botta’s guests and draw attention to the fashionability and importance of her salon. His depiction of Griswold, for example, reads like a string of backhanded compliments: “He carries his head ponderingly upon his shoulder,” Foster remarks, “as if there were a good deal in it—and so there is….His memory is a miscellaneous storehouse of celebrities of whom nobody has ever heard.” Such portrayals of Botta’s salon, which Foster refused to eliminate from Slices in spite of her protests, gained wide exposure as they circulated in The New York Tribune and his book, engaging the public in the private world of her parlors. As more and more New Yorkers looked to the periodical press for information about fashion, trends, news, and culture in a society that made celebrities of their writers and poets, this media attention shaped her salon’s public image and added to its popularity.

Likewise, Botta’s social connections advanced her early salons and allowed her to develop an expansive network of guests. Relationships forged in Washington D.C, where

---

90 Letter dated December 8 [n.d. but likely ca.1848]. Cornell University Rare and Manuscript Collections.
she spent considerable time between 1850 and 1853, were especially formative. As Grace Greenwood recalled, Botta was “surrounded like a queen by statesmen,” at the cabinet and presidential receptions the two women attended.\textsuperscript{93} More than just social occasions, these events placed Botta in close proximity to lawmakers and politicians, including Kentucky Senator Henry Clay, whom she knew as early as 1849. In fact, between 1850 and 1852, Botta worked as his private secretary, establishing contacts that expanded her social network and gave her not only presence, but also voice and power of influence.\textsuperscript{94} In 1851, emboldened by her position, she lobbied Congress for outstanding pension funds due her family for her grandfather’s Revolutionary War service, and with the help of Clay, secured a grant of several thousand dollars that she later invested in railroad stocks.\textsuperscript{95} The income generated from the railroad investment solved Botta’s financial problems and afforded her greater freedom and independence, most notably giving her the means to travel to Europe—an interest which had been a “passion [of hers] for years,” as she had written in “Diary of a Recluse” in 1838.\textsuperscript{96} “If the body is always confined,”

\textsuperscript{93} Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 8; Greenwood, “A Loving Tribute,” 44. Greenwood also notes, “Washington assemblies were in those days pleasantly unconventional, yet select—not too much thronged to be thoroughly enjoyable: and no one enjoyed them more than Miss Lynch.” Ibid., 45. Also see Rachel Aliyah Sheldon, “Washington Brotherhood: Friendship, Politics, and the Coming of the Civil War,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Virginia, 2011).

\textsuperscript{94} Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 8. See also Juliet Goodwin, “One of the Fine Souls,” in Botta, Memoirs, 94. Details surrounding Botta’s time in Washington D.C. and her work as Clay’s secretary remain vague at this time, and beyond the scope of this study. See Sheldon, “Washington Brotherhood: Friendship, Politics, and the Coming of the Civil War.” See also, Greenwood, “A Loving Tribute,” 44.


\textsuperscript{96} Gardner, “The Arts and Mrs. Botta,” 107. At the time of her death in 1891, Anne Botta left $500 each to five individuals. This amount was to be paid within a year of Anne’s death, and was independent of the rest of the property in the Botta estate. “In the Matter of Proving the Last Will and Testament of Anna C. L. Botta. Deceased. As a Will of Real and Personal Property.” Surrogate’s Court Records in the city and county of New York. November 10, 1891. Three years later upon Vincenzo Botta’s death in 1894, a total of $85,000 and the remaining material possessions were left to specific family members. Additionally, the Botta house and property on which it sat on West 37th Street was valued at a minimum of $50,000. “In the
she continued, “the mind must remain so in some degree, despite the reading and thinking. It convinces us that we are not indeed the center of the world, and that the sun shines on other lands and other races.”

Botta sailed to Europe in 1853, beginning a lifelong cultural exchange that would include many subsequent trips overseas. During her initial voyage, she travelled to cities in England, France, and Italy; echoing facets of the Grand Tour tradition, she visited studios, museums and galleries. This trip signaled Botta’s interest in self-edification and served as a marker of her wealth and refinement.

While in Europe, she met prominent figures and forged connections that strengthened her ties to Old World culture, ultimately informing the way she organized and ran her salon.

Meanwhile, as she enjoyed the pleasures of a trip abroad, her future husband—Vincenzo Botta—arrived in the United States.

A professor of philosophy at the University of Turin in Italy, Vincenzo Botta (1818-1894) held a Ph.D., worked as a correspondent for several Italian papers, and was...
elected to the Sardinian Parliament in 1849. He came to the United States in 1853 to study the common school system. A letter of introduction brought from Italy led to his first meeting with Anne, and they married on March 31, 1855. Vincenzo Botta became a well-known professor of Italian Literature at New York University, with a specialty in translations of Dante. The author of books and essays, he was a member of both the Nineteenth-Century Club and the prestigious Union League Club. Shortly after marrying, the Bottas left Washington Square in search of more space and a better location. “We have changed our residence within the last year,” Botta wrote Taylor in 1857, “and are now far uptown.” Their new home, near the crest of Murray Hill and at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and West Thirty-seventh Street, placed them at the height of fashion and at the epicenter of Manhattan’s economic, social, and cultural life.

MURRAY HILL 1856-1891

The Bottas’ home at 25 West Thirty-seventh Street was located in a neighborhood that was rising in popularity and prosperity by the mid-1850s. The Murray Hill neighborhood was bounded by Third Avenue on the east, Sixth Avenue on the west, Third Avenue on the north, and Waverly Place on the south. The neighborhood was known for its elegant mansions, fine shops, and restaurants. The Bottas’ home was located near the crest of Murray Hill, which was the highest point in Manhattan.

101 Before arriving in the United States, Botta was a professor at the Royal Colleges of Piedmont, an ex-member of the Subalpine Parliament, author of a book on Dante, a monograph on Cavour and other scholarly essays, and worked as a correspondent for several Italian papers. Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 174.
102 See Kate Field, “A Noble Woman,” in Botta, Memoirs, 140.
104 Kate Phillips, Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 80.
Thirty-second Street to the south, and Forty-fifth Street to the north. Brownstones and Italianate row houses intermingled with freestanding churches, estates, clubs, and manor houses that all dotted the streetscape, while maintaining an architectural uniformity that further reflected contemporary fashions. Murray Hill attracted high-class developers, and at mid-century it was considered progressive and cultured. The area was home to extravagant mansions owned by members of New York’s *nouveaux riches*, including department-store owner A.T. Stewart, and the Astor and Vanderbilt families.

When the Bottas moved to Murray Hill in 1856, the Presbyterian “Brick Church” at the end of their street, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and West Thirty-seventh, was under construction; it would soon become a neighborhood landmark. In 1857, work commenced on Central Park, which extended from Fifty-ninth Street to One hundred and tenth. The Crystal Palace was located on Fortieth Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues; the Grand Opera House, a massive white marble structure with a 2,000 seat theater, sat on the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Twenty-third Street and opened in 1867. The Metropolitan Opera House at Thirty-ninth Street, just a few blocks northwest of the Botta’s address, opened in 1883; by 1889, as James Grant Wilson noted three years later, it had the reputation of “the finest place of amusement in the

---


108 Ibid., 576.
city."  

Built and controlled by New York’s new elite, the Metropolitan Opera ultimately eclipsed the old Academy of Music—popular through the 1870s—forcing that theater to close in 1886.  

The newer institutions added cachet and social sophistication to Botta’s neighborhood, attracting wide audiences and signaling the advancement of cultural life in the city.

Botta’s friends and acquaintances described her Murray Hill home as “spacious, betokening wealth, refinement, and ample leisure.” It “was one of the large old-fashioned houses near Fifth Avenue,” recalled Sara Agnes Pryor, “with San Domingo mahogany doors, wide staircase, and four spacious rooms on each floor. There were tapestries on the walls, a few good pictures…wood fires, and fresh flowers every day.” By the time this house was built, architectural reformers such as Catharine Beecher were arguing for home designs that reflected the needs of the idealized family. The floor plan of Botta’s home aligned with these mid-century trends by isolating the bedrooms upstairs, relegating the kitchen, pantry, and workspaces to the basement and back of the house, and dividing the main floor into a front and back parlor with an extension dining room. It was a perfect layout for Botta, who now held her salons in the adjoining parlors of her five-story Italianate brownstone (Figure 1)

---


Upon entering the Botta’s home one passed through the hall, which extended the length of the house with its wide staircase, high ceilings, “interesting pictures . . . fragrant . . . with fresh flowers,” recalled Kate Sanborn. Running parallel to the hall were the living quarters, which were one room wide and three rooms deep. The two parlors and dining room on the main floor aligned in succession to create a vast entertainment space that allowed for activities such as dancing, singing, and recitals. The house was gracious yet intimate, luxurious and eclectic. Anna Leonowens, who visited the salon throughout the 1870s and 80s, recalled Botta’s raised first-story parlors with “their rich background of

---

**Figure 1:** First and second floor plan—1850s row house.  

![Floor Plan Diagram](image)

---


cabinets . . . covered with Venetian glass, mosaics, bronzes, [and] statues (some of which were the work of her own hands), the walls hung with shields and rare pictures,” while Lucia Runkle, also a Botta guest, remembered that the parlors were filled with photographs, as well as books “that overran the library and climbed the stairs to invade and take possession of all the undefended spaces.”117 Most of the guests who described the Thirty-seventh street interior took note of the unassuming décor and piles of books and art that adorned the walls, shelves, and stairs. Rarely did visitors draw attention to the design, or document any of the elaborate furnishings in detail, yet the objects they do mention hint at the Bottas’ wealth and refinement, while retaining the artistic character and tone of her Washington Square residences.118 The family’s bedrooms were on the third floor, the servants’ quarters on the fifth, and her art studio was between them on the fourth.119 Botta was discerning about whom she invited to her studio—“her own sanctum,” as Sanborn called it—“where chosen few were admitted,” but some of the most telling recollections of her home describe this workspace.120 Leonowens depicted it as an intimate, eclectic space filled with layers of ephemera and personal effects collected over time.

---

Leonowens was an American author and educator, most prominently known for the time she spent in Siam (modern Thailand), where she taught the wives and children of the king, Mongkut, from 1862-1868. Her experiences were fictionalized in Margaret Landon’s novel, Anna and the King of Siam (1944), and Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical, The King and I (1951).

118 According to one author who described Botta’s home in the 1880s, after Botta moved to West Thirty-seventh Street in 1856, she hardly updated the interior. For a detailed description see, ”Literary New York in the Eighties.” The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life 51, no. 1 (March 1920): 15.
119 The Bottas employed three live-in domestic servants according to both the 1860 and 1870 United States Federal Census. Botta had allocated a total of $2,500 to be paid in five equal parts at the time of her death in 1891 to selected friends and family members. In 1894, after Vincenzo Botta died, he left over $85,000 to various family members. Their house and the land on which it stood was valued minimally at $50,000. In sum, their estate would be worth over $3.5 million dollars today. “In the Matter of Proving the Last Will and Testament of Vincenzo Botta. Deceased. As a Will of Real and Personal Property,” Surrogate’s Court Records in the city and county of New York, October 10, 1894; “The Inflation Calculator,” accessed March 15, 2012. http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi.
120 Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 179-80.
Here one realized more fully the wonderful many-sidedness of her character . . . a long table . . . stood by the window; on the wall just about it were hung crayon portraits of herself and her husband, the work of Samuel Lawrence, an eminent artist of England . . . Some cases containing her favorite books ran along the wall . . . here there was nothing too fine, everything had the look of having been well used. On her table lay certain books, her constant companions and friends—Emerson, Herbert Spencer, George Eliot, Longfellow, Whittier, “Light of Asia,” Tennyson, Wordsworth, etc. In the drawers of her writing and study table were a series of blank books filled with choice and most exquisite extracts from all the great thinkers and teachers of the world . . . The walls of the studio were hung with all kinds of bas-reliefs, models, busts, statues, the mantelpiece crowded with pictures, paintings, photographs. The middle of the room was generally occupied with whatever bit of sculpture she happened to be working at.\textsuperscript{121}

While most of Botta’s invitees never crossed the threshold of this space, the sensibility of her studio infused the ambiance of her salon. The furnishings in her parlors communicated not only Botta’s experiences in the public world, but also pieces of her self-constructed identity.\textsuperscript{122} She combined public and private elements in her homes in ways that reinforced, benefited, and inspired the interactions she encouraged. Silent participants in her salon, the rooms’ décors reflected her artistic sensibility while communicating her place in an sophisticated and well-to-do neighborhood.

At about the time she moved to Murray Hill in 1856, Botta published \textit{The Handbook of Universal Literature}, a textbook intended for use in schools and universities.\textsuperscript{123} “This work was begun many years ago, as a literary exercise,” Botta explains in her introduction, “to meet the personal requirements of the writer which were such as most persons experience on leaving school and ‘completing their education’ . . .

The world of literature lies before them but where to begin, what course of study to

\textsuperscript{121} Leonowens, “A Tribute,” 110-11.
\textsuperscript{122} For more on the male and female division of space within the home, see Clark, \textit{The American Family Home}, 40.
\textsuperscript{123} For more on Botta’s interest in compiling \textit{The Handbook of Universal Literature} see Cheryl Walker, ed., \textit{American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 135.
[pursue], in order to best comprehend it, are the problems which present themselves to
the bewildered questioner, who finds himself in a position not unlike that of a traveller
suddenly set down in an unknown country, without guide-book or map."¹²⁴ Organized by
country, the textbook is a type of literary travelogue, intended to provide a contextual
overview of major authors and genres from around the world. Botta compiled several
texts into a single-volume anthology, addressing a vast collective of authors and works,
and spanning over a thousand years of literary history.¹²⁵ Although largely a compendium
of source material written by other scholars, some of the analysis was produced by Botta
herself; she explained that “where standard works have not been found, the sketches have
been made from the best sources of information, and submitted to the criticism of able
scholars.”¹²⁶ The textbook went through several editions and sold widely into the
twentieth century.¹²⁷

Botta’s Handbook allowed her to gain academic credibility, and to develop a
more cosmopolitan approach in her writing.¹²⁸ This “cosmopolitanism” grew from her
conviction that everything was interconnected and from her belief in the importance of
seeing the whole of a larger idea before analyzing the details. “The literatures of different
nations are so related, and have so influenced each other,” Botta explains in her
introduction, “that it is only by a survey of all, that any single literature, or even any great
literary work, can be fully comprehended.”¹²⁹ This conviction underpinned Botta’s

¹²⁴ Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta, Handbook of Universal Literature from the Best and Latest Authorities,
3rd ed. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), iii.
¹²⁵ The volume is organized into sections by country, including Persia, Spain, France, Italy, Rome, Egypt,
¹²⁶ Botta, Handbook of Universal Literature, iv.
¹²⁷ The text went through several editions and was revised and reprinted in 1890.
¹²⁸ Gruesz, “Feeling for the Fireside,” 56.
¹²⁹ Botta, Handbook of Universal Literature, iv.
commitment to fostering international cultural exchange, in turn animating her teaching, influencing her salon, and shaping her social interactions.\textsuperscript{130}

Botta pursued some of the most elevated of these interactions as a member of the intellectual and artistic clubs that emerged in New York during the latter half of the century.\textsuperscript{131} She was one of the founding members of the Wednesday Afternoon Club, an organization initially comprised of fifty women who were “prominent in the social and literary circles.”\textsuperscript{132} According to an article in the \textit{New York Times}, the “purpose of the club, which meets regularly Wednesday afternoons in the parlors of one of its members, is to rescue an hour or two each week from the multitudinous cares of social and domestic life which shall be devoted to the discussion of literary, economic, educational, and reformatory subjects.”\textsuperscript{133} Botta and her husband were also members of the Nineteenth-Century Club, a popular “debating society devoted to the discussion of social, literary, artistic, theological, and scientific problems in the spirit of the broadest

\textsuperscript{130} For more on Botta as a teacher, see Leonowens, “A Tribute,” 112. Botta instructed a few select children who took up residence in her home. There is record of her doing this as early as 1845, and well into the 1870s. Census records and correspondence point to students including, Sophie Congden Ewer, and Ida and Alice Cushman. Sisters, Ida (age 18) and Alice Cushman (age 16), are listed in the Botta 1870 census record.

\textsuperscript{131} Anne Botta was a member of the Sorosis Club—a women’s club with a political agenda—that met for the first time on March 2, 1868. Kate Field organized the club as a counterpart to the men’s Union League Club. For more on the Sorosis Club, see Gary Scharnhorst, \textit{Kate Field: The Many Lives of a Nineteenth-Century American Journalist}. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 56-7. Beginning in the antebellum period, many women devoted their spare time to charitable causes and benevolent societies. In keeping with established cultural standards they organized themselves within their local communities and churches. The American Civil War (1861-1865) served as a catalyst for widespread philanthropy, and these efforts grew in popularity in the latter half of the century. Botta pursued two large-scale projects in this vein. The first benefited the 1864 Metropolitan Sanitary Fair during the Civil War, and the other was to benefit victims of the Franco-Prussian War in 1872.


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. For more on musical women’s clubs throughout the second half of the nineteenth century see Broyles, “Art Music from 1860 to 1920, 227-32.
“Economic,” founded by Courtland Palmer in 1882. Botta was one of several vice presidents listed in a *New York Evangelist* article about the club dated January 1883.

The parallels between the Nineteenth-Century Club and Botta’s salon are striking. Under the motto, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” the club insisted that it did not intend to “promulgate any ‘ism,’ but rather to “discuss problems relating to religion, philosophy, industry, aesthetics, and society.” The club’s members and invited lecturers presented papers on music, poetry, art, and belles-lettres. The Nineteenth-Century Club met bi-monthly and within the first five years membership increased significantly; as the *New York Times* later reported, it “became the fashion in polite society to attend the club meetings.” By 1887, these gatherings were being held at the Metropolitan Opera House—a choice that situated the organization squarely in Murray Hill and aligned it with the social and cultural aims of New York’s *nouveaux riches*, who both financed and supported the Met. Highlighting the sophistication associated with the club, the *Times* reported: “At all the gatherings the brilliantly lighted rooms were crowded with men and women in fashionable attire.” The article publicizes the club as not only stylish, but also intelligent, diverse, and effective. The “discussions involved every presentable topic. Society was readjusted, difficult theological problems were solved more or less to the satisfaction for the stray theologians present, the weightiest questions of modern science were heroically grappled with, the rules of art criticism were reformulated, and the needs of authors (and of readers as well)

135 For a list of the club’s vice presidents see ibid. See also “The Nineteenth Century Club,” *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts*. (December 8, 1888), 258.
were set forth with candor and fairness . . . . There is no question that the Nineteenth Century Club has done good work. Of any social movement that encourages people to think for themselves that may be said.”

As part of elite urban life in New York, the clubs of the late nineteenth century gradually replaced the casual, ad-hoc literary salons that existed during the antebellum years. Botta’s salon, however, endured, perhaps because of the ways in which its activities mirrored those of the clubs, involving many of the same people–Nineteenth-Century Club President Courtland Palmer among them—and because of its devotion to advancing the same intellectual ideals.

**BOTTA’S MUSICAL BACKGROUND**

Anne Botta was a professional writer, a trained artist, and an amateur dancer and singer, and these skills contributed to both her public and private identities. Fanny Garrison Villard knew her as “a poetess, sculptress and singer,” while others identified her more broadly as a patroness of the arts. For Botta, each of the fine arts served as a personal mode of expression, and collectively they defined her *conversazione*.

Botta studied visual art in the 1830s while still a student at the Albany Female Academy. Throughout her life, she worked as a painter and as a sculptor; “she made portrait busts...that really were like the subjects,” attested Kate Sanborn, “with occasionally an inspired success and that without any teaching. She showed genius in this work.”

---

visual art beyond her education in Albany, but she displayed some of her work throughout her home, and several of her pieces gained recognition among members of her circle. Botta found solace in creating art that functioned as a personal rather than public expression.

Unlike her art, which was largely private, music occupied Botta’s social landscape and she capitalized on its performative qualities. She did not formally study music, and the expectations surrounding its place and performance in her salon reflected her amateur status. As a nineteenth-century New Yorker, however, her familiarity with music would have been strong; she likely heard music every day—on the streets of the city, in concerts, and at social events. She used musical metaphors and references in her poems, essays, and letters, and maintained friendships with composers and performers.¹⁴³ She understood music’s significance to her salon from the dual perspectives of hostess and guest, and cultivated a stimulating and diverse musical landscape that mixed invited professional performances, informal singing of parlor ballads, and dancing. She was a regular and accomplished participant in these activities; her long-time acquaintance N.P. Willis once offered the praise of “[g]reat compliments all round at your dancing last night. The poplin… & al. you [move] all of them satisfactory.”¹⁴⁴

Botta’s dancing was not confined to her salon. In July 1850, she and Grace Greenwood attended a reception at the National Hotel in Washington D.C. “We had music, we had dancing!” Greenwood later enthused. “Senators, Judges and Generals chasséed and dos-a-dosed with belles and blues in blissful forgetfulness of all the cares

¹⁴⁴ N.P. Willis to Anne Botta, n.d., Nathaniel Parker Willis Collection, Special Collections, University of Virginia.
and dignities of States . . . We had laughing and jesting over ices—we had tête-a-têtes in window-seats, and promenades along piazzas—all the usual concomitants of a pleasant evening party.”

In the convivial scene that Greenwood described, she singled out the quadrille for special mention and referred to two of its steps—“chassée” and “dos-a-dos.”

Although several women hosted this reception, Botta, according to Greenwood, “seemed the presiding genius . . . she was a host as well as a hostess...in the ease, gaiety and kindliness of her manner.”

In 1852 Botta and Greenwood attended another Washington assembly and this time Greenwood singled out the “the polka [which] was then fashionable,” having noted that Botta “was very fond of it . . . dancing lightly, gracefully, and untiringly, with a refined enjoyment delightful to see.”

These accounts reveal a side of Botta’s character—entertaining, sociable, and sophisticated—that must have been a factor in setting the tone of her salon.

Because we have so little information about the music performances and practices at Botta’s salon, the musical details about events in which we know she participated provide us with a more informed notion of the repertoire that may have been heard in her parlors.

One of the best examples we have comes from Botta’s close friend Ellen Osgood, who recalled a New Year’s party the two women attended around 1850 at a

---

148 Grace Greenwood, “A Loving Tribute,” 44.
149 For more on home music making in the parlor setting, see Preston, “Music in the McKissick Parlor,” in Slobin, *Emily’s Songbook*, 14-5. Also, for information regarding Botta’s desire for music at an 1850 gathering she hosted in her West Ninth Street home, see Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta to Mr. [likely Evert A.] Duyckinck, letter dated Thursday [July] 5th, [1849] Duyckinck Family Papers. Box 11: Duyckinck Collection, Literary Correspondence Lynch, Anne Charlotte. New York Public Library.
private residence near Botta’s home in Washington Square. As Osgood later explained to her daughter, the evening’s entertainment included “good conversation and some music . . . Mrs. H. played the harp, and Anna Lynch . . . recited one of her own poems.” Osgood had studied piano and voice as a girl, and according to her daughter, she “had always been asked to sing. So on this particular evening . . . she sang and accompanied herself without notes,”

“She Wore a Wreath of Roses,” “[Wha’ll] be King but Charlie,” “[“Jock O’Hazeldean”] “The Bell at Sea,” Roy’s Wife of [Aldivalloch],” [and] “We are Coming, Sister Mary,” followed each other in quick succession. Then when she had spoken to Anna Lynch who stood behind her, they sang the duet, “I Know a Bank Where the Wild Thyme Blows. Miss Lynch taking the alto.”

Although many of these songs date from the early decades of the century, Osgood aligned this performance with fashionable mid-century parties at home. Nearly all of the song texts capitalize on popular themes of sentimentality, nostalgia, and longing, and Osgood’s selections, “Wha’ll be King but Charlie,” “Jock O’Hazeldean,” and “Roy’s Wife of Aldivalloch” all speak to the period’s captivation with Scotch folk ballads.

Typical of this style, “Wha’ll be King but Charlie,” was published in 1826 and includes a text by Sir Walter Scott that was written phonetically to imitate a Scotch dialect. Arpeggiated chords accompany the lilting 6/8 melody, and the vocal line—spanning an octave and a half—is framed by a short piano introduction and postlude. Nearly all seven songs are set to accessible, tuneful melodies, in strophic form, with a relatively simple piano accompaniment.

---

151 Ibid. The author slightly misremembered the pieces she performed. In the original text Wright recorded “Who Shall be King but Charlie,” “Jack O’Hazeldene,” “The Bell at Sea,” and “Roy’s Wife of Aldevalloch.” Ibid.
In keeping with this amateur tradition, “I Know a Bank,” the duet performed by Botta and Osgood, was written by John Barnet for two unspecified treble voices and piano. Yet unlike the other songs listed in Osgood’s account, this ballad is through composed, and Barnet assigned one line of text from Shakespeare’s play, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, to each of the three melodic sections. Unconventional harmonies and voice-leading, and unexpected accidentals, mordents, trills, tempo markings, and melismas seem to have been haphazardly added to the score. The piano part is not especially idiomatic, and the treble duet is dominated by voice crossing, and harmonies, including alternating major and minor thirds and major seconds (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** John Barnet, “I Know a Bank” mm. 75-81

“I Know a Bank,” and the other songs listed in Wright’s account speak to the amateur parlor tradition, situating Botta as a participant in this musical practice.
In the area of professional musical performances and traditions, Botta, like many New Yorkers of her social station, attended the opera. One of the most important musical contacts she developed was with Maurice Strakosch, who arrived in the United States in the spring of 1848 and toured as a pianist, composer, and manager of concert troupes and opera companies that included Amalia and Adelina Patti, and Ole Bull. Along with Bernard Ullman and Max Maretzek, Strakosch, who managed Patti and opera stars Italo Campanini and Christine Nilsson, dominated Italian opera performance and management in the United States throughout the 1850s. Botta moved quickly to invite Strakosh to her salon. “I am going to have a tea party (don’t faint) tomorrow evening,” Botta wrote Bayard Taylor in November 1848, a few months after Strakosch’s arrival in New York “I hope Mr Strakosh [sic] [will be] in town to come.” Strakosh did come to the salon, and became one of its most important musical figures, and facilitated performances by his stars in Botta’s parlors.

Beyond the personal relationships she cultivated with singers via her salon, Botta’s connections to the New York opera scene were multifaceted. An admirer,
patron, and promoter of the art, in each of these roles she was connected to different dimensions of opera. As a devotee, she, like many upper-class New Yorkers, viewed opera-going as a fashionable pastime. As a philanthropic patron, she invested in the city’s burgeoning cultural life. As a promoter of the art in her salon, she provided a space that facilitated a cultural dialogue involving artists, performers, managers, and critics. Finally, her personal relationships with opera stars brought artistic credibility and a sensibility of sophistication to her salon, soundly positioning her as an active member of New York’s cultural aristocracy.

In sum, Botta followed her own artistic pursuits, and invested in the arts by encouraging, presenting, and fostering them in her salon. “If not gifted with special genius for any one of the fine arts,” recalled Leonowens of Botta in 1894, “she certainly possessed a passionate love of abstract beauty for its own sake and an ardent desire to express herself through several forms of art, as her paintings, sculptures, poems and other writings . . . show.”

CONCLUSION

Botta was a product of the world she inhabited. Her education, travels, interests, career, and social class collectively shaped her sensibility, and each of these factors was reflected or embodied in her salon. Her gatherings served as extensions of her personality and were fueled by her intellectual curiosity and personal connection to the arts and education. Over decades, they saw discussion of ideas and fashions, and provided cultural snapshots of New York life. But at the core of Botta’s salon was a conversation about


157 Leonowens,“A Tribute,” 111-12.
American culture, and a desire to advance the arts in New York City—a “rich, crude, unthinking community,” as author and Botta’s acquaintance, Lucia G. Runkle once described it, “not cosmopolitan, not even of an interesting heterogeneousness.”\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{158} Runkle, “A Beautiful Life,” 88.
CHAPTER 2
Botta’s Salon and the Concept of Conversazione

Botta’s *conversazione* were fixed moments in history, nearly always colored by some form of historical distance. Even while they were happening, they included nods to the past—most often to eighteenth-century France—which influenced contemporary perceptions and framed the salon’s sensibility.158 These nostalgic conceptions fed her *conversazione*’s stylish image, subsequently adding to its popularity and longevity. Despite the historical distance that has consistently separated the documentation from the event itself, the fashionable aura attributed to Botta’s salon has persisted. The sophistication of Botta’s *conversazione* and the literati who attended them remains tangible thanks to evidence provided in her guests’ personal writings and published works, and in commentary that appeared in the popular press. Botta crafted a multi-faceted persona that facilitated a multi-dimensional salon, ultimately creating an image that could be interpreted in ways that suggested that her gatherings could offer all things to all people. The multiplicities of her salon were extolled in popular magazines, particularly in the very popular *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, which featured articles about her, poems written by her, and fashion plates that alluded to her.

In January 1837, Sarah Josepha Hale joined Louis A. Godey as co-editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a Philadelphia-based women’s magazine that had been in

---

circulation since 1830. The publication had a sizeable audience that included nearly 10,000 subscribers by 1837, but once Godey added Hale to the staff, his magazine’s popularity skyrocketed. By 1851, subscription numbers had quadrupled, and at the height of its popularity in 1861 the monthly magazine had 150,000 subscribers with an estimated readership of an astonishing one million. Targeting middle-class women, Godey’s was sold at a cost of $3.00 a year and each issue—as fashionable as it was popular—included a piece of original sheet music and a full page of colored fashion plates.

By combining fashion, fiction, and nonfiction into a monthly format for the purposes of amusement and instruction, Hale instituted the American women’s magazine, inaugurating an archetype still in place today. She commissioned poetry, along with articles on women’s health, education, employment, and domestic life from prominent American writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and Edgar Allan Poe. With a rotating cast of authors each month, Godey’s was in fact a written forum that in many ways paralleled the Botta salon. Some of the


162 $3.00 in 1851 is equivalent to about $78.00 today. “The Inflation Calucator,” accessed March 15, 2012, http://www.westegg.com/inflation/. Godey’s indicated only that the fashion plates were “Americanized,” usually taken directly from contemporary Parisian fashions. Occasionally, references were made to the “latest Paris fashions,” yet neither the artist nor the original source was cited.

country’s most prominent authors filled both *Godey’s* pages and Botta’s parlors alongside others whose names were unknown. Parlor ballads, poetry, paintings, and fiction provided the entertainment, while articles and editorials provided the conversation. And as fashions changed over four consecutive decades, both *Godey’s* magazine and Botta’s salon remained emblematic of contemporary trends, reflecting and influencing ideals, and cultivating taste.

Botta’s early affiliation with *Godey’s* remained part of her identity for the rest of her career, to the extent that for some, this association served as a reminder of their childhood. Botta’s salon guest Andrew D. White, for example, recalled that his earliest encounter with her came through the magazine in the 1840s; fifty years later Botta remained part of “the pleasantest recollections of [his] boyhood. In those days,” he explained, “when there was little American literature, a new poem or story brought joy to very many families throughout the country; I recall vividly the days when ‘Graham’s Magazine’ and ‘Godey’s Lady’s Book’ arrived and were laid on my mother’s table. Among the greatest attractions in them to her and to me were Miss Anne C. Lynch’s sketches and poems. There was in them a purity, a sweetness, a kindliness which seemed to bring into the house a benediction, and in my country home, far from the city in which she lived, she became one of the objects of my especial admiration.”

As White attests, by the 1840s Botta belonged to a group of young American writers who published in newspapers and magazines that, in addition to *Godey’s* and

*Graham’s Magazine, included The Southern Literary Messenger, The Atlantic*

164 Andrew D. White, “Recollections,” in *Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta, Written by Her Friends with Selections from her Correspondence and from Her Writings in Prose and Poetry*, ed. Vincenzo Botta (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894), 60.
Monthly, and the New York Tribune.¹⁶⁵ This group of authors, intent on promoting American literature, aimed to identify, cultivate, and define an American cultural identity. As Godey’s editor, Hale promoted many of these writers, hiring them as contributors and publishing articles that acquainted readers with multiple dimensions of their work. Godey’s reported in 1845 that “an eminent lady, and one well known in the literary circles of this country,” was about to visit Great Britain and intended to send four letters to be printed in the “Foreign Correspondence” column.¹⁶⁶ Later that year, contributor John Ross Dix wrote an entire article chronicling an evening he spent “in the society of some noticeable literary folks,” noting “how different, both in person and in conversation” most of them were “from the imaginary individuals whose pictures had been painted in our image chambers.”¹⁶⁷ Dix named some of these poets and writers specifically, and described their personalities and topics of conversation. By including these articles, Hale both promoted her authors and educated her readers, while welcoming them into Godey’s printed literary circle.

Hale further engaged her audience with the lives of literary women—and occasionally men—via the iconic fashion plates that appeared in her magazine. Appearing at the front of the January 1845 issue, for example, is a plate titled “The Soirée” (Figure 3).¹⁶⁸ The detailed scene features a small crowd of mixed company: a young woman plays the piano while a second sings beside her; a man and a woman look on, while another couple flirtatiously engages in their own conversation, next to another pair who appear to be discussing something more intellectual. Set against a

¹⁶⁵ For example, see Anne Lynch, “Sonnet,” Godey’s Lady’s Book (October, 1848): 208.
¹⁶⁶ “Editors’ Book Table,” Godey’s Lady’s Book (October 1845), 180.
¹⁶⁷ John Ross Dix, “Prosings about Poets,” Godey’s Lady’s Book (December 1845), 237.
rich, stylish, and detailed background, all eight of the guests model the season’s latest fashions; oriented to highlight their clothing.

**Figure 3.** “The Soirée,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1845

Both the image and its title conjure a literary salon, and the stylized ideal connects the soirée’s guests to contemporary fashions in dress—a suggested cultural sophistication that was similarly attached to Botta and her salon, lasting well into the twentieth century.

In Hervey Allen’s 1927 biography of Edgar Allen Poe, he described Botta’s guests as they arrived in her parlors, drawing attention to the fashionability of her gatherings.169 “Thither came the ladies of the *literati,*” he began, “in hoopskirts, and ostrich plumes, head-dresses, hair parted in the middle with thick water curls, or with heavy looped and taffy-like coiffures . . . . The gentlemen arrived in stove-pipe hats,

---

169 See also Mortimer Smith, “That was New York: Anne Lynch’s Salon,” *The New Yorker* (September 12, 1936), 64-73.
black cloaks, and shawls.”170 Highlighting both the men’s and women’s attire, and echoing the terminology and detail found throughout Godey’s mid-century fashion plates, Allen’s text reads like a primary source account. Although a center part was consistent with women’s hairstyles throughout the nineteenth century and could point to any decade, the “thick water curls . . . [and] heavy looped and taffy-like coiffures” however, appear on Godey’s pages in the 1840s. As depicted in the illustration below (Figure 4), one model wears a hairstyle of spaniel curls framing the face (at left) and another has braided or twisted pieces that loop in front of the ear and back to the knot worn at the back of the head (at right).171

Figure 4. Godey’s Lady’s Book, October 1848

171 Godey’s Lady’s Book (October 1848), n.p.
A later plate from *Godey’s* July 1864 issue however, captures more of the detail in Allen’s account. Portrayed with tiny feet, hands, waists, and facial features, these women exemplify period standards of beauty, yet anachronistically depict Allen’s 1840s description in the 1860s (Figure 5). Two of the models wear hats trimmed with ostrich feathers, while two others wear elaborate hairstyles paired with headdresses decorated with ribbons and flowers. All five women wear wide skirts supported by a cage crinoline, better known as hoopskirt, which would not have been worn at the time that Edgar Allan Poe, the focus of Allen’s book and subject of his discussion, attended Botta’s Waverly Place salons during the mid-late 1840s. Poe died in 1849, six years before the cage crinoline—now emblematic of nineteenth-century women’s fashion—had reached common acceptance in America.

**Figure 5.** “Godey’s Fashions for July 1864,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*
As for the men, while it is difficult to locate relevant illustrations in *Godey’s*, the stovepipe hats and frock coat Allen described are featured in an illustration printed in the Parisian *Journal des Tailleurs* in 1853 (Figure 6). This plate no doubt represented the general fashions of the day, but it is remarkable to compare the figures in the illustration to a daguerreotype taken around 1855 by Mathew Brady, in which Botta’s longtime acquaintance, salon guest, and noted dandy N.P. Willis strikes the same pose as the man depicted to the right of the plate. In a second daguerreotype taken by Brady in 1857, Willis wears a cloak likely similar to the one Allen referenced (Figure 7).  

**Figure 6. Journal des Tailleurs, November 1853**

---

In Allen’s conception, Botta’s guests wore clothes that mirrored the idealized fashions found in *Godey’s* and other popular fashion magazines, bringing polish and style to her parlors. By staging some of the lingering perceptions associated with the Botta salon, Allen elevated them by painting them as *events*, worthy of a more sophisticated style. In fact, in the 1949 reprint of his Poe biography, Allen included a *Godey’s* plate that he titled “Fashions of the Literati” (Figure 8); yet, nowhere in the original source is this label attributed to the plate.175

For Allen, these two women pose as members of a trendy literary circle, while modeling the season’s latest fashions. The woman on the left holds a book and appears to read aloud—a common parlor pastime—while the woman seated before her listens passively. Although few outstanding details connect these figures exclusively to a literary gathering, Allen conceptualized of the literati as stylish and even idyllic by retrospectively attaching this falsified title more than a century later.

While Allen’s description and the *Godey’s* plates portray an anonymous and stylized ideal of the literary woman, the magazine’s prose and poetry presented a distinctly different perspective. In 1846 *Godey’s* commissioned Edgar Allen Poe to write a series of articles about his New York colleagues. The resulting work, serialized in six parts and called “The Literati of New York,” appeared in the May through October issues that year. In the series, Poe identified thirty-seven authors by name, and in his introduction explained that he was to give “some honest opinions at
random respecting their authorial merits, with occasional words of personality.”176 As one of the chosen thirty-eight, Botta’s profile appeared in the September issue. Riding the popularity of both her earlier publications and her Washington Square gatherings, Botta was already attracting national attention, even though her Manhattan salon was less than a year old.

Poe used the Godey’s “Literati” series to provide his “Honest Opinions” about many of his subjects. He sardonically attacked most of his subjects, using what historian Leonard Cassuto called “a needling tone of arch and ironic judgment,” but Poe limited himself to dismissive remarks a when he wrote of Botta.177 “Miss Anne Charlotte Lynch has written little,” he began, “her compositions are even too few to be collected in volume form . . . . In poetry, however, she has done better, and given evidence of at least unusual talent. Some of her compositions in this way are of merit, and one or two of excellence.”178 Following a convoluted discussion of the passion and expression found in Botta’s poetry, Poe concluded her profile by offering little more than a character study and a physical description.

In character [Botta] is enthusiastic, chivalric, self-sacrificing, equal to any fate, capable of even martyrdom in whatever should seem to her a holy cause—a most exemplary daughter. She has her hobbies, however, (of which a very indefinite idea of “duty” is one,) and is, of course, readily imposed upon by any artful person who perceives and takes advantage of this most amiable failing. In person she is rather above the usual height, somewhat slender, with dark hair and eyes—the whole countenance at times full of intelligent expression. Her demeanor is dignified, graceful, and noticeable for repose…179

---

179 Ibid., 133.
Poe focused on Botta’s personality—her generosity, benevolence, and energy—without any real discussion of her salon. Yet, of all the authors Poe described, a vast majority of them (including Poe himself), were affiliated with Botta’s circle.\(^\text{180}\) While everyone else who wrote about Botta also wrote about her weekly “at homes,” Poe overlooked them except to say, “She goes much into literary society.”\(^\text{181}\) Poe’s article notwithstanding, by 1846 people in Manhattan knew Botta as a salon hostess, and thanks to *Godey’s*, people in cities across the country knew her as a poet and an author, as fashionable as she was popular.

**GODEY’S, BOTTA, AND THE IDEAL WOMAN**

In the four decades that Sarah Josepha Hale served as *Godey’s* editor, she became the “revered expert on the woman's sphere.”\(^\text{182}\) Each month, *Godey’s* presented and reinforced the ideologies of “True Womanhood,” an antebellum conception that dominated social ideals through the end of the century.\(^\text{183}\) The attributes of True Womanhood, as Barbara Welter has explained, were piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity, and by striving to attain these qualities some nineteenth-century women felt this would ensure their happiness and afford opportunities to assert their authority or power. In addition, these four qualities

---

\(^{180}\) For a brief discussion of the politics surrounding Poe and the salons in the 1840s, see Smith, “That was New York: Anne Lynch’s Salon,” 67.

\(^{181}\) Poe, “The Literati of New York,” 133.


collectively created an ideal that complied with women’s roles as a daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers.184

Many nineteenth-century Americans viewed women as innate nurturers and society’s moralizing force, while they considered men to be guardians and leaders with inherent analytical aptitude.185 They divided their environment into two separate spheres—the public male sphere and the domestic female sphere—each with its own rules of etiquette based on gender and the type of activity taking place. Each month Godey’s showed women how to uphold the tenets of True Womanhood within the female sphere: what to wear, what to cook, what to read; how to dress their children, husbands, and home; how to act and how to better themselves. Hale aligned Botta with the Godey’s mission not only by publishing her work and making her part of the domestic consciousness, but also by promoting her fashionability through her associations with American literary circles. Beyond Godey’s, Botta’s colleagues added to her public image by portraying her as the model daughter, sister, wife, and mother: domestic, pious, pure, and submissive.186 By addressing different aspects of Botta’s persona, these commentators in sum projected onto her a public identity. A public understanding of Botta’s femininity added to her popularity and appeal in

---

185 Botta herself constructed a distinctly female identity through her writings. For more on this topic see Gruesz, “Feeling for the Fireside,” 43-63.
186 Botta’s friends portrayed her as the ideal daughter, sister, wife, and mother by highlighting her contributions in each of these roles. Botta cared for her widowed and aging mother, Charlotte Gray Lynch, beginning in 1845. Gray moved to New York City in 1845 with her daughter, and remained a member of the Botta household until her death in 1874. After Botta’s brother, Thomas Lynch, died in 1845, she adopted his son. She married in 1855, and without any biological children of her own, Botta’s biographers cast her nephew, grandnephew, and students into this role. Also, an 1889 Current Literature article declared, “The Bottas have no children save the manifold offspring of their brilliant minds.” See “Article 10—No Title,” Current Literature 2, no. 1 (January, 1889): 10. See also Laurel Ann Lofsvold, Fredrika Bremer and the Writing of America, (Sweden, Lund University Press, 1999), 74-5.
much the same way P.T. Barnum marketed and then capitalized on Jenny Lind as the embodiment of the feminine ideal at mid-century. In fact, some of Botta’s acquaintances compared her to Lind who was widely accepted as a period standard. “I was impressed with the force of her personality,” remarked Juliet Goodwin of Botta, “in appearance she seemed to me to resemble Jenny Lind, partly, perhaps, from the contour of her head and the way of wearing her hair.” In reality, Botta and Lind looked nothing alike, but in character, aspects of their public image bore a striking resemblance, and shared a stylized identity constructed on the four principles of True Womanhood.

Botta’s acquaintances highlighted her domesticity with references to her hospitality, recipes, trips to the market, and details about her home; Kate Sanborn even called her the “perfect housekeeper.” On the quality of submission, friends characterized her as having a commanding yet “quiet, reserved, and modest,” presence, with a gentle voice, manner, and smile that showed the “utmost purity.” Sanborn also reported that of her salon Botta remarked, “I never made much of a point of it; it was natural and I liked it.” And despite her residences in upper-class neighborhoods and her presence in fashion magazines such as Godey’s, Botta asserted that she “was not fashionable, nor rich,” and that ‘literary people’ were simply her

---

187 For more on Jenny Lind’s time in America, see Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41-74.
188 Juliet Goodwin, “One of the Fine Souls,” in Botta, *Memoirs*, 95. Likewise, Botta’s close friend Swedish author, Fredrika Bremer once described Botta: “The little poetess Miss Lynch was among the morning’s visitors whose face and glance remind one of Jenny Lind.” Quoted in Lofsvold, *Fredrika Bremer*, 30. See this source for more primary source accounts and descriptions of Botta and other women authors in her circle.
191 Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 170.
‘companions.””192 Many friends understood Botta’s purity to stem from a virtuous heart, character, and spirit, and attributed the quality of purity to her poetry, referring to the topics she chose and her manner of expression.193 Of the four tenets of True Womanhood, however, it was piety that people perceived most profoundly in Botta, evident in her acts of benevolence. Anna Leonowens, for example, wrote of one orphaned girl taken in by Botta, who was so impressed with her benefactor’s kindness that she compared her to the mother of God, claiming that she was “great enough to have been an inspired prophetess of olden times, and tender enough to have been the mother of our dear Saviour.”194 Leonowens evoked religious images to describe Botta, but this persona—however pious, pure, and kind—was also multi-dimensional. Although some crafted Botta’s public image in ways that align with Welter’s True Womanhood ideal, others considered Botta the ideal woman using criteria that points to what historian Frances Cogan identifies as Real Womanhood.

Cogan argues that in the United States between 1840 and 1880, this ideology co-existed alongside True Womanhood, and each operated within their own separate sphere.195 Real Women adopted a philosophy that advocated for intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage: in sum, qualities that supported what Cogan identifies as a “survival ethic.”196 This “popular middle-of-the-road image” promoted several early feminist issues while placing equal emphasis on maintaining nineteenth-century conceptions of feminity.197

192 Ibid.
196 Ibid., 4.
197 Ibid.
Within this construction, women were viewed as biologically equal to men—both rationally and emotionally.\textsuperscript{198} Real Women considered themselves important to family and society, and believed that it was necessary to not only strive to be good daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, but also to pursue educational opportunities, physical health, and self-reliance.\textsuperscript{199}

In keeping with this ideology, Botta’s acquaintances often couched discussions of her aptitude and analytical skill by setting her “male intellect” in balance with “her intuitive female sensibility.”\textsuperscript{200} Her friend Wallace Wood, for example, labeled her a “historian,” a title that for some members of the nineteenth-century middle and upper classes generally held more masculine connotations. Wood, however, immediately countered this characterization by detailing Botta’s involvement with the fine arts and benevolence, family and friends, stating that of Botta “it must be written down that she was historian, poet, sculptor, philanthropist, as well as wife, friend and social leader.”\textsuperscript{201} Wood later defended Botta’s intellect and femininity by carefully choosing language that enhanced her attributes without compromising either identity. “In familiar acquaintance with our dear Mrs. Botta,” he wrote, “how surely do we find the refutation of the idea that greatness of mind in woman may endanger that sacred femininity which in all society is so highly prized. She was womanly—more, she was intensely feminine: anti-masculine, so to speak—a dainty being, a creature of rose-leaves and laces.”\textsuperscript{202}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Gruesz, “Feeling for the Fireside” 47.
\textsuperscript{201} Dr. Wallace Wood, “A Perfect Woman,” in Botta, Memoirs, 158-59.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 161.
\end{flushleft}
a balance between the gendered attributes he perceived of in Botta, Wood set her intelligence against the physical ideals like those modeled in a *Godey’s* fashion plate.

Likewise, those who knew Botta also perceived the masculine/feminine characteristics in her personality as complements to one another; for example, Leonowens once described Botta’s “slight graceful figure,” and “broad masculine brow, on which will, energy, thought, and intellect seemed to have stamped themselves.” Although she was characterized as one version of the feminine ideal, the strength and intellect ascribed to nineteenth-century masculinity added credibility and depth to her character, her salon, and her art. Of her sculptures, Edwin Elwell noted that, “[s]everal of Mrs. Botta’s busts are masculine in their touch, and have a poetical quality.” Botta’s command of the piece was understood to have complemented its female elegance.

Period perceptions of these masculine personality traits added to Botta’s success and ultimately served her femininity, elevating her to the role of “ideal hostess.” The nineteenth-century expectation was that women—both Real and True—knew how to entertain, and to entertain well, required careful study, practice, and talent. Botta had command of all three. The masculine qualities she appropriated, the “will, energy, thought, and intellect” that Leonowens identified, empowered Botta in the role of hostess and added depth and credibility to her gatherings. Above all, she astutely crafted an image that ultimately meant many different things to many different people.

For those who knew Botta’s salon, it was not an exclusive women’s club that emphasized domestic life and social status.\textsuperscript{205} Rather, by conflating constructions of male and female identities, in a space that collapsed the male and female spheres, Botta’s \textit{conversazione} fostered higher-level thought and intellectual ideas alongside sociability and compassion. The buzz generated through published articles and fashion plates—in large part due to \textit{Godey’s}—made Botta a social and literary celebrity. This constructed identity further incorporated an aura of accessibility that fueled her salon’s popularity during its forty-six year run. Above all, it remained a constant by evolving and adapting with the changing space it inhabited.

**EUROPEAN CULTURE IN AMERICA**

Between 1840 and 1860, New Yorkers witnessed significant cultural and technological changes that ultimately influenced city life for decades.\textsuperscript{206} The industrial revolution produced a middle class that had more leisure time and a surplus of spending money, and new technologies supported infrastructures that moved both people and information faster than ever before. New Yorkers took advantage of the new print media and travel opportunities, and many pursued their interests in European culture and history.\textsuperscript{207} As Botta wrote to her husband in 1865, “You Europeans can never know what a charm the Old World has for us, who have no antiquity, no romance, and so short a history (though in every other aspect [we are]  

\textsuperscript{205} See also Eliza Richards, \textit{Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe’s Circle} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.  
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid. See also “Going Abroad,” \textit{Putnam’s Magazine: Original Papers on Literature, Science, Art and National Interests} 1, no. 5 (May, 1868): 530-538.
the greatest people the world ever saw).” America’s fascination with European culture took on several forms, each revolving around the circulation of language, people, and ideas.

American writers distributed foreign vocabulary into paper media across the country and some people, such as writer Charles Caleb Colton, found this off-putting. “It is . . . a piece of pedantry to introduce foreign words into our language,” he complained, “when we have terms of legitimate English origin, that express all that these exotics convey, with the advantage of being intelligible to every one. For foreign sounds, like foreign servants, ought not to be introduced to the disadvantage of the natives, until these are found unworthy of trust.” Despite Colton’s frustration, writers whose works were published in newspapers and magazines used foreign terms in stories, poems, and non-fiction features throughout the nineteenth century. So popular was this trend that some English dictionaries contained separate sections devoted to translations of commonly used words. Editors and authors compiled entire books devoted to translations that included contextual examples and a practical application of the phrase in question. In 1860, for example, Madeline Leslie published a single volume pocket manual that translated words and phrases from Italian, French, Latin, Spanish, German, and Greek to English. In the preface she explained that since the “present age was essentially a reading age,” and “every one [wished] to understand what he [read],” it was unfortunate that so many were “frequently at a stand-still, in consequence of the classical and foreign words,

208 Anne C.L. Botta to Vincenzo Botta, March, 1865, in Botta, Memoirs, 282.
209 Charles Caleb Colton, Lacon: or Many Things in Few Words, Addressed to Those Who Think (New York: Charles Wells, 1832), 181-2.
phrases, and quotations” they encountered. In her dictionary, Leslie aimed to assist a wide audience by meeting “the wants of the industrious and well-conducted mechanic—the man of business who has but little time for study—and by no means an inconsiderable portion of the higher grades of society, is the object of the work now offered to the public.” She translated 2,018 foreign words and phrases in this book, intending for it to serve as both a timesaver and a tool for those wishing to improve their knowledge through reading. As one of many, the publication of books like this suggests a considerable international exchange owed to the middle-class fascination with not only Europe, but also self-education; thus creating a market for international ideas.

Meanwhile, in the 1830s, waves of Young Americans, including writers Nathaniel Parker Willis and Ralph Waldo Emerson and artist George Healey, sailed to Paris looking for educational opportunities and experiences they did not have access to at home. Each of these men, after averaging about a month at sea, arrived in Paris without knowledge of the language, connections, or a sense of how to navigate the city. Once in France, they stayed for months at a time, taking in the culture, food, art, architecture, and music. And after they returned to the United States, these travelers shared what they had learned through printed media, academic clubs, and salons like Botta’s. Some of these writers also worked as travel correspondents, and their articles appeared in newspapers, such as the New York _Mirror_.

---

211 Ibid.
213 In 1831, twenty-five-year-old N. P. Willis left for Paris and worked as a correspondent for the *New-York Mirror*. His assignment while in France was “to provide a series of ‘letters’ describing his travels abroad.” Ibid.
Tribune and the New York Mirror, and magazines including Godey’s, which regularly highlighted French cultural life. Godey’s Table of Contents reveal an assumed familiarity with the French expressions that appeared in articles and stories, in addition to fictional accounts of incidents that took place in France.214

Along with prose and poetry, Godey’s and other fashion magazines copied plates straight from Parisian sources, changing little beyond the setting or color palette. Articles such as “Woman’s Influence in France—extracts from a work by Monsieur Emile Girardin, De l’Instruction Publique en France, Guide des Familles, from the September 1854 issue, appeared alongside columns such as “Paris Gossip,” from the October and November issues that same year.215 William Asbury Kenyon, an itinerant tailor and self-proclaimed “prairie poet,” for example, translated three of Lamartine’s poems—“Papillon, La Branche d’Amandier, and Isolement”—for Godey’s in 1849 and 1854.216 Works by French writers, including Alphonse de Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and François-René de Chateaubriand, appeared both on American bookshelves and on newsstands, and Godey’s advertised the novels by these authors.217 The magazine also encouraged correspondence between American subscribers and their presumed acquaintances overseas. So much so that the October

217 French novels popular among American audiences in the nineteenth century include: Corinne (1857) by Mme de Staël; René and Atala, first published in 1802 as part of Génie du christianisme by Chateaubriand. See ibid.
1854 “Editor’s Table,” column printed the following advice: “How to Save Postage—
A letter sent from the United States to any place in France is invariably charged with
double postage when inclosed [sic] in an envelope. The fact should be remembered
by those writing to their friends in that country. In order to save postage, letters
should be written very close on good thin paper, and directed without and
envelope.”

Godey’s captivated the American imagination by making French
history, culture, and fashion both accessible and relevant to its readers. In searching
for ways to cultivate the fine arts in antebellum New York—a setting that a member
of the Wednesday Afternoon Club later remembered as a “crude commercial city”
American artists and intellectuals consciously imported and appropriated European
culture and then translated its languages, fashions, and ideologies into something
more American.

By 1845, Washington Square was home to a large population of Francophiles,
including many of the Americans who had traveled to Paris, contributed to Godey’s,
and attended literary salons. By the early 1850s, Botta stood at the center of this
Washington Square circle, fostering a cultural dialogue between her guests and
generating a conversation that extended beyond her parlors. Borrowing cultural ideals
and the salon idea itself from France, Italy, England, and Germany, Botta grounded
her gatherings in deeply credible traditions. Further, by allowing parlor conversations
to shape her salon, and by drawing an international guest list, Botta’s gatherings

218 “How to Save Postage,” Godey’s Lady’s Book (October 1854). 368.
220 For N.P. Willis’s comments about the predominance of the French influence in New York and the
practice of soirées, see N.P. Willis, “Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil: Part IV, Ephemera,” The

\section*{DEFINING CONVERSAZIONE}

Francophiles infiltrated Botta’s parlors and French culture remained a looming presence, yet Botta labeled her gatherings “conversazione,” appropriating the Italian term for house parties with an emphasis on the arts.\footnote{222}{See Sara Agnes Pryor, \textit{My Day Reminiscences of a Long Life} (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909), 405.} She chose this identity several years before her first visit to Europe in 1853 and before she married Italian Vincenzo Botta in 1855. Throughout the 1840s, most of Botta’s guests referred to her “salon” as a “conversazione,” yet by 1894, when Vincenzo Botta compiled and published the \textit{Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta}, contributors labeled her gatherings not just “conversazione,” but also “salons,” “soirées,” and “at homes.”\footnote{223}{Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” in Botta, \textit{Memoirs}, 14.}

As a collective enterprise, salons have long been associated with France, but by the early decades of the nineteenth century these gatherings existed in cities across Western Europe and the United States.\footnote{224}{Historian Charles M. Lombard has written extensively on the connections between Botta’s literary circle and France, as well as the influence of French culture in the United States during the nineteenth century. See “An Old New York Salon—French Style,” \textit{New-York Historical Society Quarterly} LV, no. 1 (January, 1971): 38-52, and \textit{French Romanticism on the Frontier}.} Initially, a “salon” in France and Germany was comparable to a “conversazione” in Italy, and an “at home” in both England and the United States.\footnote{225}{For a period etymology of the term “conversazione,” see Philological Society (Great Britain), \textit{A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles: Founded Mainly on the Materials Collected by the Philological Society} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 941.} By the 1830s however, both English and American English speakers were also hosting “conversazione,” and the term’s connotations were
meaningful and popular. When writer Charles Caleb Colton was asked to differentiate between a conversation and a *conversazione* in 1832, he responded acerbically: “In a *conversation*, if a blockhead talks nonsense you are not obliged to listen to him; but in a *conversazione* you are.”\(^{226}\) In fact, by 1836, *Johnson’s Dictionary* published in Boston, defined “conversazione” as “a meeting of company,” while the word “salon” remained absent from its pages.\(^{227}\) In these early decades, American understandings of a “conversazione” remained consistent with its Italian derivations; not until mid-century did some refine its meaning by reserving the term for gatherings that focused exclusively on literature or science.\(^{228}\)

Likewise, the term “salon” slowly made its way into colloquial use. Leslie’s 1860 dictionary provided translations and conversational examples of both “conversazione,” and the French equivalents and associated terms, including “habitué,” and “salon” itself. Her interpretation of these words highlighted the salon’s attachment to culture and fashionability by elevating the event with references to royalty, drawing attention to sophistication through opera (here with a capital O), and overtly underlining fashion.

269. “Our *conversazione* of last year was well attended:” that is to say, Our *conversational party &c.*

---

\(^{227}\) Samuel Johnson, Henry John Todd, and John Walker, *Johnson’s Dictionary* (Boston: Charles J. Hendee, 1836), 79. Between 1840 and 1890 a large majority of English, American, and Italian language dictionaries defined “conversazione,” and not “salon.” In France the opposite was true.  
270. “The habitués of the Opera are now longing for the pleasure of the seaside;” that is to say, The frequenters &c.
629. “His name was as a war-cry in the salons of Paris;” that is to say, in the drawing rooms, fashionable circles &c.
758. “The Prince’s salons are thrown open once a week to the Neapolitan beau monde;” that is to say, The Prince’s drawing-rooms are…..to the Neapolitan fashionables, or, world of fashion. 229

By using the French and Italian words, each with its own subtle meaning, Americans aligned their “at homes” with older traditions steeped in the cultural history they felt they lacked. In so doing, they not only appropriated the salon’s European brand, format, and practices, but also the longstanding traditions and cultural conceptions that came with them. At the close of the nineteenth century, “salon,” “at home,” “soirée,” and “conversazione,” were part of the American vernacular. Subtle differences distinguished one from the other, but colloquially Americans used these terms interchangeably. 230

In context, this semantic shift reflects both the cosmopolitan atmosphere and cultural exchange integral to the construction of Botta’s conversazione. International tone notwithstanding, the majority of Botta’s guests were Francophiles, and she adhered to French tradition, earning praise for having created “the nearest approach New-York ever made to the French salon.” 231 The French influence was pervasive. Parke Godwin, for example, used the term rendezvous in a description of Botta’s

---

229 Madeline Leslie, Read and Reflect. The Newspaper and General Reader’s Pocket Companion, by the Author of “Live and Learn” (London: John F. Shaw & Co., 1860). Page numbers are not included. Instead, words are numbered and arranged chronologically as excerpted and listed above.
230 By 1895 the Webster’s Academic Dictionary still defined “conversazione” as “a meeting of company for conversation,” and “salon” as “an apartment for receiving company; fashionable society.” Noah Webster, Webster’s Academic Dictionary: A Dictionary of the English Language (New York: American Book Company, 1895), 493, 677. Contemporary English dictionaries did not uniformly define “salon,” but typically maintained that a “conversazione” was an “assembly for conversation, chiefly on literature . . . a social assembly for purposes of conversation, often held for the ostensible purposes of promoting interest in art, literature, or science.” John Frederick Stanford, The Stanford Dictionary of Anglicised Words and Phrases (Cambridge: University Press, 1892), 278.
231 Goodwin, “One of the Fine Souls,” 95. See also Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 170.
*conversazione*, strategically placing the term early in the account, to connect the reader to France. Botta’s home, he wrote, “soon after her arrival in this city, became the rendezvous for nearly all that was distinguished in statesmanship, literature, and art. The receptions she gave there each week came nearer to forming a *salon* such as we read of in French and English memoirs than any we had previously had, or perhaps have had since.”  

Such conceptions existed beyond the imaginations and perceptions of her francophilic guests, as historian Joseph Frazier Wall later described her salons as “more congenial in spirit to eighteenth-century France than to nineteenth-century Jacksonian America.” As early as 1845, in tone, practice, and sensibility Botta was translating an eighteenth-century French *salon* into a nineteenth-century American *conversazione*.

**ATTENDING BOTTA’S CONVERSAZIONE**

In the 1840s, Botta invited guests to her Washington Square salon by writing informal invitations and “[l]ighting [the] evening lamp in her modest parlors in Ninth street,” as Kate Sanborn later recalled, “simply let[ting] it be known that she would be ‘at home’ on Saturday evenings.” With little advance notice—typical for the period—Botta often wrote notes to her friends on a Saturday morning asking them over for a *conversazione* later that evening; sometimes requesting they extend her invitation, or bring another guest in tow. By the mid-1850s Botta added calling cards

---

to her list of invitations. Understated and informal, the details of the *conversazione* were handwritten on the front of her card (Figure 9). It was a ticket, according to Sara Agnes Pryor, that was “eagerly sought, and never declined.”

**Figure 9.** Botta’s Calling Card Invitation: Card reads—“Mrs. Botta At Home, Monday 26th from four to six o’clock 25 West 37th Street To meet the Prince of Siam and Mrs. [Anna] Leonowens.”

From approximately 1845-1865 Botta hosted her salon nearly every Saturday, welcoming a different crowd each week. As she explained to Sarah Helen Whitman in an 1847, “I still have my Saturday Evenings and they are often very pleasant, both the evenings and the company. There is a sufficient infusion of new comers to keep them fresh and enough of the regular corps to preserve very much the same character.”

---

237 Card held in the “John Bigelow Papers” in the New York Public Library special collections. The reception was held on “Monday the 26th from four to six o’clock.” Neither a month nor year was indicated.
went in such numbers that many were obliged to sit on the stairs.”

Botta eventually changed the standing Saturday meeting time and scheduled her *conversazione* as needed, depending on who was in town, whom she was honoring, and who she wanted to be there. Her *conversazione* typically began in the late afternoon or early evening, and lasted for three to four hours. Some of Botta’s guests greeted her in the latest fashions and their best dress, and others wore an indifference that materialized in old coats and day dresses.

Fundamentally, Botta’s *conversazione* conflated conceptions of the traditional French salon with a literal English translation of the Italian term. Like the eighteenth-century French salon model, her gatherings featured refined conversations, varying from what James Ross describes as “elegantly accomplished verbal trifling to the intellectually profound.” And like other contemporaneous gatherings in France, Botta hosted what most considered a literary salon. A majority of her guests were writers, editors, and publishers. She treated some of the authors as celebrities, hosting occasional receptions in their honor; some of the literary figures associated with her

---

239 Kate Sanborn, *Memories and Anecdotes* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), 76.
240 It is unclear exactly when Botta made this change, but around 1865—ten years after the move to Thirty-seventh Street—and as her salon grew in popularity, she was hosting receptions on any night of the week, including Sundays.
241 On Thirty-seventh Street, Botta served her guests Italian ices, cakes, coffee, and old Italian wine, but at the Washington Square salons, she served lemonade and wafers or sandwiches. Sanborn, *Memories and Anecdotes*, 76. Wright mentions the coffee and wine in *My New York*, 247, 248-50. The Washington Square menu was shaped by Botta’s adherence to the temperance movement in the United States.
243 Contemporaneously, several different types of salons existed in France, including those that sought to continue the legacy of the eighteenth-century with a primary focus on philosophical matters; official or ministerial salons; literary salons; musical salons; those that were associated with particular celebrities; and those salons that maintained a political bent. Steven D Kale, French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 4-5.
circle, including Horace Greeley and John Bigelow, also ventured into politics. As New York architect A. J. Bloor wrote in his diary after attending Botta’s salons on February 13, 1866, he “heard most interesting talk by Dr [William] Rimmer accompanied by illustrations on a board which he delineated with most wonderful skill in drawing with charcoal. It lasted about an hour after which general conversation . . . Talked with Miss Kate Field, Mrs. [Ames] Mrs Spring & Edward Spring, Dr. Mrs. Geo. T. Strong, Mrs. Brace, Mrs Henry Field . . . Also Bayard Taylor. A little after 10 left & went to club dancing at . . . [corner of] 34th St & 5th Av. Danced till about half an hour after midnight. Nothing but the gallop & the German.”

Bloor’s account underlines the presence of several prominent figures including American artist William Rimmer. A renowned art professor, sculptor, and painter, he also “understood music thoroughly,” according to Walter

---

244 For more about French salons see Kale, French Salons, 6. Botta hosted authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett (The Secret Garden) and Anna Leonowens (The English Governess at the Siamese Court) and treated them as celebrities, holding special receptions in their honor. For Fredrika Bremer’s reaction to a reception Botta hosted for her, see Lofsvold, Fredrika Bremer, 32. For Ewer’s favorable account of Bremer at this reception see Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 7. Like other French literary salons, Botta hosted hommes politiques, including New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley, who also served for a brief time in the United States House of Representatives (December 4, 1848- March 3, 1849) and ran for president as the Liberal Republican Party’s candidate in 1872. Other politicos who visited Botta’s salon included John Mac Pherson Berrien, a Washington politician from Georgia; John Bigelow, who held positions including Inspector of Prisons, U.S. Consul and Charge-d’Affaires at Paris, France, and Minister to the Court of Napoleon III; Democrat George P. Marsh, who served as United States Minister to Turkey and Italy; Thomas Seymour, a politician and lawyer from Connecticut who served as Governor of Connecticut from 1850-1853 and as Minister to Russia from 1853-1858; Pierre Soule, a Washington politician from Louisiana; and Daniel Webster, who served as a United States Senator from New York.

245 Ibid. For information about a series of tableaux vivants performed at a Botta salon see Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 15. For more on the performance of tableaux vivants, see George Arnold and Frank Cahill, The Sociable: or, One Thousand and One Home Amusements (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1858), 153-71.

246 “Alfred J. Bloor Diaries,” vol. 3 (May 1865-March 1866), New-York Historical Society.

247 Rimmer sketched images while he was talking to supplement his lecture.
Montgomery writing in 1889, and “was a good pianist, and played several other instruments.” Although Bloor leads his account with Rimmer, he mentions his interactions with other famous figures across disciplines, including a critic, an attorney, and a poet. He also notes that Botta’s salon segued into what would today be called an after-party, where he and other salon guests continued socializing over drinks or dinner. This, too, reflected French tradition; in France, salons were used for a variety of purposes, and often afternoon gatherings led to dinners or planned activities later that evening. As extensions of her conversazione, Botta held dinner parties, teas, and breakfasts for members of her intimate circle, and like the salon they grew from, the emphasis remained on conversation. The quality, variety, and ease with which Botta initiated conversation amongst her guests were pervasive themes throughout her conversazione’s history.

Although many French salons—literary, political, social, or otherwise—may not have focused solely on music, it remained part of the soundscape. In fact, by the time of the Third Republic in France [1871-1940], only three general types of salons fostered music: those organized by musicians, literary salons, and the salons of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie. In line with the French literary salon, Botta’s

---

249 See A.J. Bloor Diaries, entry dated January 8, 1866, New-York Historical Society for information about his trip to Delmonico’s restaurant following a party at Bottas.
251 See Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 172. See also, Pryor, *My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life*, 405. Botta wrote to Bayard Taylor ca. 1848, “My dear Taylor, I am going to have a few friends to tea on Friday eving [sic] at ½ past 7.” Anne C. Lynch to Bayard Taylor. Letter dated Wednesday 7 [ca. 1848]. Cornell University Rare and Manuscript Collections, #14/18/1169 Box 1, Carl A. Kroch Library.
252 Fredrika Bremer described Botta upon her arrival at the salon (likely ca. 1850). See Lofsvold, *Fredrika Bremer*, 31.
254 According to Ross, of the salons of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie, only a small number focused on music. Ibid., 94.
American version also featured music among the changing activities and rotating cast that defined her conversazione for over four and a half decades.

Botta carefully reworked historic and contemporary French salon models to facilitate a freedom of movement through time, space, and ideas, creating a space for cultural experimentation. Over time, as her conversazione changed and developed, features from the French tradition remained a dominant part of her conversazione’s identity. Following Botta’s death in 1891, Katherine Youmans read a paper before New York’s Nineteenth Century Club in memory of her friend. Recalling the modest tone of Botta’s salon and its French sensibility, considering that the “educating, refining influence of such a social center in this then crude, uncultured mercantile metropolis, [could] scarcely be overestimated . . . emphatically a triumph of ‘high thinking and plain living.’” In Youmans’ conception “Botta always retained the French simplicity of salon entertainment, even when the ample means of later days would have warranted a more lavish expenditure, and when the practice was universal of luxurious table-cheer.”

Although France prevailed in setting the tone at Botta’s conversazione, England, Germany, and Italy were also represented, both culturally and comparatively. Recalling her first meeting with Botta, Mary Elizabeth Sherwood likened Botta to German salon hostess, Rahel Varnhagen von Ense whom she

---

256 For more on early twentieth-century perceptions of eighteenth and nineteenth century French and English salons see Muriel Harris, “Salons Old and New,” The North American Review, 213, no. 787 (June, 1921): 827-832. Harris mentioned early nineteenth-century American salons at the close of her article, but did not name Botta specifically. Parallels can be drawn however, between the earlier European traditions Harris described and the gatherings at Botta’s.
identified as the “Queen of the German salon.” Labeling Botta the “American Rahel,” Sherwood claimed in 1897 that if “there is anything so good now in New York I do not know it. Mrs. Botta, after her marriage . . . continued to be the Rahel . . . of New York until her death.” Likewise, Sara Agnes Pryor noted in her 1909 memoirs that Botta’s salon was “not inaptly termed a reproduction of [Irish novelist,] Lady Blessington’s or the [Scottish] Duchess of Sutherland’s.” These broader European associations began as early as 1847, when Henry T. Tuckerman—an American writer, critic, Godey’s contributor, and Botta affiliate—wrote an article for Sartain’s Union Magazine, referencing the salon tradition emerging in antebellum New York. He began, “[t]he ladies of our metropolis lately manifested a singular want of esprit du corps, in countenancing by their fair presence the opening of a new and splendid Club-house.” Tuckerman contextualized these activities by addressing the merits and faults of similar gatherings in England, France, Germany, and Italy. He complained about contemporary trends like the club system in London, for example, that withdrew “the cleverest men from the drawing rooms,” advising his readers to “frown upon all projects which tend to make the social pleasures of the other sex exclusive.” Tuckerman continued:

Some of the pictures we have of those lesser but permanent circles of French society—where a gifted woman makes her house a nucleus for the periodical gathering of the same friends—are a delightful contrast to merely fashionable assemblies . . . . A beautiful simplicity is also evidenced in some of the social habits of Germany, where learning, talent, or worth, however obscurely lodged, easily calls around it kindred elements. Often the wealthiest citizen is

257 Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, An Epistle to Posterity: Being Rambling Recollections of Many Years of My Life (Harper & brothers, 1897), 123.
258 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
found domesticated in the humble apartment of a poor *savant [sic]* or laborious author . . . . The conversazione of the Italians boasts at least the advantages of good nature and independence. Those large and scantily furnished halls opening upon a cool balcony overlooking a garden, and deliciously adapted for tête-à-têtes . . . The piano, the card-table, or an ottoman, invite each guest to consult his mood, and the tray of ices in the corner, indicates how little superfluity of means has to do with real hospitality in the estimation of that sympathetic people.  

Tuckerman’s comparison of these European salon practices issuggestive of the way Botta have absorbed them. Indeed, unlike the English clubs, Botta’s salon welcomed mixed company; like the French, she invited a select group of returning guests; like the Germans, she entertained artists and writers who were at opposite ends of the social spectrum; and like the Italians, she hosted weekly *conversazione* in her unpretentious home, serving Italian ices and wine. In fact, nearly eighty years after Tuckerman published his article, Mabel Osgood Wright noted these details following a Botta salon in 1880 when she described the rooms as “shabby,” and recalled the “dainty little ices and sponge cake,” and a coffee urn and old Italian wine arranged on the sideboard where guests could help themselves. Wright’s account not only alludes to period understandings of the Italian *conversazione*, but also reflects several qualities that had been part of Botta’s salon’s identity for decades. By the late 1840s, guests were fashioning an image for the Botta *conversazione* itself, often projecting onto it an identity that paralleled that of their hostess; they described it as modest, communal, and extraordinary for its carefully crafted indifference, later adding qualities like “cosmopolitan” and “liberal” to this list. At the conclusion of

---

262 Ibid.
Catharine Sedgwick’s 1847 article on social life in New York, for example, her protagonist left Botta’s salon that evening, considering:

Here was a young woman without ‘position’ . . . without any relations to the fashionable world, filling her rooms weekly with choice spirits, who came without any extraordinary expense of dress, who enjoyed high rational pleasures for two or three hours, and retired so early as to make no drafts on the health or spirits of the next day. I communicated my perplexity to a foreign acquaintance . . . ‘Why,’ said he, ‘your fair friend has hit upon a favorite form of society common in the highest civilization. Miss Evertson’s [Botta’s] soirées are Parisian—only not in Paris. Not in the world, with the exception of the United States, could a beautiful young woman take the responsibility unmatronized of such a ‘reception.’”

Above all, guests situated Botta among “the queens of Parisian salons,” who according to Kate Sanborn writing in 1893, had “been praised and idealized till we [were] led to believe them unapproachable in their social altitude.” Sanborn continues, “[b]ut I am not afraid to place beside them an American lady, uncrowned by extravagant adulation, but fully their equal.” For Sanborn, Sedgwick and others, an American hostess, hosting an American salon in America, Botta beat the French at their own game. While she followed their tradition, the idea was that she cut against the expectations of the ideal, allowing her parlors to become a laboratory that facilitated cultural experimentation. Both Botta and her acquaintances carefully crafted the salon’s effortless, unaffected image, and this calculated, *laissez faire* undertone drew from French ideals, adding to the salon’s popularity and strengthening this connection to France. Perceptions of the unassuming air and informal setting that surrounded Botta’s salon not only called on French associations,

---

266 Sanborn, “Her Hospitality,” 179-80.
267 Ibid.
but also allowed international ideas, practices, and art forms to intersect, creating what people perceived as the ideal American salon. The mixture of cultural models Botta collected to form her *conversazione* was paralleled by a guest list that included people from all over the world.

**COSMOPOLITAN GUEST LIST**

“To scan the packets of letters in her writing table,” attested Julia Campbell Keightly, “was to exchange greetings with half a century of notabilities, and the roll-call of modern fame might have been read from the pages of her book of hospitality.”268 By the second half of the nineteenth century, Botta’s home was a cultural mecca for many who visited the city, and nearly every account, memory, and anecdote speaks to her extraordinary guest list.269 The early salons were usually small gatherings, but as they grew in popularity, her guest list expanded to include an unpredictable, international, and interdisciplinary crowd generating a buzz and curiosity that attracted more and more people.270 Eventually, the term “cosmopolitan” became synonymous with the Botta *conversazione*, and her guests often inventoried countries as well as people. “For years it seemed as if this were the one truly cosmopolitan drawing-room in the city,” Lucia Runkle noted, “because it drew the best from all sources. Italy and England, France and Germany, Spain, Russia, Norway

---

and Hungary, Siam, China, India, and Japan, sent guests hither.\footnote{L.G. Runkle, “A Beautiful Life,” in Botta, \textit{Memoirs}, 89.}

Representing each of these countries were many of the most prominent people of the day, including musicians, writers, poets, critics, editors, publishers, politicians, diplomats, architects, artists, and actors.\footnote{Some of the more prominent guests included writers and poets Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Catharine Sedgwick, Kate Sanborn, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Grace Greenwood; actor Edwin Booth; American music critic, editor of the \textit{Home Journal}, and man-about-town Nathaniel Parker Willis; his brother, critic, composer, musician, and editor Richard Storrs Willis; American poet, critic, and songwriter George Pope Morris; Italian opera tenor Italo Campanini and Swedish opera soprano, Christina Nilsson; American landscape painter Frederick E. Church; New York \textit{Tribune} editor Horace Greeley; attorney and famed diarist George Templeton Strong. Regarding Botta’s fondness for Emerson, see Keightly, “Recollections,” in Botta, \textit{Memoirs}, 154.}

One anonymous friend commented that "[t]here are probably no Americans of note as writers and artists who have not trodden her broad stairway, and no distinguished foreign traveler in this country has failed to taste her hospitality."\footnote{A Friend, “Her Perennial Youth,” in Botta, \textit{Memoirs}, 194. Other accounts regarding cosmopolitan and interdisciplinary qualities of Botta’s salon include: Pryor, \textit{My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life}, 404.; Greenwood, “A Loving Tribute,” 43.; And Youmans, “A Paper Read before the Nineteenth Century Club,” 225.}

Botta’s guests were an eclectic mix. European and American, young and old, established and unknown, professional and amateur, they represented a select cross-section of nineteenth-century American culture. In an 1889 \textit{Current Literature} article about Botta, the anonymous author touched on this dimension of her salon, reporting that:

\begin{quote}
At the house of the Bottas in West Thirty-seventh street one meets every distinguished literary person who comes to New York. From far and wide are they gathered together, and in her spacious and beautiful mansion out-at-elbows Bohemia hob-nobs with moneyed aristocracy as it does in no other establishment in town. Here you find the impecunious Italian count who gives music lessons for a living, and yonder stands the president of a great university. There a European artist of world-wide repute talks with an unpretending writer from Mississippi. Beside them is the latest poet from Kentucky, and farther off, a Japanese Prince and a New York novelist are engaged in conversation.\footnote{“Article 10—No Title,” \textit{Current Literature} 2, no. 1. (January, 1889): 10.}
\end{quote}
No single element dominated Botta’s _conversazione_, allowing this mix to emerge as one of her salon’s defining components. The surviving accounts suggest that she crafted the illusion of a sensibility that compelled each guest to feel as though her salon prioritized their art, their opinions, their social station above all else. In the same way _Godey’s_ style evolved while fulfilling expectations within an established formula, Botta’s salon—without age barriers, or expectations of accomplishment—retained its status and power and evolved over time, serving as a cultural catalyst and signifying fashionability.

Author Mary Elizabeth Sherwood seized on these qualities of Botta’s _conversazione_ in her 1897 collection of memoirs. She compiled the names, nationalities, and professions of the guests she remembered over a period of time, exclaiming, “such a grand phalanx as would often gather in a single evening!” And following this announcement came a long list of names: “Christine Nilsson, Salvini, Ristori, Anthony Trollope, Sala, Thackeray, and George P. Marsh; Mr. W.W. Story, home from Rome, and General di Cesnola, fresh from Cyprus. This was a salon indeed! Everything that was fresh and new. Paul du Chaillu, from Africa and the land of the gorilla, and Charles Kingsley, with his gifted daughter Rose. From time to time a fresh arrival—N.P. Willis, General Morris, or Lewis Gaylord Clark—while in one corner would sit the authoress of _Queechy_ [“Susan Warner”] and the poetesses Alice and Phoebe Cary, and Bryant, Bancroft, Everett, and Emerson.”

When organized into a chart, Sherwood’s account, highlighting the nationality, profession, and age of

---

275 Sherwood, _An Epistle to Posterity_, 123-4. Also, A. J. Bloor may have attended a few gatherings with Sherwood present. The entry in his personal diary dated May 1867 speaks to the diversity of salon guests, and overlaps with Sherwood’s account. See “Alfred J. Bloor Diaries,” Wednesday, May 15, 1867, vol. 4 (April, 1866-December, 1867), New-York Historical Society.
the guests is remarkably illuminating (Figure 10). Although guests from several countries are mentioned (Sweden, Italy, England, and France) of the twenty-one names, over half (twelve in total) are Americans. Of those twelve, Sherwood made a point to draw attention to Willis, Morris, and Clark as “fresh arrivals,” from a recent trip to Europe. And despite France’s strong influence, Paul du Chaillu is the only representative from that country.
Figure 10. Guests to Botta’s Salon according to M.E.W. Sherwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nilsson, Christine</td>
<td>1843-1921</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Opera Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvini, Tommaso</td>
<td>1829-1915</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ristori, Adelaide</td>
<td>1822-1906</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Actress/ Tragedienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trollope, Anthony</td>
<td>1815-1882</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Novelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sala, George Augustus</td>
<td>1828-1895</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh, George P.</td>
<td>1801-1882</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Diplomat, Philologist, Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di Cesnola, General [Luigi Palma]</td>
<td>1832-1904</td>
<td>Italian-American</td>
<td>Soldier, Amateur Archaeologist, He received the Medal of Honor for his service in the American Civil War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du Chaillu, Paul</td>
<td>1835-1903</td>
<td>French-American</td>
<td>Traveler, Anthropologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsley, Charles</td>
<td>1819-1875</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Priest (Church of England), Professor, Historian, Novelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsley, Rose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis, N.P.</td>
<td>1806-1867</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Author, Poet, Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris, General [George Pope]</td>
<td>1802-1864</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, Lewis Gaylord</td>
<td>1808-1873</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warner, Susan</td>
<td>1819-1885</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary, Alice</td>
<td>1820-1871</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary, Phoebe</td>
<td>1824-1871</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant [William Cullen]</td>
<td>1794-1878</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Poet, Journalist, Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bancroft, George</td>
<td>1800-1891</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Historian, Statesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett, Edward</td>
<td>1794-1865</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Politician, Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Ralph Waldo</td>
<td>1803-1882</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Essayist, Lecturer, Poet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-salon namedropping was a common practice, and it served several purposes. For the guests who compiled the lists, it modestly elevated their social status to match those of the celebrities they named and whose company they shared. And for Botta, these extensive lists and international names added an Old World imprimatur, making her salons that much more popular and attractive to potential guests. Further, the accounts published in her lifetime functioned as advertisements, adding to the salon’s fashionability, and making it ever more popular.
Botta’s kaleidoscopic guest list circulated in magazines, newspapers, letters, journals, memoirs, encyclopedias, and dictionaries well into the twentieth century. As literary historian Kirsten Silva Gruesz observes, “the salon itself . . . became a living anthology of culture, redacting the ‘best from all sources.’”\textsuperscript{276} Botta’s ability to attract so many of the nineteenth century’s leading figures was one of the hallmarks of her conversazione. “Many were introduced to her select group,” wrote Andrew Carnegie, “but only the most interesting or those who were demonstrably successful in the arts and letters were invited to return.”\textsuperscript{277} A majority of these men and women were cultural trendsetters whose ideologies and contributions resulted from fringe movements, liberal ideas, and cultural change.

**DIVERSE IDEOLOGIES**

Many of Botta’s guests were social reformers: people Julia Campbell Keightly remembered as, “leaders of parties, of charities, of reforms, of social, literary, and artistic organizations,” who fought for issues including women’s suffrage and the abolition of slavery.\textsuperscript{278} Leading figures in the Transcendentalist movement including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and William Cullen Bryant were guests, and Unitarian preachers Rev. Dr. Samuel Osgood, Dr. Henry Whitney Bellows, and George Ripley also frequented Botta parlors. Ripley, in fact, associated with the Transcendentalist movement, served on the New York *Tribune* staff for years and founded Brook Farm—a the short-lived utopian society in Massachusetts—of which

\textsuperscript{276} Gruesz, *Sentimental Men*, 57.

\textsuperscript{277} Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, 363.

the American music critic, John Sullivan Dwight, was a dedicated member.\textsuperscript{279} Horace Greeley was one of several guests who supported unconventional ideas such as fourierism and vegetarianism.\textsuperscript{280} As editor of the New York \textit{Tribune}, he promoted social causes like abolition, temperance, and the preservation of the Union before the Civil War, while his opposition to liquor, tobacco, gambling, prostitution and capital punishment reflected his puritanical upbringing. “Liberals and Conservatives, peers and revolutionists, holders of the most ancient traditions, and advocates of the most modern theories,” Sanborn explained, “all found their welcome, if they deserved it and each took away a new respect for the position of his opponent.”\textsuperscript{281}

The advanced and experimental ideas espoused by her guests reflected Botta’s own interest in self-edification, and her development of a salon around this ideal harkened back to eighteenth-century French traditions. Further echoing her experiences at the Albany Female Academy, she approached her \textit{conversazione} with curiosity, and an interest in new ideas, supplementing her own education in the process. Botta “passed through life with an open mind and a listening ear,” recalled Andrew Carnegie, “absorbing all that appeared to her to genuine, no matter if unusual, or who uttered it—Pagan, Christian or Jew.”\textsuperscript{282} Botta’s insistence on instruction remained a pervasive theme for her salon, influencing how she organized

\textsuperscript{279} For information relating to Botta, Ripley, Curtis, and Cranch at Brook Farm see Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” 29. On Botta and transcendentalism see ibid., 29-30. There were several different \textit{Tribune} publications from mid-late century including the daily, weekly, semi-weekly, and evening. The daily \textit{Tribune} started as a penny paper in 1841 and eventually merged with the \textit{Herald} in 1924. The \textit{Tribune Weekly} had a vast following: first published in 1841, by 1860 it had a circulation of 200,000. “About New York Daily Tribune,” \textit{Library of Congress Chronicling America, Historic American Newspapers}, last accessed December 27, 2011, http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/.


\textsuperscript{281} Sanborn, \textit{Memories and Anecdotes}, 78.

and ran it and whom she attracted each week, contributing to what Keightly later described as a “universal learning, helping, doing.” She created a space that structurally complied with nineteenth-century social protocol, but within the scope of her gatherings new ideas and practices could be examined, explored, and experienced.

Not all of Botta’s guests were adventurous in thought. Franco-American anthropologist Paul du Chaillu, who attended a Botta reception in 1867 and was popular in the late 1860s for confirming the existence of gorillas and what he termed “pygmy” people in central Africa, once opined after an evening at Botta’s that “African life hinged on three things, polygamy, slavery, & witchcraft.” While other guests, such as Helen Hunt Jackson, fought against common cultural conceptions like that which du Chaillu implicated in his assessment. A poet and close friend of Botta’s, Jackson turned to activism in the late 1870s, fighting to improve the treatment of Indigenous Indian tribes by the United States government. Jackson’s connection to Botta provided her with access to publishing and financial resources that allowed her to advance a platform for the Ponca Indian delegation. Indeed, thanks to Jackson, members of the Ponca tribe attended a reception Botta hosted on January 14, 1880. Botta detailed the event in a letter to Anna Leonowens a week later:

H.H.—who is visiting us—is very enthusiastic on the subject of the Indians and their wrongs, and has published several articles in the papers, which have made quite a stir and called out explanations from the Secretary of the Interior. There is a Ponca chief here, with ‘Bright Eyes,’ his interpreter, and some others, in whom she has been deeply

---

283 Keightly, “Recollections,” in ibid., 149.
interested. I invited them last Monday to our house, and ‘Standing Bear,’ the chief, made a short speech. He wore a scarlet blanket and a dark-blue coat worked with beads, a very handsome eagle’s feather in his hair, and a necklace of grizzly bears’ claws about his neck. He is sad, dignified old man, and everybody was interested in the story of his wrongs. We had about seventy people present, and the evening went off very pleasantly.286

Botta’s account reflects the attention the Poncas had attracted in the weeks leading up to the event at her home, but she chronicled little beyond what people wore and their general affect. Likewise, Mabel Osgood Wright was one of Botta’s seventy guests that night; she saved her calling-card invitation, and documented the interior space, the food, and some of the people she met, including an Irish poet and a Scotch botanist. Wright described how “Professor Botta himself gave a charming reading from Dante’s sonnets, first in English then in the unctuous Italian that comes the nearest to making Latin a live language.”287 Yet, with everything taking place that evening—the controversy surrounding the Poncas in New York, the content of their talk, the interaction between the guests who were there, the entertainment—all of these details remain elusive: lost to generalities and reduced to a tone, a sensibility, and a long list of names. A documented silence that gives voice to those details that truly mattered to both Botta and her guests.

CONCLUSION

When Botta died in March 1891, her salon closed its doors and all that remained were nostalgic memories and vague impressions of forty-six years worth of

286 Anne Botta, in Botta, Memoirs, 311-12. Botta was also heavily involved with the abolition of slavery, and many of the leaders in this movement gathered in her parlor as well, although some—including Botta—were not in support of immediate emancipation, nor John Brown’s insurrection. In 1855 she and Prof. Botta visited plantations in the south. For more on Botta’s views on slavery see her letter to Dr. Henry Bellows in Botta, Memoirs, 276-78.

‘at homes,’ salons, and *conversaziones*. Botta animated each gathering by decorating the set, casting the players, and making introductions, but then left the rest to her guests. Once the evening began, each salon was its own performance, and this semi-organized spontaneity fostered creativity and inspired a series of fleeting, improvised, ad hoc performances and dialogues within the salon’s larger performance. Botta and her guests gathered lists of people and names of countries, and recorded descriptions of a physical world they knew would disappear as soon as they left. Like artifacts, these ephemeral lists became souvenirs: tangible proof that their authors were members of not only Botta’s cast, but also her audience. In contrast, the performances within the larger performance—the conversations, poetry readings, songs, dances, and concerts—vanished without a trace. Few people bothered to create an artifact for something that was never a physical object in the first place. The performative nature of Botta’s salon guaranteed that it remained only in memory, in diary entries written hours later, letters the next day, and in books the following century.

Periodicals such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* also serve as a sort of public record of several facets of Botta’s *conversazione*. This magazine promoted not only material culture, but also ideas, ideals, and style. Vested with layers of meaning, the stylized women depicted in the magazine’s fashion plates illustrated the latest trends, while performing perfection in appearance, action, and thought. Ostrich plumes, flounced skirts, and the cut of the latest sleeve were on equal fashion footing with motherhood, art, and reading, and music was often an essential part of the scene. Music stands,
instruments, and sheet music appeared regularly in *Godey’s* fashion plates, and one of the favored models was a woman seated at the piano. (Figures 11 and 12).  

**Figure 11.** *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, November 1862

**Figure 12.** “Dancing the Doll,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, March 1875

---

While the women’s dresses remain the primary focus, the piano and everything it represents—culture, ability, sophistication, education, social status, and cultivation—is elevated to a level of fashionability equal to that of the clothing. *Godey’s* published these images along with articles about opera, European music, composers, and performers, and each month the magazine included a piece of original sheet music, typically a parlor ballad for voice and piano. With a single issue of *Godey’s* in hand, a woman could sew a dress, perform music, and immediately appear to be as fashionable and idyllic as the women in the plates. In *Godey’s* pages, music staked a claim in nineteenth-century American society as not only a fine art, but also a popular, integral, and fashionable part of both a domestic ideal and feminine ideal.

The music at Botta’s *conversazione* added to perceptions of her constructed identity, and was more than a form of functional entertainment. People knew Botta as a writer, artist, and teacher; a wife, mother, and daughter; a genius hostess, the perfect housekeeper; a True Woman; a Real Woman—sophisticated and fashionable. Music remains associated with the ideal version of each of these labels; yet, music not only supported the tenets of Botta’s public persona, but also reflected contemporary trends. Above all else, like *Godey’s*, it reflected and influenced ideals, cultivated taste, and contributed to a much larger conversation.
CHAPTER 3
MUSICAL PERFORMERS, PERFORMANCES, AND PERCEPTIONS AT BOTTA’S SALON

In 1846, when Catharine Sedgwick reported on her friend’s visit to Botta’s Washington Square conversazione for the The Columbian Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine, she recalled that “[t]here were artists in every department, painting, poetry, sculpture, and music.” Yet she identified only one—Ole Bull.\(^{289}\) This article appeared eight months after the Norwegian virtuoso violinist’s first United States concert tour ended, and in spite of the time lapse, Bull remained noteworthy; he is the only guest Sedgwick singled out for special mention. More important, of the 191 men and women documented as having been affiliated with Botta’s conversazione, he is one of only six professional musicians or composers to have been identified by name.\(^{290}\) Although we know a fair amount about many of the more famous writers, poets, and politicians who visited Botta’s salon, available information about the musicians who attended is inconclusive. The documents themselves do not account for anonymous or amateur musicians, and Botta’s visitors only rarely mention a work’s composer, an evening’s program or the audience’s reaction. This attitude toward music’s place and function was not unusual for the period, and indicates the way in which music was situated in larger contexts.

\(^{289}\) Catharine Sedgwick, “Varieties of Social Life in New York,” The Columbian Magazine (July 1846), 15. For an extensive excerpt of this article see Chapter 1.

\(^{290}\) The other five are: Richard Storrs Willis (1819-1900), Maurice Strakosch (1825-1887), Adelina Patti (1843-1919), Christine Nilsson (1843-1821), and Italo Campanini (1845-1896). It is also likely that Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) also attended Botta’s salon.
In the 1840s, although most people overheard, performed, and listened to music every day, the idea that it could possess cultural capital was relatively new in the United States. Regardless of class, education, or training, most antebellum Americans did not separate music into the categories that we live with today, such as cultivated/vernacular; classical/popular; music/art-music.¹²⁹ Instead, from the early decades of the century through the 1850s, most Americans regarded music as functional, and tied to either worship or entertainment.²⁹² This understanding changed when staggering numbers of European immigrant-musicians began to settle in the United States, bringing with them Romantic ideals that catalyzed changes in musical classifications.²⁹³ With these immigrants leading the way, Americans inched toward a more nuanced perception of music as an expressive art—establishing the foundation for the later notion of art music. As Michael Broyles explains, in this new conception, music was understood to have “the capacity to do more than entertain; it inspired and elevated. Even though it might be instrumental and abstract, it spoke to the ethical side of humanity. Even though it might be secular, it was sacred, in an intangible way. It was moral, it was good, it was good for

²⁹² Katherine K. Preston, “Art Music from 1800-1860,” in The Cambridge History of American Music, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 190-91. Various dichotomies have been imposed on music of the nineteenth century: Lawrence Levine uses highbrow/lowbrow; H. Wiley Hitchcock, cultivated/vernacular; Michael Broyles and Katherine Preston both talk about functional/entertainment. For the sake of this discussion, I will use the terms music/art-music, based on the vocabulary most often found in the primary sources consulted for this project.
²⁹³ For more on the German immigrant influence see Preston, “Art Music,” 190-95.
you.” With its expanding array of new magazines and newspapers, the United States publishing industry centered in major cities including New York, fueled the dissemination of these ideas about music, and spread them to an ever wider audience. Over the century, as Americans began to understand the concept of art music, it gained status within an emergent cultural hierarchy and came to be seen as separate from parlor genres such as ballads, dances, and folksongs. Botta’s salon did not impose any such hierarchy, and guests had the option either to engage with art music or reject it altogether. On salon evenings, guests moved freely within the rooms of her home, creating a hive of activity, and travelling through a fluid soundscape comprised of music, talk, debate, and recitation. The physical location of any one individual determined how they participated, with whom they spoke, and what they heard; the music itself fell into one of three categories—song, dance, and formal recitals.

MUSICAL SONG

Botta did not hire musicians to play at her conversazione, but rather encouraged her guests to sing, dance, and perform the music themselves. “I give no entertainment except what they find in each other,” she explained in a letter dated January 20, 1846. “Sometimes a great singer would volunteer a song,” Sara Agnes Pryor added, “or a poet or an actor [would] give something of his art, of course never requested by the hostess.

---

296 See Broyles, “Art Music,” 214-54. See also Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.
Sometimes the evening would close with a dance.”

New York poet James Herbert Morse attended a Botta salon for the first time on June 6, 1880, joining an intimate crowd that gathered in honor of Anna Leonowens. “The company was small,” he wrote, “hardly more than a dozen guests,” including actor Edwin Booth, and several members of the Nineteenth-Century Club. Over the next several years, Morse documented additional Botta gatherings, but most of these accounts offer little beyond a listing of guests and reports on their clothing. On March 30, 1888, however, he provided one of the most detailed accounts of a musical performance at Botta’s salon.

That evening Morse heard two performances that exhibited his perceptions of artifice and authenticity—the first, by “some Swedish singers, well trained and good in their place,” and the second, by a Scottish servant girl, whom he considered a talented amateur musician. Within the context of the nineteenth century’s domestic sphere, many considered the unrestrained emotionalism and showy professionalism that was part of public performances to be inappropriate. This attitude ultimately inspired a form of popular music that, as Dale Cockrell explains, “treasured reserve and sentiment, was

---


299 Botta also held a reception for the Prince of Siam and Anna Leonowens. The reception was held on “Monday the 26th from four to six o’clock.” Neither a month nor year was indicated. See Botta’s calling card in the “John Bigelow Papers,” New York Public Library Special Collections.


301 This preference also reflects some contemporary attitudes towards Italian opera in New York, which some viewed as showy and excessive, as opposed to the more unpretentious and pragmatic aesthetics underpinning emerging notions of Americanism.
without ostentation, and could be performed by the competent amateur.”

In line with this domestic ideal, Morse noted that one of the Swedish performers “sang much with operatic antics.” “I grew tired of him,” Morse remarked; “the usual self-conscious and vanity of such people was, in his case, emphasized.” Morse went on to complain that “the young Swede whose face and singing [he did] not like . . . pour[ed] out his artificial love-sick sentiment . . . [and] grimaced and attitudinized until everybody was tired of him.”

Uninspired by the Swedish performers, Morse may have protested not simply based on personal taste, but rather in response to more general expectations of such domestic performances. For Morse, the Swedes defied the ideal of amateurism, while the Scottish servant, Katy Macdonald, embodied it. He described her as “a young . . . girl with an untrained but remarkable voice… a simple country child . . . without cultivation of any kind” and wrists that “showed the marks of hand-labor.”

In Morse’s conception she was anything but sophisticated, even though the Swede allegedly “tried to learn her some tunes.” Morse valued Macdonald’s sincerity, since he understood it to have been rooted in personal experience. “As Madame B[otta] told us privately,” he wrote, Macdonald “had two years ago landed at the Battery, a common servant, with 25 cents in her pocket, 20 of which she spent in finding a friend who was to meet her. Since landing, [she found] work as a servant girl . . . . [and] she seemed very homesick in America, glad to talk about Scotland and home.”

304 Morse, “James Herbert Morse Diaries,” VIII, 75-77
305 Ibid.
306 Morse, “James Herbert Morse Diaries,” VIII, 76. According to Morse, Macdonald was born in Inverness.
For Morse, Macdonald was a Scot singing Scottish ballads, thus epitomizing his perceptions of the Scottish ideal. She was expressive and free of artifice in ways that the Swedes were not. Morse reported that he and another guest “induced [Macdonald] to sing some of [her] songs, both to get the dialect and for the pure, sympathetic, almost tearful tones in which she sang them.” Macdonald performed some unaccompanied songs, and as Morse later noted, “her lower notes lacked fullness, but in the upper ones, the voice possessed great power and richness.” For Morse, this imperfection only added to Macdonald’s image and authenticity, and although the Swedes may have been “well-trained,” their contrived performance was a distraction.

Several other guests recorded similar accounts of singers performing songs at Botta’s conversazione, and they used musical terms such as “rhythmic,” “consonant”, and “melodic” to describe what they heard. These descriptions appear to reference folksongs and parlor ballads, but Botta’s guests, in fact, were not speaking of music at all—they were referring to poetry. This overlapping of sister arts was consistent with understandings of the day. In 1831 Noah Webster defined song as, “a poem, a hymn, a tune,” and in the 1857 edition of the dictionary expanded the definition to include: “1. … that which is sung or uttered with musical modulations of the voice… 2. A little poem to be sung, or uttered with musical modulations. 3. A sacred poem to be sung... 4. A

---

307 Ibid., 75. See also, Joan L. Severa, Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), 418, 424-27.  
308 Ibid.  
309 Ibid.  
310 Morse, “James Herbert Morse Diaries,” VIII, 76. In the end, Morse saw promise in Macdonald. His wife invited her to “bring her book of songs,” to sing at one of their receptions, and she arranged to have Macdonald’s voice tested by a Mr. Björcksten, who was a voice teacher. The Morses also offered Macdonald work as a domestic servant and attempted to secure her a music education at “the Conservatory,” although Morse did not specify which one. Shortly after the Morses hired Macdonald, she had an argument with their kitchen staff, advertised for employment elsewhere, and left. They never heard from her again. Ibid.
poetical composition.”³¹¹ As this complicated definition suggests, musical vocabulary was appropriated for discussions, studies, analyses, and performances of poetry, and the lines between the two art forms were blurred, making it difficult to tell where poetry ended and music began.³¹²

**POETIC SONG**

For nineteenth-century Americans, including those who gathered at Botta’s salon, elocution was an essential skill and a practiced art. Reading aloud was a common parlor pastime and declaimed texts included fiction, plays, and poetry.³¹³ “Reading is one of the most important branches in our schools,” wrote pedagogue Edward Brooks in 1883, “many persons would rather be a great elocutionist than a great mathematician, gramarian, or musician. The great actors have been as highly honored as the great musicians; Charlotte Cushman has perhaps as enduring fame as Jenny Lind. The eminent orators,” he concluded, “stand as high in public appreciation as the eminent mathematicians; though part of this eminence is due to the thought and sentiment expressed, rather than to the delivery.”³¹⁴ Brook’s references to music reflect the emphatic oratorical style of the day: dramatic, teetering between an expressive speaking voice and


³¹² Alfred Holbrook’s 1859 textbook includes a section called the “Branches of the Cosmos; or the Fine Arts.” Here he defines the terms “music,” and “poetry.” See, Alfred Holbrook, *The Normal: Or, Methods of Teaching the Common Branches, Orthoepy, Orthography, Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic and Elocution* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Burr, 1859), 29.


song. Children studied declamation as part of their common school education, and pedagogical textbooks, such as Brooks’s *Normal Methods of Teaching*, codified this practice of reading aloud. “Methods of teaching reading may be discussed under three elements,” Brooks explained, “the Mental, Vocal, and Physical.” In the instructions that follow, Brooks relied heavily on musical vocabulary, taking a stance that was consistent with contemporary sources. These elocation manuals, in turn, took their cue from the work of eighteenth-century Irish inventor Joshua Steele, who used musical concepts to analyze “voice-pitch, length, and stress.” As musicologist Jamie Kassler has observed, “Steele used musical notation as the basis of a new system for recording and executing speech,” and vocal instructors, such as Brooks, later adopted this methodology.

Music and oratory were so intertwined that terms normally associated with music were routinely applied to elocution. Yet despite the shared vocabulary, words did not always carry the same meaning; instead, music and elocution were overlapped and linked via shared technical language and expressive ideals. In musical discussions, for example, the term “modulation” connotes “the process of changing from one key to another;” for

---

317 Ibid., 168. The performative aspect of gesture (the physical element) also bears parallels with musical performance. For more on this topic, see Andrew Comstock, *A System of Elocution* (Philadelphia: Andrew Comstock, 1841), 185.
318 Steele (1700-1791) was born in Ireland, but spent many years living in London. Many of the symbols and ideologies used in the textbooks quoted throughout this discussion are similar to, if not identical to, Steele’s ideas. For more on Steele’s conceptions, and the history surrounding elocation and notation of elocution dating back to the ancient Greeks see Jamie C. Kassler, “Representing Speech through Musical Notation,” *Journal of Musicological Research*, 24. (2005): 227, 229; 229-39.
319 Ibid., 227.
elocution, Brooks transfers the essence of the musical concept to the spoken word, identifying it as “the variations of the voice in reading and speaking.”

Instructors applied this same approach when appropriating musical symbols for linguistic notation. Andrew Comstock’s 1841 text on elocution provides a compendium of these connections, with extensive instructions, illustrations, and charts that demonstrated the ways in which musical concepts and language were applied to elocution. Pitch and inflection are explained in the diagram below, using what Comstock terms the four-line “staff of speech.” The second line (labeled the pitch-note line) refers to the orator’s natural speaking voice (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Comstock, “Example of Emphasis Melody,” *A System of Elocution*, pg. 54

Comstock builds his chart around a line from James Sheridan Knowles’s *William Tell Among the Mountains*: “These are the things that tower, that shine, whose smile makes glad, whose frown is terrible.” In this phrase, Comstock identified four emphatic words—tower, shine, glad, and terrible—and he mapped them onto the speech-staff using teardrop-shaped notes that indicated emphasis, inflection, and relative pitch depending on

---

321 See also Holbrook, *The Normal: Or, Methods of Teaching the Common Branches*, 17.
their size, direction, and position. With this understanding, orators composed what they
termed “melodies for spoken phrases.” Comstock illustrated this concept in Figure 14,
using the sentence “With you, and quit my Susan’s side?”

Figure 14. Comstock, “With you and quit my Susan’s Side,” A System of Elocution,
pg. 174

![Diagram](image)

The word given the greatest emphasis is “you,” which is accented by both the weight
given to the note, and the ascending third performed in the inflection. The terms “quit,”
“side,” and the first syllable of “Susan,” are also given greater emphasis through accent;
they are set in relief in a series of six consecutive notes all at the same pitch level a fifth
above the pitch-note line. “In good elocution,” wrote Comstock, “[the speaking voice]
seldom rises a fifth above the lowest note of its compass,” a guideline demonstrated in
this example as well as in figure 15.\(^{324}\) Based on the F-major scale, Comstock’s rubric
spans a tenth (Figure 15), and at each scale degree he specified which emotion was best
expressed at that relative pitch, citing few examples beyond the dominant. He also
included famous quotations next to each scale degree, including Mark Antony’s speech
from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, which, according to Comstock, was most effectively
intoned a major third above the speaker’s lowest point of compass.

\(^{324}\) Ibid., 46.
To add further dimension to vocal delivery, Comstock next introduced the idea of force (relative volume) to his system, appropriating the full range of musical dynamic markings—*ppp-fff*—to indicate the possibilities. As seen in Figure 16, these indications were integrated into exercises that combined force with emphasis, inflection and pitch.

As in the previous examples, the direction and weight of the notes designates inflection, as well as the general rise and fall of the voice.
Orators dissected and annotated prose and poetry in ways very similar to the way musicians interpreted a musical score. In the following example (Figure 17), Comstock identified each syllable by assigning a simple duple meter to the poem and overlaying a quarter-note/quarter-rest rhythm to the spoken text:

**Figure 17.** Comstock, “I am monarch of all,” *A System of Elocution*, pg. 179

In addition to markings signifying meter and rhythm, standardized symbols were used to indicate four basic vocal inflections, described as by Comstock’s contemporary Hugh Doherty as “rising,” “falling,” “mixed,” and “ambiguous” (Figure 18).

**Figure 18.** Doherty, “Inflections,” *An Introduction to English Grammar*, pg. 164

---

325 For a list of these symbols and characters and their meanings, along with a practical application, see Appendix A taken from Comstock, *A System of Elocution*, 200.

326 Hugh Doherty, *An Introduction to English Grammar* (London: Simkin, Marshall, and Co., 1841), 164. In Brooks’s explanation of these vocal slides, he identified just three: rising (marked by an acute accent (\( / \)), falling (marked by a grave accent (\( \backslash \)) and circumflex (a combination of rising and falling, which can be a single union (V) or double (VV)). Brooks, *Normal Methods of Teaching*, 192.
Each of these vocal slides had a specific purpose, and the interval between the notes in the rise and fall had implicit associations. The voice could pass directly from one note of the scale to another (a discrete interval), as in singing; or it could slide from one degree to another, as in speaking (a concrete interval). \(^{327}\) “The rising inflection expressed decision or incompleteness of expression,” Doherty explained; “the falling inflection expressed decision and completeness of expression.” \(^{328}\) Doherty marked slides above the words of the text indicating general direction and type of inflection (Figure 19). \(^{329}\)

**Figure 19.** Doherty, “Sweet is the gale,” *An Introduction to English Grammar*, pg. 166

![Oh.](image)

*Sweet is the gale that breathes the Spring,
Sweet through the vale yon winding stream,
Sweet is the note Love's warblers sing,
But sweeter Friendship's soothing theme.*

The intervals orators mapped onto poetry could be major, minor or perfect in quality, and both the direction of the inflection, and the size and quality of the interval itself were understood to have specific meanings. As Brooks explained:

> The slide of the [major] Third is used for more earnest and animated discourse than the second. The Downward Third expresses considerable feeling, though somewhat subdued and dignified….The Rising Third is used in asking questions,

\(^{327}\) Ibid., 188.

\(^{328}\) Ibid., 192.

\(^{329}\) George Freyer, ed., *The Poetry of Various Glee*, *Songs, &c: As Performed at the Harmonist* (London: Philanthropic Reform, 1798), 33. This poem appears in collections of traditional English songs as early as 1798.
and also for emphasis….The Minor Third is used in the emphatic words of pathetic utterance; as “Little Nell was dead. She died last night.”

The slide of the Fifth is used for very earnest and animated discourse. The Downward Fifth is employed in expressing surprise, admiration, and dignified command. It indicates strong emotion….The Rising Fifth is used for earnest interrogation, or for the emphatic expression of inquiry or doubt.\textsuperscript{330}

An orator, taking all the possibilities into consideration, had the creative freedom to decide how the text would be performed, and audiences understood the choices made to be the essence of an expressive art. The poetic score Comstock devised to explicate Fitz Greene Halleck’s poem, “Marco Bozzaris,” for example, incorporated sustained tones, pitch level, dynamic markings, rhythm, and articulation (Figure 20). Comstock edited the text using numbers to show pitch level (measures 1 and 2), added a horizontal line to indicate suspended tones, included ff and fff dynamic markings, and italicized letters to “represent sounds that are liable to be omitted, or imperfectly articulated.”\textsuperscript{331}

\textbf{Figure 20.} “Marco Bozzaris,” by Fitz Greene Halleck, quoted and annotated by Comstock in \textit{A System of Elocution}, pg. 214

\begin{center}
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
\textbf{1} An hour pass'd on — | \textbf{2} the Turk awoke — |
\hspace{2em} That bright dream was his last ; |
\hspace{2em} He woke, to hear his sentries shriek — |
\hspace{2em} \textit{ff} To arms! \textit{ff} they come! [the Greek! the \textit{ff}Greek! \textit{ff}] |
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}
\end{center}

As this attention to details suggests, the performance of poetry was considered to be particularly close to the performance of music. Brooks gave this matter special consideration, and offered a sense of a poetic elocutionary ideal that sought to avoid a delivery that included features such as “too rapid utterance . . . a plain and dry articulation . . . a mechanical observance of the harmonic pauses . . . and a mouthing and

\textsuperscript{330} Brooks, \textit{Normal Methods of Teaching}, 192-94.
\textsuperscript{331} Comstock, \textit{A System of Elocution}, 200.
chanting tone, [that produced] the effect of bombast and mock solemnity." This aesthetic ideal echoes the rhetoric of authenticity that was part of the ideal associated with the performance of musical song.

Whether for poetry or prose, Brooks, Comstock, and their contemporaries further appropriated not only musical language but also ideals when providing instruction on the performative aspects of elocution. “Poetry should be read . . . with a moderate prolongation of vowel and liquid sounds, a slight degree of musical utterance, and with an exactness of time, as indicated by the nature of the verse and the emotion expressed. The utterance should indicate the metre but should never render it prominent.” They considered meaningful expression to be a high accomplishment that was achieved through vocal inflection and physical gestures, and they valued genuine performance that was true to the text’s meaning. “Reading is an Art,” Brooks explained, “and the basis of all Art is Nature. The object of culture in Elocution is therefore natural expression. It aims not to eliminate, but to train and improve the natural expression. Everything artificial in expression is regarded as inartistic and distasteful. The reader who ‘shows his elocution’ in his reading, offends good taste, and shows his shallowness of mind and the imperfection of his art.”

Brooks’s commentary recalls Morse’s criticism of the well-trained Swedish singers, and suggests that the ideals Morse championed for music may have been rooted in an elocutionary performance standard. His critique of the young Swede aligns with

---

333 Ibid.
334 “See that the *emphasis* is properly placed….Notice with care that the *pauses* be properly placed, and are of the proper length….See also that the *slides or inflections* are properly used….See also that there is proper *natural melody* in the use of the voice…” Ibid., 175-76.
335 Ibid., 212-13.
Brooks’ notion of “mock solemnity,” as well as with his proclamation that “[e]verything artificial in expression is regarded as inartistic and distasteful.” For both men, truth in expressive art—grounded in either personal experience or in a vivid conceptualization of what that experience may have been like—trumps artificiality.

Brooks carefully instructed his student teachers on the method necessary to achieve this aim, suggesting they “[t]ry to make the appreciation so full as to result in a complete assimilation of the thought or sentiment. Lead the pupil to make the thought or sentiment his own, as if it were the product of his own mind and heart; and he will read it as if he were telling something he had thought or felt.” As all of these directives suggest, although their goal was the projection of authenticity spoken recitals were anything but natural, having been carefully analyzed, crafted, and rehearsed. Done well, this delivery was effective and favorable; done poorly it came across as showy and artificial. “It may be stated as a maxim,” wrote Brooks, “that vividness of conception is a golden key to the truthful and effective expression. He continued, “[s]ee…that there is proper natural melody in the use of the voice. Be careful that there is no jerkiness or abruptness in the use of the voice; but a natural melodious flow of tone that gives sense of musical beauty to their expression.”

Connections between elocution and music were forged not only through vocabulary, symbols, and performance, but also through imagery. Several of Comstock’s chapter headings for example, include a decorated initial that presents a musical theme in miniature (Figure 21).

336 Ibid.
337 Ibid., 172-73.
338 Ibid., 173, 176.
These illustrations suggest not only a literal connection between poetry and music, but also a conceptual perception that relates to the shared relationship between the fine arts and domestic ideals of cultivation, education, and the contemporary notion of “True Womanhood.”

Three cherubs, suggesting Christian iconography, play ancient instruments—flute, trumpet, and panpipes—while a more updated musical ideal is offered in the image of a young woman—a feminine angel—who performs at a modern instrument, the piano. Particularly interesting is the cherub associated with the word “Pitch,” whose panpipes allude to Pan, the Greek fertility god associated with shepherds and flocks. In the image, the cherub points to a chart that seems to be Comstock’s “Keys of the Speaking Voice” (Figure 15); thus suggesting a relationship between ancient

---

339 See Chapter 2.
Greek elocutionary practices, which emphasized affect and vocal delivery and Comstock’s own system.

While many orators of the day subscribed to the principles and ideals of elocutionary practice as proposed by Comstock, Brooks and their contemporaries, one of the most revered practitioners was Philadelphia-born poet George Pope Morris, who attended Botta’s salon throughout the 1840s and ‘50s. A poet, Morris was praised for his sensitivity to music and his poems were considered “songs,” even when they were independent from a musical accompaniment or traditional melody. Botta described him as “the recognized song-writer of America,” in her 1860 Handbook of Universal Literature, and Nathaniel Parker Willis acclaimed him as “the best-known poet of the country, by acclamation not by criticism,” in a letter to Graham’s Magazine in 1845.341

He is just what poets would be if they sang, like birds, without criticism; and it is a peculiarity of his fame, that it seems as regardless of criticism as a bird in the air. Nothing can stop a song of his. It is very easy to say that they are easy to do. They have a momentum somehow . . . that speeds them to the far goal of popularity—the best proof consisting in the fact, that he can, at any moment, get fifty dollars for a song unread, when the whole remainder of the American Parnassus could not sell one to the same buyer for a shilling . . . . Ninety-nine people in a hundred, taken as they come in the census, would find more to admire in Morris’s songs, than in the writings of any other American poet.342

Morris blurred the line between poetry and song by writing the lyrics for numerous popular parlor ballads. As late as 1906, the Literary History of Philadelphia still cited him as a significant songwriter, claiming that “there was none who did not know his “Woodman, Spare That Tree,” “My Mother’s Bible,” “We Were Boys Together” . . . and

342 Willis letter dated February 1, 1845, Graham’s Magazine, 150. 636
a host more.” Henry Russell composed the music for each of these songs—strophic, nostalgic, and sentimental—and they were designed to be accessible to amateurs, with balanced melodic phrases and simple piano accompaniment. The uncomplicated musical setting serves Morris’s popular lyric for “Woodman Spare That Tree” (Figure 22) by setting the text in relief against the harmonic background and predictable melodic line, heard by many as an expressive vehicle that affectively communicated the poem’s narrative.

Figure 22. Morris and Russell, “Woodman Spare that Tree,” mm. 15-23

---

343 Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, The Literary History of Philadelphia, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1906), 293. Throughout Griswold’s essay he used musical vocabulary to describe Morris’s poetry and its artistic merits. “If there is any literary work that calls for a special gift of nature, perhaps it is the song…. [the] first note should find the hearer in sympathy with it, and its last should leave him moved and wondering.” Ibid.

While such musical settings of Morris’s lyrics proved meaningful and reached a wide audience, his poetry was considered to be musical in its own right, needing (as Oberholtzer put it in 1906) “no red-sashed troubadours with their guitars under the latticed window for its accompaniment. It sings itself.”345 For Morris’s contemporaries, a poem’s construction, language, meter, and cadence created its own music when it was read aloud; thus poetry was often described with words that conflated the two art forms. Richard Henry Stoddard, for example, recalled a Botta salon performance in 1849 by “two of the swarming sisterhood of American singers, an elderly spinster (Miss [Elizabeth] Bogart) who was remembered through one of her solemn lyrics, entitled…” "He Came Too Late," and a more hopeful married woman, whose songs were of a more cheerful cast.346 Although he refers to both women as “singers” who wrote lyrics and songs, Stoddard left ambiguous the relationship between music and language.347 And he later wrote of poet Frances Sargent in a similar way, describing her as a “singer of tender melodies.”348 Like Stoddard, Grace Greenwood documented a performance by American composer and editor Richard Storrs Willis at Botta’s salon in November 1849. “Aside from this rare gift [of music] Mr. Willis possesses yet another, that of song;” she wrote, “He is a fine poet, and writes the words as well as the music of his delicious songs. What a beautiful and enviable duality of genius! What a full and perfect expression is thus given to the sad and joyous emotions of the heart, to its dreams and loves, wild hopes and intense longings, and passionate regrets—to the restless play of fancy—to the swell and

345 Ibid.
347 There is no evidence that “He Came Too Late” was set to music, nor that Bogart ever wrote musical melodies.
surging of free, strong thought—to all the deepest delights and divinest aspirations of the spirit!”

Greenwood’s statement speaks to poetic expression, while hinting at music’s ability to engage with the sublime; for her, music and poetry worked in tandem to create one of the highest forms of artistic expression.

As these examples suggest, poems of the era often had two lives: they were printed, collected, and published as works of poetry, and also set to tunes and published as sheet music. What determined the genre was context, performance practice, and perception. For nineteenth-century audiences, the definitions of song and music extended beyond our characterizations of these terms today, and afforded performances of poetry that transformed this genre into something that fell between a traditional song and spoken word. Declaimed poems, folksongs, parlor ballads, and opera arias were all part of the broad music-making practices of the period, and as such, they were regular features at Botta’s conversazione. Indeed, while Botta’s own poems were not set to music, and she never studied composition, nor received formal vocal training, contemporaries considered her a singer and a songwriter—both poetic and musical—to the extent that in 1887, the Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography described her poetry and sonnets as “musical, elegant, and finished.”

---

349 Letter dated November 30, 1849. Grace Greenwood, Greenwood Leaves: A Collection of Sketches and Letters (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852), 281. Willis wrote both the poetry and music for songs such as My Baby’s Shoe (1860), and Anthem of Liberty (1862).
350 Lucia Gilbert Runkle once remarked that at Botta’s gatherings, “[George Pope] Morris ceased to be an American Tom Moore, and became an agreeable and kindly singer of pleasant songs.” Mrs. L. G. Runkle in Botta, Memoirs, 88. Runkle lived in New York and was well known in literary circles; she also wrote for the New York Tribune.
DANCE MUSIC

In performance, songs were invested with layers of meaning. At Botta’s conversazione, dance music complemented these performances, accompanying the choreography it facilitated, calling the guests to attention, and combining with song to reflect the gathering’s sensibility. George G. Foster provided a window into this musical mix in Botta’s parlors in his 1849 book, New York in Slices, which chronicled daily life in New York City during the antebellum period. There are thirty-four “slices” of New York life in total, and Foster modeled number fifteen, “The Literary Soirées,” on Botta’s 1849 Valentine’s Day salon gathering. Addressing the reader as a first-time guest, he set the scene and advised:

“Hush!” Open the door softly, after you have smoothed your hair with a pocket-comb . . . and adjusted your cravat . . . . Step in gingerly and make your respects noiselessly to the smiling hostess, lest you interrupt what is going on in the front parlor, where a dozen distinguished-looking men and twice as many women, whom the veriest greenhorn would at once set down as leaders of the Bas Bleu, are gathered in a somewhat picturesque group, listening to a tall, deaconly man who stands between two candles held by a couple of sticks summoned from the recesses of the back-parlor, reading a basketful of gilt-edged notes.

Continuing to narrate the scene, Foster introduces the reader to several of the male guests before music interrupts his roll call. “But a polka has struck up in the next room,” he announces, “and we shall take a look at the dancers.” In Foster’s vivid account, the polka stops the party and steals the guests’ attention, creating an impromptu, informal moment.

“Here is a sunny-faced, smiling gentleman,” he reports,

352 According to the front matter, the New York Tribune published each of the original thirty-four slices before Foster then revised, enlarged and corrected them for publication. George Foster, New York in Slices, (New York: W. F. Burgess 1849), 57-63.
353 Foster mentioned some of the guests by name, including: Grace Greenwood, Lewis Gaylord Clark, Mrs. Seba Smith, Fanny Osgood, Miss [Margaret] Fuller, and Lydia Maria Child, who were all known attendees. In addition, he set the chapter with a description of the annual Valentine Party for which the Washington Square Lynch salon gained popularity. Ibid.
354 Ibid., 58.
standing up with a demure lady . . . The gentleman cannot stand still, but capers and prances about with an exuberance of animal spirits . . . shaking his head like a Newfoundland dog about to leap into the water, away he plunges, carrying his partner with him into the dismaying depths of the dance . . . trampling time out of the music and kicking it into eternity—while his merry and infectious laugh lights up the room with mirth . . . when the dance is over, he will take you into the wine-room, and tell you confidentially a side-shaking anecdote.355

Foster’s evocative description conveys the energy of the polka, but much like other reports of dances at Botta’s receptions, his does not list the title of a specific piece, but rather speaks to fashion more broadly.356 The polka was extremely popular by the end of the 1840s, and mere mention of the dance situated Botta and her guests with contemporary trends. Likewise Bayard Taylor’s account of 1848 lacks details: “Last night I attended Anne Lynch’s [Botta’s] ‘conversazione’ . . . . We had a dance and most delightful conversations with recitals.”357 And while Sara Agnes Pryor chronicled specific people and happenings at one particular Botta salon, she spoke of the entertainment much more broadly, concluding “[s]ometimes the evening would close with a dance.”358

It is not surprising to learn that Botta’s evenings included dancing, which, according to Preston, was the most popular form of social recreation in the nineteenth century.359 Today, dance cards or programs from the antebellum period are scarce, but many examples from the final three decades of the century indicate that arrangements of operatic music often comprised more than half of the music performed at these gatherings. Published as sheet music during the antebellum years, opera melodies

355 Ibid., 61.
359 Preston, Opera on the Road, 309.
appeared in quadrilles, quick steps, waltzes, and other dances, further attesting to the popularity of this social activity. Music stores across the country marketed and sold these pieces to young middle-class women who collected them, and then had their collections organized into a binders’ volume. By the final decades of the century, such collections of dance music for parlors and balls were professionally organized, published, and printed. An advertisement for one such volume, the *Winner’s Dance Foli for the Piano-Forte* (Figure 23) appeared at the front of an 1882 music collection, claiming that “A great want [was] supplied,” with this volume “arranged in an easy manner for parlor or ball-room.”

**Figure 23.** Advertisement for the “Winner’s Dance Foli” (1882)

---

A series titled “The Philosophy of Living, The Etiquette, Economics and Ethics of the Home,” published in 1888, includes an article on “Receptions, Dancing Parties and Anniversaries,” which offers insight into the understanding of parlor dances at the time.

360 Ibid., 309, 311.
Targeting a female middle-class audience, the feature focuses on “at homes,” now used as a catchall term that encompassed receptions, holiday dinners, and dancing parties. As the article explained, “the floor was divested of furniture and covered with crash, the piano and a couple of violins were stationed in an adjoining hall” and refreshments that included chocolate, sandwiches, punch, and wine, were offered in a separate room. “The hostess leads off the first quadrille,” the article advises, “and during the evening watches to see that all who desire have an opportunity to dance . . . . From twelve to eighteen dances are enough for one evening.” Good Housekeeping’s model “at home” reflects some of the trends that Botta helped popularize and perpetuate as both a socialite and member of the upper class. Her informal salons usually began in the early evening and lasted for two or three hours. She served wine and light refreshments, and a piano provided the dance music for polkas and quadrilles. But the main difference between Good Housekeeping’s description of a parlor dance and the dancing at Botta’s salon was intent. Botta’s guests described dancing as one of several spontaneous parlor activities that happened over the course of the evening rather than as a series of organized dances that dominated the evening’s entertainment. As part of a mix of entertainments and activities at her conversazione, dancing was unplanned and unaffected.

362 See Chapter Two for a discussion of the American appropriation and use of the term “at home” at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
365 The 1865 IRS tax assessment shows that Vincenzo Botta listed a piano as one of his taxable articles under the United States Excise Laws. Internal Revenue Service Tax Assessment, 1865. Division 13, District 8, New York City. Vincenzo Botta, 25 West Thirty-seventh Street.
Although publishers assigned catchy titles to the polkas, waltzes, and quadrilles that animated these dance parties both at home and in public, dancers and audience members paid more attention to the dance itself than to the title. In these settings, as well as at the Botta salon, this music communicated the spirit of the gathering and helped shape the scene. It is telling that Botta’s guests recorded the dancers’ names and details of their dress, but gave little attention to the musical details, drawing emphasis instead to the sociability, popularity, and fashionability of dancing rather than to the music that set it in motion.

PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS AND PERFORMERS

Not all the musical events at Botta’s conversazione were amateur or ad hoc. She also hosted professionals, including instrumentalists, opera singers, and composers, and was recognized for organizing “receptions . . . attended by many of the most famous . . . musicians of Europe and America.”

Maurice Strakosch, a musical manager who was affiliated with Botta beginning in the late 1840s, seems to have brought a number of opera stars to her salon over several decades, among them Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson, Italian tenor Italo Campanini, and famed soprano Adelina Patti.

In 1849, Botta had hosted two professional musicians on the same evening: American

---

pianist, composer, and editor Richard Storrs Willis—who had just returned from Germany—and an anonymous German pianist. Author Grace Greenwood was at the salon that evening, and her opinions about what she heard reflect changing attitudes about music in New York during this period. Typical of many of Botta’s guests, she was not a trained musician, but a devoted listener; “I need hardly acknowledge that I know nothing of the science of music,” she wrote to a friend in 1847,

I am not deep in the mysteries of operatic lore; I cannot discourse learnedly of trills, shakes and cadenzas; I do not own a dictionary of musical terms; my ear is not trained and eager to detect short-comings in time, and transgressions in tune. But, with me, the love of music has grown to be a wild enthusiasm, a passionate adoration….In my present blissful ignorance nothing is so distasteful to me as that mere criticism which coldly analyzes and remorselessly dissects the sweetest strains and most exquisite passages…. I can only speak of the effect of musical performances on my own mind, can only give my impressions of great musical artists.368

A year and a half later, writing about her experience at Botta’s, Greenwood commented on the performances by R.S. Willis and the anonymous pianist, just as she described:

without dissecting it. “A rare pleasure was ours, that evening,” she observed, “in listening to the playing and singing of Mr. Richard Willis, the young composer and ardent musical enthusiast, who has but lately returned from Germany, where he has spent some years in study. His music seems mostly sad, thoughtful, and delicate, rather than dashing and stormy in character; it is sweet, tender, earnest, yet full of spiritual meanings.”369

Greenwood did not record the names of the pieces Willis performed, nor did she assess technical issues, or even mention the instrument he played. Instead, her list of adjectives hints at the intangibility and affective qualities that many nineteenth-century Americans equated with music, and perhaps even an active resistance to German intellectualism; yet

368 Letter dated April 1847, in Grace Greenwood, Greenwood Leaves, 221-22.
369 Ibid., 282.
Greenwood’s description of the piano pieces as being “full of spiritual meanings” suggests an engagement with the emerging idea of art music. She had been considering this concept since at least 1847, when she wrote in a letter to a friend that music was “the revelation of a higher life . . . God’s eloquent evangel to the sense—divinity made audible.”

Greenwood’s account of the anonymous pianist’s recital is equally vague. “His playing is surely wonderfully fine,” she wrote, “and most peculiar in its character. As I stood near him and watched his fingering, thus listening with the eye as well as ear, it did not seem to me that he so much evoked the music from the instrument before him, as bestowed it, in a royal largess, a . . . shower of melody. The liquid tones seemed dripping from his fingers, rather than leaping up from the keys at his quick electric touch.”

Greenwood’s language, romantic and metaphoric, suggests poetry, as does her use of the words “liquid” and “tone”—terms that had specific meaning for Greenwood and her contemporaries. In his 1859 pedagogical textbook, Alfred Holbrook defined the term “liquid” within the framework of elocution as a “continuant, susceptible of simultaneous combination with other obstructed sounds.” This definition evokes musical associations, in which a liquid is equivalent to either a legato articulation or a slur. Likewise the term “tone” had both musical and linguistic associations, connoting the quality of sound, in music, and in elocution, a spoken syllable, which can be described using qualitative adjectives like loud, soft, pure, aspirated (whispered), rich, drawling.

---

370 Letter dated April 1847, in ibid., 221-22.
371 Ibid., 283. Also, “largess” is defined as “a present, bounty, or gift.” Robert Joseph Sullivan, A Dictionary of the English Language (Dublin: Alex. Thom, Printer and Publisher, 1847), 156. “Electric” is defined as “pertaining to, or containing electricity.” And “electricity” is defined as “that property in bodies which by friction attracts light substances and emits fire.” Ibid., 83.
372 Alfred Holbrook, The Normal, 50. Other terms describing issues of orthoepy are addressed in ibid., 47-62.
chanting, grave, hollow, high, and low.\textsuperscript{373} In this context, the “liquid tones” Greenwood heard in Willis’s piano playing are colored by literary associations. Greenwood’s description is thus not only metaphoric, but also practical. She mapped the terms she understood as a writer onto the music she claimed she could not analyze as an untrained listener, choosing words that had very specific aural associations in her milieu.

Greenwood drew from elocution more broadly by adopting its conception of the performer’s role in mediating content and affect; for her, technical facility did not trump the affective response.\textsuperscript{374} “It was very brilliant,” she concluded, remarking on the anonymous German’s playing, “yet . . . we missed the audible heart-beatings, the tearful quality, the sweet human feeling, which had most charmed us in the music of the young American.”\textsuperscript{375} While Greenwood gushed over Willis’s affective interpretation, she found the German’s performance lacking and insufficient in this regard. In the same way that Brooks, Holbrook, and others like them applied musical terms in a linguistic context, Greenwood applied expressive ideals associated with elocution to critique what she heard in the piano performance.

While opera stars and other musicians appeared from time to time chez Botta, Norwegian virtuoso violinist Ole Bull was a more regular visitor to her conversazione. Bull made five extended tours of the United States during his career, beginning in 1843 and ending in 1880, and his initial American tour was highly anticipated due to rumors of his charisma and exceptional musical ability.\textsuperscript{376} Bull had moved within Parisian salon

\textsuperscript{373} Brooks defined elocution as “the art of correct vocal delivery with the speaking tones of the voice in distinction from the singing tones.” Brooks, \textit{Normal Methods of Teaching}, 167.
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid., 283.
circles as early as the 1830s, and was reputed for his commanding performances and stage presence. American hostesses clamored for his attention and company in their parlors, and in 1845, just before his final series of American concerts on this tour and only a month after Botta moved to New York, she scored a social coup by hosting an evening reception in his honor. Thereafter, Bull was one of the most talked about guests at Botta’s gatherings, and as his popularity flourished across the United States, he became a fixture at her salon.

Contemporaries compared Bull’s musicality and technical facility to that of Paganini. In 1841 a reviewer in Warsaw proclaimed, “Paganini is great, Bull is greater. Ole Bull has Paganini’s technique, but Paganini does not have Ole Bull’s warmth and heartfelt style.” The “heartfelt” quality acclaimed by this reviewer was recognized by audiences and critics alike, and was often connected to Bull’s Norwegian heritage. This line of commentary emerged early in Bull’s career: two days before a concert in Paris on April 16, 1833, the musical journal L’Entr’acte announced an upcoming “soirée” to be given by Bull, promising that it would be of the “greatest interest.” The contributor continued: “Mr. Bull’s original talent (he will play Souvenirs de Norvège…) and the

circles as early as the 1830s, and was reputed for his commanding performances and stage presence. American hostesses clamored for his attention and company in their parlors, and in 1845, just before his final series of American concerts on this tour and only a month after Botta moved to New York, she scored a social coup by hosting an evening reception in his honor. Thereafter, Bull was one of the most talked about guests at Botta’s gatherings, and as his popularity flourished across the United States, he became a fixture at her salon.

Contemporaries compared Bull’s musicality and technical facility to that of Paganini. In 1841 a reviewer in Warsaw proclaimed, “Paganini is great, Bull is greater. Ole Bull has Paganini’s technique, but Paganini does not have Ole Bull’s warmth and heartfelt style.” The “heartfelt” quality acclaimed by this reviewer was recognized by audiences and critics alike, and was often connected to Bull’s Norwegian heritage. This line of commentary emerged early in Bull’s career: two days before a concert in Paris on April 16, 1833, the musical journal L’Entr’acte announced an upcoming “soirée” to be given by Bull, promising that it would be of the “greatest interest.” The contributor continued: “Mr. Bull’s original talent (he will play Souvenirs de Norvège…) and the

---


377 Haugen and Cai, Ole Bull, 218.
378 For more on the attention Bull received upon his arrival in New York see Mortimer Smith, The Life of Ole Bull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 64.
assistance of prominent artists will ensure him a numerous and brilliant audience.\textsuperscript{381}
Drawing on his virtuosity and Norwegian appeal, Bull hoped to establish himself in Paris with this single salon performance. His program consisted of several variation sets, all of which used novel techniques, along with one of his first compositions, \textit{Souvenirs de Norvège} (1833), which incorporates Norwegian folk melodies and features the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle.\textsuperscript{382} The day after this concert, \textit{L’Entr’acte} published a brief review: “We must not forget Mr. Ole Bull,” enthused the critic, “who showed an unusual talent. He has such a skill that the greatest difficulties are for him just like a game.”\textsuperscript{383}

From the time of his first tour in 1843, Bull moved within American salon circles, and while he likely performed at these gatherings there are few details about his appearances. Unlike the Parisian press, American periodicals did not print a record of salon performances, and to date no other accounts have surfaced. Repertoire notwithstanding, Botta’s salon provided Bull with a network of useful contacts in the press and in cultivated society, and his presence at her conversazione gave her salon celebrity, cachet, and cultural credibility.

**CONCLUSION**

From informal chatter to carefully declaimed poetry and spirited dancing, the activities in Botta’s salon served as modes of expression that collectively formed a microcosm of musical life in nineteenth-century New York. A wide range of music—polkas and waltzes, poetic songs and parlor ballads, instrumental solos and opera arias—

\textsuperscript{381} Quoted in Haugen and Cai, \textit{Ole Bull}, 24.
\textsuperscript{382} Haugen and Cai, \textit{Ole Bull}, 294. \textit{Souvenirs de Norvège} is scored for solo Hardanger fiddle (a country fiddle), two violins, viola, cello, double bass and flute. It was later revised and likely became \textit{Norges Fje\lde} (1838).
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid., 25.
coexisted in this central place, and these performances were both literally and metaphorically in dialogue with one another. Today we are left with an empty space where we imagine extensive details about the repertoire and programming choices at Botta’s salon should reside. But rather than telling us what her guests performed, this empty space actually suggests how they listened, and points to the fact that they made a conscious decision to include details about what they valued, what music meant, and how it was situated within the context of her conversazione.

These details relate to aesthetics of naturalness that were attached to the French leanings of Botta’s salon, evidencing a preference valued by so many of the Francophiles who attended.³⁸⁴ Emphasis on affect permeated their commentaries about music, suggesting a preference for that which was instinctively understood and that did not require intellectual analysis to be appreciated. This attitude, more inclusive than elitist in tone, aligns with the democratic ideals also valued by so many of Botta’s guests. Within the context of her conversazione, the documentation we have further suggests that music maintained its role as a source of entertainment despite the emergence of high and low art classifications throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Botta did not aim to promote a specific repertoire, musical or otherwise. Instead, she fostered an artistic and intellectual culture in which music served the greater conversation, and ultimately facilitated a lasting symbiotic relationship between those who attended and the society from which they came.

CHAPTER 4

BOTTA’S ATTENDEES IN THE PRESS: YOUNG AMERICA, THE CRITICS, AND OLE BULL

Anne Botta’s *Handbook of Universal Literature*, published in 1860, ends with a paean to American newspapers and periodicals. Describing them as “powerful engines in creating taste for literature,” she noted that:

Every interest, every social and political doctrine has its organ, and every village has its newspaper; not devoted solely to special local or even to national topics, but registering the principal passing events of the actual as well as of the intellectual world… These papers are offered at so small a price as to place them within the reach of all; and in a country where every one [sic.] reads, the influence of such a power as a public educator, in stimulating and diffusing mental activity, and in creating cosmopolitan interests, can scarcely be comprehended in its full significance….The Magazines and Reviews of the United States…present a variety of reading which exhibits at once the versatility of the people and the cosmopolitan tendency of the literature which addresses itself to the sympathies of the most diversified classes of readers.  

Botta’s focus on cosmopolitanism and edification reflects her own commitment to cultivating these qualities, which she pursued not only in her writing and poetry, but also in her salon. The press, Botta believed, brought culture and knowledge to the masses: “every one reads,” as she noted, and paper media cultivated not only literary, but also musical, political, and artistic taste. She invited a select number of the writers who did this work, including staff writers from the *Democratic Review*, *New York Tribune*, 

---


386 By 1850, the amount of reading material made available to Americans was astonishing: “New York City alone had 104 publications with an annual circulation of 78,747, 600.” Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11. According to historian James McPherson, “New England led the world in educational facilities and literacy at mid-century. More than 95 percent of its adults could read and write; three-fourths of the children aged five to nineteen were enrolled in school, which they attended for an average of six months a year. The South lagged with only eighty percent of its white population literate and one-third of the white children enrolled in school for an average of three months a year. Even counting the slaves, nearly four-fifths of the American population was literate in the 1850s.” James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19-20.
Home Journal, Musical World and Times, and the Evening Mirror to her salon, and from the time of its inception made her conversazione a space in which they could interact not only with each other, but also with the artists they reviewed. Collectively, Botta’s guests represented opposing sides of political parties and cultural debates. “Liberals and conservatives, peers and revolutionists, holders of the most ancient traditions and advocates of the most modern theories—all found their welcome, if they deserved it,” author and Botta guest Lucia G. Runkle later recalled, “and each took away a new respect for the position of his opponent.”

Although members of Botta’s salon collectively aimed to raise public consciousness and advance cultural life in New York, they shared differing opinions about what musical sophistication should look like, how it should sound, and how to go about achieving it. Members of both the Young America movement and New York’s cultural aristocracy shared a presence at Botta’s salon, and between 1845 and 1852 their differing cultural agendas manifested in the city’s periodicals. These movements, and their related initiatives come into focus through an examination of Ole Bull’s second United States tour in 1852, which illuminates both this convergence of ideas and the emanating influence of Botta’s salon.

YOUNG AMERICA

Organized in 1837 by writer and editor John O’Sullivan, “Young America” was a collective of writers and critics that conflated culture with politics. Aligning itself with

---


388 Edward L. Widmer, Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19. After 1850, the Young America movement grew increasingly more complex, ultimately calling the organization’s original initiatives into question. Separate factions emerged, and the term “Young America” colloquially took on different meanings. See ibid., 133. For more on Young
the Democratic Party, the group argued for a nationalist agenda that would end the United States’ cultural subservience to Europe, and promoted itself as the alternative to the Knickerbocker gentry—a conservative circle of Episcopalian anglophiles who supported the Whig party.389

Many of the Knickerbockers were amateur writers, and they endorsed each other’s work through puff pieces in their own Knickerbocker magazine, a publication that by 1840 held significant sway over public opinion. Young America competed with the Knickerbockers by publishing two magazines of its own: Arcturus, a monthly established in 1840, and the Democratic Review, a broad-circulation political magazine founded in 1837.390 From its inception until 1846, the Review reflected the complexities of American nationalism, combining political journalism with an eclectic mix of articles, including new fiction and columns devoted to music, drama, and art.391 Informing audiences about specific performances, works, and artists, these articles generated a public conversation about current events and raised new questions about what American culture looked and sounded like. Retrospectively articulating this argument alongside the fundamental components of Young America’s ideology, historian Edward Widmer observes that:

The founding of the Democratic Review was the first blow in a cultural argument that raged through the antebellum era and still flickers quietly today. At the heart

---

389 See Widmer, Young America, 19. Youth and an interest in revitalizing American culture dominated the rhetoric in 1837. Many members of the Young America circle were Botta’s contemporaries, and when the group was organized, they were mostly in their late twenties and early thirties. See also Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 685–87.
390 Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 686. For more on the Democratic Review, see Widmer, Young America, 65.
391 Widmer, Young America, 13, 47. Duyckinck and other members of his circle aimed to cultivate a new kind of American literature that was intended to reflect their conception of the United States—vast, reckless, and thoroughly ‘original.’ Ibid., 97.
of this regional, political, and generational argument were basic ideas we now take for granted; namely, that a creative artist does not have to be educated or wealthy to be taken seriously as an intellectual; that a raw teenager can say something as interesting as an older person; and that a successful work ought to speak clearly to the mass of the American people, not just to intellectuals.\footnote{392}{Ibid., 12.}

Botta published poetry in the \textit{Democratic Review} as early as 1842, and was further absorbed into its circle when she moved to Washington Square in 1845.\footnote{393}{Some of these include "Lines, to One Who Wished to Read Some Lines I Had Written." \textit{The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review} 11, no. 54 (December, 1842), 645.; "A Thought by the Seashore." \textit{The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review} 11, no. 54 (December, 1842), 644.; and "Books for the People." \textit{The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review} 12, no. 60 (June 1843), 603.} She fit the profile of the model Young American and quickly established both professional and social connections with members of the group. Her Washington Square neighbor Evert Duyckinck was a leader at the heart of the Young America scene, and in 1845 he became the literary editor of the \textit{Review}. Among their many cultural initiatives, he and his brother George hosted an informal literary salon that became known as the Tetractys Club—a liberal-leaning club of journalists, writers, and editors that was open to men who mainly shared similar political views and gossip.\footnote{394}{"Tetractys Club" taken from Gregory M. Pfitzer, \textit{Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 1840-1920} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 19. See also Widmer, \textit{Young America}, 112.} They also debated the future of United States culture, and intended to steer the course by asserting their influence and taking control from Boston, the Whigs, and old conservatives.\footnote{395}{Ibid., 12.} The enthusiasm and sense of purpose that Young America maintained was captured in grand pronouncements and declarations printed in its publications and delivered in public addresses.

"Americanism [is] sweeping the world," declared author and Young American Cornelius Mathews in 1845, "redefining the realms of literature, humor, art, music, and theater."\footnote{396}{Quoted in ibid. 103. Mathews and E. Duyckinck also co-founded \textit{Arcturus} magazine to rival the \textit{Knickerbocker} magazine founded by Lewis Gaylord Clark, who was at the center of the Knickerbocker circle. Burrows and Wallace, \textit{Gotham}, 685-86. Evert Duyckinck and his brother George also founded and}
For Mathews, Americanism was bound to a sense of place where ideas converged, were reinterpreted, and then redistributed. Further, in his conception an assortment of ideas and influences came together in New York, and he viewed of Young America as an arrangement of concentric circles—regional, national, and international—emanating its influence to the rest of the world.

Mathews’s vision of Young America relates profoundly to the sense of purpose that Botta maintained for her salon. Inspired by Young America’s ideals and looking to assert her position within the New York literary scene, she welcomed Duyckinck and his circle to her Washington Square conversazione. “Miss Lynch will be happy to see Mr. Duyckinck’s friends this evening,” she wrote one Saturday, inviting them to a salon later that day.397 On another occasion she “request[ed] the pleasure of Mr. Duyckinck’s company to tea on Friday evening at ½ past 7 o’clock.”398 And after extending an invitation to a 4th of July party, she offered him a standing invitation to her conversazione: “If you are prevented from coming tonight however, I am always home on Saturday evening, when I am in town & I shall be most happy to see you.”399 Far more inclusive than his Tetractys Club, her salon welcomed many who were not Young Americans, including Knickerbockers, Whigs, Democrats, and women, representing various artistic disciplines and giving voice to a vast array of cultural ideas. Her inclusion

---

of the Knickerbockers was particularly shrewd, as it gave her the credibility that came through an association with New York’s traditional aristocracy, and prevented those in the group from commenting negatively about her in the press.

Young America, as its ideals were expressed and advanced by the activities in Botta’s salon and in the pieces published in the Democratic Review, had at its center a circle of writers whose chief mission was to elevate American literature and poetry; as in Botta’s literary salon, however, music was an essential part of Young America’s cultural fabric. Many of the authors who contributed fiction and poetry to the Democratic Review also wrote music criticism, ultimately giving literary voice to musical ideas. They often focused on more general discussion topics, highlighting aspects of the audience, the venue, and the concert program, and wrote about the issues surrounding the music rather than the actual music itself. Instead of concentrating on American composers or an American style specifically, these authors grounded their discussions in American ideals of democracy and education via overarching themes of accessibility. Most frequently, the Review’s contributors pressed the importance of American music—it’s place and meaning—as a distinctive element of national culture. “It has been justly remarked by a well-known foreign writer on this country,” reported one contributor in November 1846, “that there is a general and enthusiastic love of music in the United States; and that evidences may be seen of it in the residences of nearly all our citizens. This passion has gradually acquired an intensity which is the best earnest of our future progress and the attainment of degree of excellence equal to that of the most musical nations of Europe.”

In keeping with Young American ideals, the author called attention to the

United States’ musical potential, while encouraging the country’s cultural development. He asserted that “good music” was imported from Europe and acknowledged the influence of foreign artists in “forming the style of [American] singers and musicians,” but he credited cosmopolitanism for the success of foreign performers in the U.S. Further, the author raised a call to arms for the composition of a new, national music claiming, that “the ambition of the people [was] now fully awakened and [sought] to give native talent those advantages of study and instruction which [would] eventually enable it to achieve for [the United States] a national reputation.”

One key to this development, and to a broader cultivation of more sophisticated taste, he maintained, was public music education. A second key, embraced by many of the Review’s authors, was the development of musical institutions—the American Musical Institute, the Philharmonic Society of New York, among others—which provided evidence of America’s cultural capital.

Essays and reviews were not the only vehicles for The Democratic Review’s commentaries on music; advertising and informational columns also played a role. Articles about European composers and advertisements for concert events featuring European performers appeared regularly. Boston music critic John S. Dwight published lengthy biographical articles about Handel, Haydn, and Mozart, while essays about Jenny Lind, poems to Ole Bull, and detailed biographies about contemporary composers.

---

401 Ibid.
402 Ibid.
including Franz Liszt added to the Review’s content.\textsuperscript{404} Introducing a new column entitled “The Arts” in 1847, the magazine’s editors explained that, “[u]nder this general head we propose to give in each number a view of what has been done during the past month, and, as far as our opportunities will admit, of what is about to be done in Music, the Drama, Painting, &c.”\textsuperscript{405} These columns fostered understanding and creativity, and subtly challenged readers to produce their own music through either performance or composition. In 1847, celebrating perceptions of musical progress since the founding of Young America the previous decade, an anonymous author who contributed to the magazine announced that, “music has made greater advances within the last ten years than during the previous sixty years of our existence as a country, and relatively, almost incredibly greater advances here than in Europe. According to this article, music’s exponential advancement was an indicator of cultural promise. The author recognized Young America’s use of music to advance its goals and ideologies, and placed the U.S. in a strong position to overtake Europe in the cultural sphere. “We have yet but started from points which she has left, but we go over the ground at railroad speed, and may reasonably hope to overtake, if not outstrip her, at no very distant period.”\textsuperscript{406}

For Young America, a key component of this mission was to establish New York as the nation’s leading cultural center, and the promotion of music was central to this aim. Young America viewed music as a means both to improve the city’s cultural status,
and to measure and elevate public taste. Throughout the 1840s, as explained in an article in the *Review* in 1847, New Yorkers understood their city to be increasingly metropolitan, and ascribed this change in part to the advancement of musical life thanks to the founding of the Philharmonic Society, the American Musical Institute, and “the brilliant succession of vocal and instrumental artists who have sought and won [approval] from the critics and the public of this city.”\[407\] Highlighting both the concert setting and the audience reaction as indicators of progress, the author proposed that these perceived successes, and the hope of a permanent establishment of Italian Opera in the city, had “given an impulse to the higher sort of music, the effects of which [were] plainly visible, both in the improved taste of our public, and in the unwearying constancy with which they [attended] the performances of great works or distinguished artists.”\[408\] Further, by resituating European music within American concert halls, Young America could identify the music as inherently American, reinterpreting it as edifying and democratic, thus fulfilling the promise of its cultural mission.

Throughout the 1840s one of Young America’s strongest advocates for an American music was Walt Whitman. A prominent voice in the city’s newspapers at this time, he borrowed from Young American’s ideology, but interpreted its fundamental components—cultural advancement, democracy, and education—in ways different from the articles that appeared in the *Democratic Review*.

**WALT WHITMAN**

“Great is the power of music over a people!” So Whitman declared in the opening of a short article titled “A Thought of Ours About Music in the United States,” published

\[407\] Ibid.
\[408\] Ibid.
Celebrating music’s existence not only on an aesthetic level, but also as a means of influence, he aligned his argument with components of Young America’s cultural initiative. “We have long enough followed obedient and child-like in the track of the Old World,” Whitman asserted. “We have received her tenors and her buffos; her operatic troupes and her vocalists, of all grades and complexions; listened to and applauded the songs made for a different state of society—made, perhaps, by royal genius, but made to please royal ears likewise; and it is time that such listening and receiving should cease.” Whitman referenced the musical objects—singers and traveling opera troupes—using them as tools to generate a dialogue around the music, and emphatically called for a break from the Old World. He articulated cultural distance by pronouncing European operas, performers, and styles irrelevant to American life. For Whitman, music expressed “the . . . spirit of a nation;” one way to reflect American democracy he felt, was to develop a national musical style that any American could appreciate or perform. Whitman believed that music advanced American democracy because it promoted accessible songs and performers, was


411 At the time Whitman wrote this article, he considered European operas intended for aristocratic audiences incapable of conveying an American sensibility, yet by the mid-1850s, Whitman grew to appreciate Italian opera. See Lawrence, Strong on Music, I: 349. See also Skaggs, Overtones of Opera, 15.; and Rugoff, “Opera and Other Kinds of Music,” 260.
inclusive, and was a natural outcome of a new culture of reception that rejected intellectual analysis.

Nearly two years before Whitman published this article in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, an extended version of the essay had appeared in the *Broadway Journal*, a weekly newspaper edited by Edgar Allan Poe.\(^{412}\) The piece served as an introduction to his concert review of the Cheney Family singers, a Vermont quintet comprised of four brothers and a sister.\(^{413}\)

Like the Hutchinsons, the Bakers, and other contemporaneous family-troupes, the Cheneys cultivated a folk-like aesthetic through their repertoire, performance style, and appearance.\(^{414}\) Many of these family groups performed songs about topical issues such as temperance and abolition, and celebrated American values like family and home life.

Whitman’s column, titled “Art-Singing and Heart Singing,” reviewed the Cheneys’ performance at Niblo’s Garden and Theater, a performance venue at Broadway and Prince Streets. “At last we have found, and heard, and seen something original and beautiful in the way of American musical execution,” he wrote, “the elegant simplicity of this style took us completely by surprise, and our gratification was inexpressible. This . . . is the true method which must become popular in the United States—which must supplant the stale, second-hand, foreign method, with its flourishes, its ridiculous sentimentality, its anti-republican spirit, and its sycophantic influence, tainting the young


\(^{413}\) The Cheney Family was one of several popular family singing troupes traveling the country in the mid-late 1840s. Lawrence and Strong, *Strong on Music*, 1: 347–49.

\(^{414}\) The Hutchinson family was the most popular of these family groups. For more on their performance style and repertoire see: Dale Cockrell, “Nineteenth-Century Popular Music,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 177-78.
taste of the republic. Here, Whitman raised the tension between authenticity and artifice, and claimed that European music would corrupt the nascent taste of a country built on democratic principles. He painted European music as outdated, ostentatious, and inauthentic, and positioned it in stark contrast to the Cheneys’ homegrown aesthetic, which was signaled by the quintet’s physical appearance. Whitman described the young men as “brown-faced [and] stout-shouldered,” and the girl as “strangely simple, even awkward in her ways.” He speculated that it was even possible the girl “[disdained] the usual clap-trap of smiles, hand-kissing, and dancing-school bends,” concluding that Americans “are absolutely sick to nausea of the patent-leather, curled-hair, “japonicadom” style . . . We beg these young Yankees to keep their manners plain always.”

For Whitman, an unaffected style matched a democratic ideology because it was non-elitist, easily accessible, and instinctively understood—a pointed reaction New York’s upper class, known at the time as the “Upper Ten thousand,” or “Upper Ten”. Man-about-town and Botta guest N.P. Willis coined the term in 1844, and as editor of several New York magazines he cultivated a pretentious aesthetic that intended to improve American culture, but aimed to exclude the lower classes. Willis used “japonicadom” as a synonym for the Upper Ten, and often underlined high fashion, attire, and performance venue as an indicator of the group’s elevated taste. The Cheneys appeared in stark relief to the superficiality and pretense Whitman associated with New

---

416 Quoted in ibid.
417 Quoted in ibid.
418 Lawrence and Strong, _Strong on Music_, I: 405.
York’s Upper Ten. These tensions between accessibility and cultivation both defined and colored musical taste through the end of the nineteenth century, and played out in the discourse surrounding definitions of Americanness as it related to music.419

Like Whitman, when reviewing concerts or writing about music, many of Botta’s guests focused on its entertainment value, visual aesthetic, and affect rather than on technical features such as timbre, meter, and musical content. As professional writers and amateur musicians, New York’s literati-turned-music-critics contributed to the public discussion with easily digestible columns that included information to which they could relate. Thus the content appealed to a wider audience and worked to advance Young America’s cultural initiative. Edgar Allan Poe, the Broadway Journal’s editor, took a typical approach when he added the following footnote to Whitman’s “Art-Singing and Heart Singing,” article. Whitman allegedly protested that he had “no scientific knowledge of music,” while Poe reported that Whitman “merely [claimed] to appreciate . . . [the music] as affects, in the . . . natural heart of man.”420 Whitman’s commentary and Poe’s disclaimer purposefully aimed to include readers who were not technically trained in musical discourse, and dispensed with creating the same aura of exclusiveness that surrounded more specialized or abstract discussions of music.421

Author and Botta salon guest Grace Greenwood admitted in a letter to a friend in April 1847 that she, like Whitman, knew “nothing of the science of music,” and “[could]
only speak of the effect of musical performances on [her] own mind.”

In another letter written a year and a half later, Greenwood wrote that she preferred the “earnest” playing of American Richard Storrs Willis over the performance given by the anonymous German pianist, claiming that she “missed the audible heart-beatings, the tearful quality, the sweet human feeling, which had most charmed [her] in the music of the young American.”

Such conceptions of instinctive rather than learned understanding created distance and, for some, led to an effective break with European culture by cultivating a style that was more in line with the amateur tradition regardless of where the performance took place—at home or in the concert hall. In keeping with this view, writers in the Young America movement favored general musical commentaries that spoke to larger issues of entertainment, aesthetic value, and national identity, which made music accessible and reached a broader audience. Young America believed that a political democracy required a cultural democracy, and for Whitman this meant that a distinctly American music must inherently speak to any American, regardless of musical training.

Botta upheld Young America’s cultural promise and democratic ideals in her salon, incorporating assorted types of music—parlor ballads, declaimed poetry, folksongs, and polkas—that expressed these ideological aims. But for Botta this was only one interpretation of what American culture should look and sound like. She also evaluated and included European models, and shaped public taste by presenting her guests with an assortment of ideas, and by giving them the freedom to form their own opinions. She not only grounded her salon in Young America’s democratic ideology, but

---

also positioned herself among New York’s cultural aristocracy—an influential circle that included leading figures such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, Richard Storrs Wills, and George Pope Morris. All three men were longstanding guests at Botta’s salon.

WILLIS, WILLIS, AND MORRIS

A trio that was pervasive and influential in publishing, the Willis brothers and G.P. Morris worked independently and collectively as not only contributors and critics, but also as editors of their own magazines, newspapers, and journals. Morris edited periodicals such as the short-lived *Morris’s National Press* (1846), and together with N.P. Willis established papers such as the *New Mirror* (1843), the *Weekly Mirror* (1844-1846), and the *Evening Mirror* (1844-1846). Each of these magazines contained an assortment of columns that included “Literature, Amusement, and Instruction,” on topics such as “Tales of Romance, Sketches of Society, Manners, and Every-day Life, Fashion and Gossip,” and the “Fine Arts, Literary, Musical, and Dramatic criticism.”

With these features, the editors brought sophisticated topics to their targeted demographic, the Upper Ten-thousand, with the intention of cultivating a high level of taste. This select group of privileged New Yorkers held significant sway over public opinion, and tied itself to the fashionable world—an agenda embraced and expressed by N.P. Willis.

---

424 Skaggs, *Overtones of Opera*, 35.
426 When the Astor Place opera opened in 1847, fashionable dressmakers, milliners, and tailors across New York witnessed unprecedented business and white kid gloves soon became part of the unofficial men’s opera uniform. Lawrence and Strong, *Strong on Music*, 1: 456.
Reputed for his knowledge on the subject of fashion, Willis offered advice on a variety of style-related subjects, including appropriate attire for opera-goers, and was singled out by *Peterson’s Magazine* as a critic, “who, of all men, ought to know best what it should be.” Unlike Whitman, who thought music to be a natural expression of American identity, Willis considered it to be an outward expression of sophistication, and believed the opera, above all, to be a social gathering place where one could show off a foppish wardrobe. His essays and reviews are laced with discussions of performers, composers, and criticism, along with his assessment of the sophistication and style of the audience. He referred repeatedly to the “people of taste and influence” in attendance, and reported that the opera house was “crammed with fashion.” Following a performance of *Linda di Chamounix* in 1847, he observed that “[t]he audience was one of picked fashion, highly dressed . . . the lobbies . . . crowded with the gloved and the critical.” Willis often included other details within his commentaries, evidencing a thoughtful and even edifying tone, but he aimed to communicate with a very select audience. In his conception and in contrast to Whitman and Young America, Willis sought to advance cultural life in the city via New York’s aristocracy, and the crowds that venues such as the Astor Place Opera House sought to attract.

Willis reviewed *Linda di Chamounix* for the *Home Journal*—a weekly magazine he co-edited with Morris, which like other contemporary periodicals featured a mix of

---

427 “The Opera,” *Peterson’s Magazine* 13, no. 1 (January 1848), 52.
commentaries on current events, culture, art, fashion, poetry and literature. “Our aim will be to instruct, to refine, and to amuse,” claimed the editors; echoing the mission that Godey’s Ladies Book had established nearly a decade earlier. Articles about music filled out the Home Journal’s content and attracted interested readers and social climbers who wanted to learn more about it. “Music engrosses a large share of public attention,” observed a columnist for the National Press (Home Journal) in 1846, who claimed that music was “of greater interest to the people at large than any other subject” except for politics. Music’s “importance in a moral, a social, and an intellectual point of view is acknowledged universally; it ranks as an intellectual science, and its professors are artists . . . . It is now quite a common thing to see the name of Mozart, Spohr, Mendelssohn, Hummel, Bennett, etc., etc., enriching the ordinary programme . . . . By far the most important step towards establishing the highest class of music in New York, was the founding of the Philharmonic Society.” For the National Press, music’s relevance extended beyond entertainment and signified elevated thinking, morality, and art; composers and the Philharmonic Society of New York worked in together to align American musical practices with established European traditions. Opening the discourse and granting New York a platform to join the longstanding cultural conversation, the paper’s contributors often situated music at the center of contemporary New York society.

432 Quoted in Auser, Nathaniel P. Willis, 126.
434 Ibid.
In contrast to N.P. Willis, his brother Richard Storrs Willis was a trained pianist and composer who studied music theory in Germany from 1841-1847. He worked as a music critic for *The Home Journal, The New York Daily Tribune, The Albion,* and several of his own publications including *The Musical World and Times.* On August 1, 1849, R.S. Willis partnered with journalist and author, Oliver Dyer to launch *The Message Bird,* a biweekly journal devoted to poetry, literature, and music. The two men remained the journal’s anonymous editors until July 1852, describing themselves jointly as a “gentleman of high literary and musical acquirements,” assisted by “several of the most popular composers and masters of music now before the public.” In the first issue, Willis and Dyer set their agenda in an editorial: “We desire to exert an influence for the elevation of music and literature among the great body of people. We wish to make the songs of our nation . . . [and] cultivate a general taste for the true poetry, the real music and the higher humane literature of the country.”

Like his brother, R.S. Willis intended to elevate public taste, and like Whitman, he aimed to identify the nation’s music; yet in contrast to both, R.S. Willis approached

---


music as a musician. The editors divided each of the *Message Bird’s* issues into two parts; although the first addressed general artistic subjects that included the fine arts and literature, the second half—the Musical Department—was the journal’s primary focus.\(^{439}\)

Willis and Dyer provided their readers with a mix of musical perspectives, including biographical sketches of performers active in the United States, European composers, studies of musical instruments, reviews of concerts and operas, and news of foreign musical activities.\(^{440}\) In addition, each issue contained one or more musical scores, typically for popular parlor pieces such as ballads, solo piano works, or hymns composed for the journal. American bandsman Allen Dodworth, English violinist George Loder, and English composer William J. Wetmore all contributed compositions to the publication.\(^{441}\) The inclusion of scores allowed readers to engage with the journal’s content in either performance or study, and a broad array of musical topics was covered in each issue—“Biographical Sketches of Weber and Paganini,” appearing in the June 3, 1850 issue, for example, appeared alongside a “Review of the Musical World of Boston . . . and a motette [sic], “Our Lord is our God,” by Muller, of New Orleans.”\(^{442}\)

With a cosmopolitan mix of composers and topics on the journal’s pages, Willis and Dyer helped to integrate emerging American musical practices into Europe’s established cultural tradition. The *Message Bird’s* mission was to improve public taste by providing readers with the tools to engage with what the editors considered to be more sophisticated art. They oriented American musical practices with European standards, repertoire, and

\(^{439}\) Ibid.  
\(^{440}\) Ibid.  
\(^{441}\) Ibid.  
models, and over the next two years, the *Message Bird*’s general fine arts columns eventually gave way to an entire journal devoted exclusively to music.

Under R.S. Willis, a string of music journals successively grew from the *Message Bird*, including the *Musical World and Times*, published from 1852-1856. This journal contained substantive pieces—reviews, biographies, and short music theory lessons—that artfully reached multiple audiences. While some of the journal’s articles and analyses targeted more expert readers and allowed them to delve into the material, others were accessible to those with no musical knowledge. A forum for readers’ questions entitled “Answers to Correspondents” included advice on everything from how to pronounce “fugue” and notate a “consecutive [parallel] fifth;” to basic answers on questions such as “Have you any music for the semitone accordion?”443 The *Musical World and Times* responded to all inquiries with useful information that was accessible to a wide readership.

On a broader level, Willis situated American music within the context of the European tradition. He balanced articles about the musical scene at major European cities including Paris, Baden-Baden, and Stockholm with musical events happening in New Orleans, Albany, and even Oberlin, Ohio. Other features in his journal included a series of notated exercises, an extensive article explaining species counterpoint, complete with music examples (Figure 24), and regular reviews of new music in a column called “Sheet Music Critically Assorted,” which reads like a musical book review, with

recommendations of pieces for purchase and indications of the level of technical difficulty for the individual scores.\textsuperscript{444}

\textbf{Fig. 24}: “Division of Counterpoint,” \textit{The Musical World and New York Musical Times}, Sept. 27, 1853

For R.S. Willis, music signified sophistication, and he provided his readers with practical ways to engage with it. His choice of language and the overall tone of the journal made the information accessible rather than exclusive. The September 10, 1853 issue for example, featured an array of music-related content, including a poem by John G. Freeze called “Ode to the Wind,” a discussion of a recent performance by Ole Bull, a paragraph about a new arrangement of “Hail Columbia,” and a complete roster of the players in Louis-Antoine Jullien’s orchestra arranged by instrument.\textsuperscript{445} That week Willis also featured two musical scores: “A Hymn” (scored for S-A-T-B and piano), and a solo piano

\textsuperscript{444}“Louis van Beethoven’s Studies published by J. Schuberth, 257 Broadway,” \textit{The Musical World and New York Musical Times} 7, no. 3 (September 17, 1853): 22.
\textsuperscript{445} \textit{The Musical World and New York Musical Times} 7, no. 2 (September 10, 1853), accessed January 8, 2012, Google Books,
piece by H. Deilman, “No. 2,” which the composer dedicated to Willis.\footnote{Ibid. “A Hymn” is attributed to Edw. Weebe. The piano piece is titled “No. 2” by H. Dielman.} The contents of this issue of the journal are indicative of contemporary musical trends and perceptions of cultural advancement and, importantly, call to mind the various musical activities that took place in Anne Botta’s salon. Given her status and the popularity of her conversazione with Willis and other contributors to the publication, the criticism and musical reportage in the magazine may also have related directly to the musical discussions that transpired there, or at the very least have reflected her guests’ opinions, abilities, and tastes.

Some evidence of Botta’s cultural influence is discernable in the advertisements, reviews, and articles that appeared in the Musical World and Times and numerous other newspapers and magazines across New York City.\footnote{Botta’s affiliation with New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley brought other contributors and members of the staff to her salon for decades. These included Margaret Fuller, Kate Field, George Ripley, Bayard Taylor, and Henry J. Raymond.} Often, these periodicals include lists of contributors, and in many cases these rosters read like one of Botta’s salon guest lists. On September 10, 1853 for example, during Ole Bull’s second US tour, R. S. Willis (having been a regular visitor to Botta’s conversazione since ca.1848) ran an advertisement in the Musical World (Figure 25), for a forthcoming concert that featured Bull (who had been attending Botta’s salon since November 1845); pianist Maurice Strakosch (who received his invitation to Botta’s conversazione through poet, Bayard Taylor in 1848); and ten-year-old Adelina Patti (who was acquainted with the Botta’s at least by the 1880s and likely before).\footnote{The Marquise Clara Lanza, “Literary New York In the Eighties,” The Bookman; A Review of Books and Life 51, no. 1 (March 1920): 15-16; American Periodicals Series. See Chapter One for the note from Botta to Taylor regarding Strakosch dated 10 [Oct.-Nov.] 1848. Another example of this specific network can be found in a series of articles that appeared in R. S. Willis’s Musical World in 1855. “Music of the Week,” Musical World 4, no. 200 (January 27, 1855): 1, accessed February 11, 2012, Google Books.}
Fig. 25: *The Musical World and New York Musical Times*, September 10, 1853

Text reads: “Ole Bull announces to his friends and to the public that his Second Grand Concert, will take place on Tuesday evening, Sept. 15th, at Niblo’s Concert Saloon. On which occasion he will be assisted by Signorina Adelina Patti, The Musical Phenomenon, Maurice Strakosch . . . Director and Conductor.”

In performance, in print, and in person, the men and women who animated Botta’s *conversazione* engaged in ongoing conversations about musical life and culture. Evidence of their interactions appears on the pages of countless New York periodicals, signaling the complicated relationship that linked Botta’s parlors, New York society, and the popular press.

**OLE BULL AND THE PRESS**

On October 30, 1845, Ole Bull ostensibly ended the New York leg of his first United States tour with a benefit concert for the Masonic Fraternity’s Widow’s and Orphans’ Fund. Nearly two weeks later, however, the New York *Tribune* reported that the tour might go on, as Bull had “been requested by a large number of ladies and gentlemen to give a Farewell Concert in New-York prior to his departure for Europe.”

---


Over two hundred people allegedly signed this petition, but only twenty-four selected names appear in the newspaper article. With a notice claiming this was not simply a publicity stunt, the Tribune attested, “We know well that Ole Bull did believe that he had made his last appearance before a New-York audience, until the receipt of the Letter below, which it would have been insulting to public opinion to have disregarded.” The letter laid out the case for an additional performance:

While we are grateful for the sympathy and liberality thus evinced toward the widow and the Fatherless, we cannot but feel that your farewell concert should be for no one class of the community. Your brilliant success in this country, the enthusiastic delight which your genius has continued to call forth, month after month, in all parts of the country, the popularity and manners, the cordial friendship you have inspired in many of our most prominent and gifted citizens, make it peculiarly appropriate that you should give the public a farewell . . . . We therefore respectfully request you to give another concert in New-York, before you leave America. Whether this suits your convenience or not, you will leave with us the memory of delightful hours, and carry with you our high respect and cordial good wishes, both as an artist and a man.

The petitioners connected Bull to “many of [the] most prominent and gifted citizens” of the city—by which they referred to themselves. Of the twenty-four names selected for the article, half were or would become affiliated with Botta’s salon, including, Margaret Fuller, Edgar Allen Poe, Catharine Sedgwick, Henry J. Ruggles, Lydia M. Child, Horace Greeley, Parke Godwin, and Botta herself. These signatories’ opinions not only mattered, but they also held power; Bull ultimately honored their request, returning to

---

451 Ibid.
452 Ibid.
453 Ibid. The Botta affiliates include: Rev. Orville Dewey, Margaret Fuller, Samuel Ward, Elizabeth Fries Ellet, Edgar A. Poe, the Misses Sedgwick [Catharine and Susan Anne Ridley Sedgwick], Henry J. Ruggles, L. Maria Child, Horace Greeley, Anne C. Lynch, and Parke Godwin.
New York for a final concert at the Broadway Tabernacle on November 26, 1845.\textsuperscript{454} Their association with Bull conferred a certain cachet to his performances, and their influence as well as their attunement to public taste was reflected in fact that a capacity audience of 3,000 filled the house that evening.\textsuperscript{455}

As the success of this petition implies, New York’s literati, especially those in Botta’s salon, were significantly responsible for Bull’s New York success. In particular, they achieved this in their roles as members of the press; they shared a rare unanimity in their reactions to Bull, acclaiming his performances and enthusiastically responding to the audiences he drew.\textsuperscript{456} Botta’s \textit{conversazione} helped to foster this support, as the exchanges about Bull among the critics, performers, and editors who gathered in her parlors were documented in Manhattan’s newspapers, magazines, and discipline-specific journals.\textsuperscript{457} Contributors to these publications, including Botta herself, covered his concert tours and generated a media frenzy of reviews, announcements, advertisements, and tribute poems.

Botta was an unabashed fan, famously welcoming Bull to her salon, attending his concerts, and tossing flowers and a poem on stage following one of his performances.\textsuperscript{458} She published tribute poems in his honor, such as “A Farewell to Ole Bull,” in the New York \textit{Tribune}, and extended a standing invitation to her salon that afforded him the

\textsuperscript{454} The \textit{Tribune} printed what they claimed was Bull’s response to the request at the conclusion of that same article: “I…most cheerfully accede to your kind request, and will give the proposed concert before I depart for Europe.” “Ole Bull’s Farewell Concert,” \textit{New York Daily Tribune} (November 12, 1845): 2.
\textsuperscript{455} Lawrence, \textit{Strong on Music}, I:354.
\textsuperscript{456} Lawrence, \textit{Strong on Music}, II: 263.
\textsuperscript{457} This was especially true during Bull’s first two tours: 1843-1845 and 1852-1857. The third was from 1867–1868. He was in the United States for five extensive visits between 1843 and his death in 1880.
\textsuperscript{458} Botta’s enthusiasm was also tied to what Daniel Cavicchi has identified as a “sharing of selfhood,” where she recognized in his playing, overwhelming feelings that mimicked her own. See Daniel Cavicchi, \textit{Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 104-5.
opportunity to informally meet and socialize with members of both his audience and the publishing community. Responding to her enthusiasm for Bull, Young America illustrator F.O.C. Darley gave Botta a sketch of the artist wearing concert attire and holding his violin.

Botta’s published sentiments reflected a genuine appreciation for both Bull and his artistry at a time when it was a widely accepted practice for performers to pay journalists ‘black mail,’ to ensure good press. This approach was publicized in a lawsuit in 1846 via a letter that first appeared in the London *Musical World* from an anonymous author in New York, and was subsequently reprinted and circulated around the United States. “You can form little idea in London of what music is here,” the New York correspondent relayed, “of how musicians comport themselves toward the public; of the relations between musicians and members of the press; in short of the humbug universally practiced.” Using Ole Bull to make his point, the author claimed that it was not Bull’s talent that generated positive reviews, but rather the manner in which he captivated and manipulated the American press; according to the correspondent, Bull “fed, bribed, and flattered them all.” The *Boston Musical Gazette* targeted author and Botta affiliate Lydia M. Child as one of the writers who had “done much to give [Bull]

---

461 Lawrence and Strong, *Strong on Music*, I: 378. For more on the lawsuit brought by singer John Templeton against McLachlan, and the events that followed see ibid., 377-381.
463 “Music in America,” 194.
celebrity,” noting that she had “[wrung Bull’s] praise . . . to every part of the Union.” 464 Child’s promotions appeared in several important periodicals, including Young America’s Democratic Review, but Child was not alone in her enthusiasm for Bull. 465 A variety of New York publications, including Greeley’s Tribune, N.P. Willis’s Home Journal, and R.S. Willis’s Musical World, all had a hand in promoting Bull’s popularity. Each of these publications remained attached to Botta’s salon through a shared group of writers and editors. Thus the Botta conversazione served Bull well, allowing him to interact with this powerful press circuit, which was concentrated in a single location.

Typical was the article by Botta guest George William Curtis published in the Tribune on May 24, 1852 at the start of Bull’s second U.S. tour. 466 Curtis opened by acknowledging the curiosity and eager anticipation surrounding Bull’s concert and noted the sold-out crowd at the Metropolitan Hall—an audience that was “in itself a triumph . . . [and] evidence of [a] cordial and admiring remembrance.” 467 For Curtis, the audience signified a “genuine homage to genius of which any artist might be justly proud.” 468 More importantly, Curtis re-situated Bull as an artist by reporting on the significant change in musical culture that had occurred in New York since the last time he had performed in the city. In Curtis’s conception, audiences now had the capacity to experience music on a deeper level, and had a familiarity with higher quality performances, thus their opinions were “more discriminating, and therefor more

flattering." Even given the flourishing and more sophisticated musical culture in New York in 1852, audiences flocked to hear Bull, perhaps as Curtis suggests, because, of his individuality and charisma. “Like Paganini, he is an exceptional person. Like every man of remarkable and pronounced genius, he is a phenomenon. He is his own standard; he makes his own rules. It is useless to pursue him with the traditional rules. His orbit will not be prescribed or prophesied, for it is eccentric . . . . He is tremulous and tender, but also rugged and stern, and strong as his native mountains.” Throughout this column, Curtis touched on ways that Young America had advanced its cultural agenda and how Bull not only fit, but also embodied its initiative as a model performer. It is ironic, then, to note the extent to which, this passage borrows from the rhetoric of Romantic genius, drawing from generic attributes of the inspired performer as they had long been established in the European press.

Likewise, in a *Musical Times* article on June 5th that same year, R.S. Willis underlined Bull’s natural talent while conjuring a Romantic ideal. Willis described Bull’s “genius,” as “rough-hewn—unpolished and uneducated (so to speak);” the force of his personal magnetism compelling the “the world [to] render homage to.” Willis, like Curtis, used imagery and conceptualized of Bull’s charisma and Romantic genius in ways that fueled his appeal to American audiences, but also signaled cherished national values of individualism and self-sufficiency, which related to the idea of “rugged individualism,” a concept that has long played out in American discourse.472

---

469 Ibid.
470 Ibid.
One of the most evocative descriptions of Bull’s playing came from a reviewer contributing to N.P. Willis’s *Home Journal* on May 29, 1852. The anonymous author evoked the theatrical qualities of Bull’s performance in a critique laden with kinetic language and dramatic reference. “His mode of playing has a dash of the grotesque in it. Sometimes he hugs and fondles his instrument, and seems to coax and wheedle from it its tender tones. Sometimes, as in a sudden rage, he *snatches* music from its strings, and then, as if appeased, he skips and plays over the gamut joyously. Sometimes, however, he rises into a higher and swelling strain, and his body sways to and fro like a Norwegian pine, his hair flying about like foliage in the breeze.” While insisting that Bull’s performance defied description, the author included a vivid account of his playing, painting him as a flamboyant showman, echoing reviews of Paganini’s performances. This assessment portrayed Bull as a cultural curiosity and brought the concert to life, capturing both Bull’s appeal as an artist and his command of the stage. Bull’s own compositions allowed him to exploit the full range of his expression, from the wildly virtuosic to quietly and emotionally expressive.

In addition to his own compositions, Bull’s concert repertoire included Norwegian and American folksongs, works for full orchestra, chamber ensemble, and

---

473 The reviewer was likely James Parton. Ibid, 263 fn. For more of N.P. Willis’s writings on Ole Bull, see N.P. Willis, *The Prose Works of N.P. Willis.*


475 For a review of Bull’s piece “The Mother’s Prayer,”—one of Bull’s most popular pieces—on May 28, 1852 in the *Mirror,* see Lawrence, *Strong on Music,* 263fn. N.P. Willis and G.P. Morris had worked for earlier incarnations of the *Mirror* between 1843 and 1846.
solo violin.\textsuperscript{476} Works in this last category were especially helpful in providing Bull with
the opportunity to give performances that were both dramatic and theatrical. His solo
violin pieces, including \textit{The Polish Warrior} of 1835, often concluded with a finale that
thrilled audiences with a virtuosic display.\textsuperscript{477} The repertoire Bull chose enabled him to
achieve multiple objectives: he could demonstrate his virtuosity, he could appeal to a
diverse crowd, and he could cultivate and project a stage presence that appealed to a large
audience. Bull’s repertoire choices also allowed him to use this music to be expressive,
giving voice to his Norwegian heritage, and further projecting a genuine expression of his
personality.

As with most of Bull’s American fan base, the Young America crowd at Botta’s
Waverly Place salon in 1845 was likely attracted to him because of his stage persona and
programming choices. Born in 1810, Bull was just thirty-three-years old when he first
arrived in the United States and thus, was nearly the same age as Botta, Duyckinck,
Hawthorne and many of the other members of the Young America circle. Bull maintained
that he was largely self-taught, and he programmed pieces that he believed anyone could
understand; his own compositions exemplify this approach, as they are entertaining and
lyrical, with recognizable forms and memorable melodies.\textsuperscript{478} Bull’s image and music
connected with the group’s ideology, and particularly with its notion “that a creative artist

\textsuperscript{476} For information about Bull’s compositions see John Bergsagel, “Bull, Ole,” \textit{Grove Music Online.}
\textsuperscript{477} According to Bull’s biographer Ola Linge, he performed this work constantly, knowing that his
audiences would respond enthusiastically every time. Haugen and Cai, \textit{Ole Bull}, 233-35. Audiences also
praised Bull’s lush harmonies and lyrical melodies; elements still associated with his compositional style
today, and obvious in his work \textit{The Herdgirl’s Sunday}, composed in 1848 as part of a fantasy for strings,
When text was later added to this work, it became part of the Norwegian national song repertory.
\textsuperscript{478} Quoted in Lawrence Strong, \textit{Strong on Music}, 2: 263. See also Lawrence W. Levine, \textit{Highbrow
Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,
1988), 108.
does not have to be educated or wealthy to be taken seriously as an intellectual; that a raw teenager can say something as interesting as an older person; and that a successful work ought to speak clearly to the mass of the American people, not just to intellectuals. Bull served as one of Young America’s most important musical emissaries. “Bull symbolized the best of European culture but without an aura of exclusiveness,” notes historian Lawrence Levine, suggesting that for audiences of the day, Bull represented Old-World culture, presenting it in ways that allowed many Americans to engage with the tradition on a more fundamental level, and without having to compromise cultural or social ideals. In addition, Bull’s popularity served to advance Young America’s initiative of improving and expanding musical culture in the United States.

Young Americans John O’Sullivan and John Bigelow attended Bull’s first concert in New York in 1843, and following the performance that evening Bigelow was duly impressed, later noting in his personal diary: “[O’Sullivan] & myself went to hear Ole Bull on his first appce [appearance] in this country. He is reputed to be one of the three greatest artists in the world. His art is rather above me though I could detect a kind of power which I had never witnessed before over the violin. Bigelow’s reference to Bull’s music as “art” implies that he thought he was supposed to hear this performance differently even if it “was above [him].” With this statement, Bigelow spoke to the changing perceptions of music in America.

---

479 Widmer, Young America, 12.
480 See Levine, Highbrow Lowbrow, 108.
481 Ibid.
482 John Bigelow, November 25, 1843, “John Bigelow Papers,” New York Public Library. 1,1: 4. John O’Sullivan was editor of the Democratic Review and one of the primary organizers of the Young America movement in 1837.
Nine years later, at the time when Bull returned for his second tour in 1852, Young America’s initiative to advance cultural life in New York was in full swing. More New Yorkers were actively participating in local, regional, and international musical discussions, New York was attracting major celebrity performers, enthusiastic audiences were turning out in ever-greater numbers to attend concerts, and the press was providing a base for public music education. The increasingly sophisticated musical palette and a discerning musical taste was stimulated and shaped by Manhattan’s literati and the Young America movement, which in turn point back to Botta’s salon. Before the distinction between high and low art emerged as a point of reference, her conversazione fueled and reflected Young America’s cultural initiative, and elevated performers like Bull, who were valued for artistry, accessibility, and authenticity. The tension between Young America’s idealism and the desire to have a meaningful cultural mode of expression brushed up against the larger democratic imperative to be inclusive, and this ongoing debate continues to animate American musical culture today.

**CONCLUSION**

Botta grounded her salon in Young America’s cultural ideals, and this sensibility remained essential to her conversazione’s identity long after the original movement dissolved in the 1850s. Members of the initial Young America group attached themselves to her salon, perpetuating its ideology, and participating in ways that never fully disengaged it from her parlors. Music was essential for the group, ultimately serving as a benchmark for cultural advancement, as its accessibility communicated a democratic ideology and its entertainment value added to its popularity. This agenda was perfectly served in Botta’s salon, where music facilitated conversation, was part of the dialogue,
added a level of sophistication, served as entertainment, and expressed the sensibility of the gathering, all in an environment that was perceived as being non-hierarchical.

Botta created an inclusive and dynamic space that brought together creative people from across a range of fields. In her salon, performers talked freely with writers, artists, critics, and musicians. The musically illiterate joined conversations with the musically cultivated, and together they welcomed the public into their discussions via the press. Over the century, music critics, contributors, and correspondents changed their publications and their opinions; like musical fashions, their ideas shifted with the cultural development of the city. As Botta’s guests reinterpreted their cultural surroundings, they brought new ideas and different opinions to her conversazione that allowed her influence to retain its relevancy. Her salon was at the center of a network of conversations between her guests, performers, and the city, and operated as one of the nineteenth century’s most influential centers for tastemaking.
CONCLUSION

Music was an essential part of Anne Botta’s *conversazione* for nearly fifty years. It communicated her salon’s sensibility, provided its entertainment, and was a topic of conversation. Yet the specific details about the music once heard chez Botta are lost to history; extensive searches of extant diaries, memoirs, newspapers, magazines, and letters offer little information. There are no repertoire lists or rosters of performers, no musical scores, no outlines of performance standards—in short, no conventional evidence of the musical practice that prevailed in Botta’s parlors. While it is possible that records of performers and repertoire once existed but have since disappeared, this scenario seems unlikely, since many chronicles of Botta’s salon evenings survive, complete with details about other components of her *conversazione*. It seems more logical that the state of the available evidence reflects something more profound about the place of music in Botta’s milieu, forcing a broader consideration of the ways in which music contributed to a much larger cultural narrative in nineteenth-century Manhattan. In short, it appears that Botta and her guests documented the musical aspects of the salon only as such details struck them as interesting, relevant, or unusual in the broader context of their aims and ambitions. Viewed from this perspective, the paucity of data about musical practice at Botta’s evenings comes into new focus: what we have is not missing information, but in fact important evidence about music’s value, place, and meaning within a richly creative and influential circle.

At Botta’s salon, music operated on two principal levels. The songs, dances, and instrumental pieces created a temporal soundscape, in which visiting professionals and invited amateurs performed for one another, entertaining guests and opening a dialogue
about musical practice, skill, and repertoire that benefited all. More importantly, music underpinned and reinforced the various cultural initiatives and political movements that Botta’s guests represented and brought to her parlors. While these visitors seemingly did not subscribe to the idea that the music performed in her salon merited detailed documentation, they did comment on its cultural and social implications and overall affect. They gave consistent voice to these ideas not only in their personal writings, but also in the articles they published, notably in the pages of New York’s newspapers and periodicals. Thus, the private discourse concerning music that took place in Botta’s salon was made public, providing a glimpse into the ways music was understood there, and also disseminating the views of her small group to a wide audience.

What facilitated these dual aims and set Botta’s initiative apart was her salon’s cosmopolitan guest list, its embrace of diverging viewpoints, and its inclusion of artists and intellectuals working across a variety of fields. This mix created a fertile environment for the free exchange of ideas and the development of particular understandings of music in which song, dance, and other entertainments were resituated in a broader and more meaningful context. In this conception, the mere fact of music’s presence was sufficient, as it signified sophistication and fashionability, while also holding the potential to convey political or social messages. The evidence reveals that these associations mattered to Botta and her guests far more than the musical specifics, and that this conception remained so for almost half a century.

Botta hosted one of the most popular and enduring New York salons of the nineteenth century. It adapted and changed with the city’s trends, personalities, and tastes, all the while remaining a touchstone for many cultural leaders. This stability and
the credibility that Botta and her guests brought to her *conversazione* added to the institution’s longevity and emanating influence. Numerous period accounts credit Botta and her circle with advancing cultural life in New York, as author Charles Dudley Warner attested in 1894:

> Even in her youth she was foremost in a little band of singers [poets] and students who made American letters respected, and diffused in a commercial society the liberating influence of art and of literature. Our obligation to these enthusiastic pioneers in refinement and culture should not be forgotten. The debt to Mrs. Botta is not only in that which her pen produced, but it is for the character that ennobled social life. In this generation, I do not know any one else who did more by her influence, her spiritual and intellectual force, to lift that life into a high plane of rational living.\(^{483}\)

Like the other literary salons of her day, Botta’s *conversazione* had a significant impact on musical reception in the city. The writers who were her guests often understood music from a literary rather than musical perspective, and were allied to political, social, and aesthetic initiatives; this informed their criticism and shaded their concert reviews. For them, as for others in Botta’s circle, music was not an autonomous object but part of the physical space and intellectual milieu. It came attached to seemingly disparate agendas, such as those of True Womanhood and Young America, and exemplified important principles, including the value of democracy and elevated oratory. These threads intersected in Botta’s parlors via the music, and signaled its presence within other facets of New York life.

In sum, Botta’s salon played a major role in ushering music into New York’s cultural conversation, but her *conversazione* remained above all a literary salon, modeled on French traditions. Any understanding of the music in her milieu depends on an awareness of the activities that took place outside of it—in the circles of influence that

surrounded Botta—from her neighborhood and city to her country and points of connection in Europe. Exploration of these circles reveals truths about musical life in her salon and in nineteenth-century New York that could not possibly be provided by any repertoire list or musical program from an evening in her parlors.

Such evenings came to an end at her Murray Hill address a little more than a week before she died on March 23, 1891. Two days later, a small group of about twenty people, including Andrew Carnegie, Charles Butler, and A.J. Bloor gathered at her home for a short funeral service. According to Carnegie, there were no “formal invitations, no publicity, no pomp, no eulogy; only silence and tears;” what he described as “the sweetest and most genuine expression of sorrow [he had] ever seen.” Over the next several months, those who knew Botta mourned not only for the loss of their friend, but also the loss of her salon, memorialized as inseparable and profoundly influential. Upon her death, Botta’s *conversazione* immediately took on a venerated cast, elevated through the lens of nostalgia, and celebrated as unique, the first of its kind in New York, and “the nearest approach New-York ever made to the French salon.”

---

484 Botta hosted a salon on March 15, and two days later she “received the members and guests of the Nineteenth Century Club at their rooms [at the Metropolitan Opera House]” for the last time; that night “she [was] one of the directresses.” See Sophie Ewer, “Biographical Notes,” in *Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta, Written by Her Friends with Selections from Her Correspondence and from Her Writings in Prose and Poetry*, ed. Vincenzo Botta (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894), 32-3.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Arnold, George and Frank Cahill. *The Sociable: or, One Thousand and One Home Amusements*, New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1858.


Bronson, C. P. *Elocution: or, Mental and Vocal Philosophy: Involving the Principles of Reading and Speaking and Designed for the Development and Cultivation of Both Body and Mind.* Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1845.


_______. *The Phonetic Minstrel: Consisting of Original Songs, in Comstock’s Perfect Alphabet, as well as in the Old Alphabet; Set to Popular Airs*. Philadelphia: A. Comstock, 1847.


Garmo, William B. De. The Prompter: Containing Full Descriptions of all the Quadrilles, Figures of the German Cotillon, etc. 4th ed. New York: W. A. Pond, 1868.


________. *Passages from the Correspondence and Other Papers of Rufus W. Griswold*. Cambridge, Mass: W. M. Griswold, 1898.


Hartford County, CT, *Marriage Record*, 1838. Hartford, Connecticut Vital Records,


Internal Revenue Service Tax Assessment, 1865. Division 13, District 8, New York City. Vincenzo Botta, 25 W. 37th Street.


______. *The Rhode-Island Book: Selections in Prose and Verse from the Writings of Rhode-Island Citizens*. H. Fuller, 1841.


Ostrander, Stephen M. A History of the City of Brooklyn and Kings County. Brooklyn: Published by Subscription, 1894.


Rabinovitch, Eyal. “Gender and the Public Sphere: Alternative Forms of Integration in Nineteenth-Century America,” Sociological Theory 19, no. 3 (Fall, 2001): 344-370.


Reid, Alexander. A Dictionary of the English Language: Containing the Pronunciation, Etymology, and Explanation of all Words Authorized by Eminent Writers. 3rd ed. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1846.


______. *A Dictionary of the English Language: For the Use of Schools, and for General Reference; with the Principles of Pronunciation, Orthography, and Etymology.* Dublin: Alex. Thom Printer and Publisher, 1850.


______. *Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil*. Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845.

______. *Hurry-Graphs; Or, Sketches of Scenery, Celebrities and Society, Taken from Life*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1851.


______. Pencillings by the Way: Written During Some Years of Residence and Travel in France, Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, Turkey and England. Morris & Willis, 1844.


Wilson, Marguerite. Dancing: A Complete Guide to all Dances, with a Full List of Calls, the Music for Each Figure, Etiquette of the Dances, and One Hundred Figures for the German. Philadelphia: The Penn Publ. Co., 1899.


**NEWSPAPERS**
Brooklyn Daily Eagle
The Critic
New York Daily Tribune
New York Times
The Washington Post

**MAGAZINES**
Athenaeum
The Bookman; a Review of Books and Life
The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine
The Columbian Magazine
The Critic
Current Literature
The Democratic Review
The Dial
Godey’s Lady’s Book
Good Housekeeping
Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion
Harper’s Bazaar
Harper’s New Monthly Magazine
Home Journal
The Independent
Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine
Literary News A Monthly Journal of Current Literature
Morris’s National Press: A Journal for Home
The Musical World and New York Musical Times
New York Evangelist
New York Observer and Chronicle
The New Yorker
Peterson’s Magazine
The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health
Putnam’s Magazine: Original Papers on Literature, Science, Art and National Interests
The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society, and Art
Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature & Art

ARCHIVES
American Antiquarian Society
Bennington Museum and Archives, Bennington, VT
Brown University Archives
Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta Papers

Columbia University Archives

Cornell University Archives
John Bigelow Papers

New-York Historical Society
A.J. Bloor Diaries
James Herbert Morse Diaries
Mss. Lynch / AHMC Botta, Anne Charlotte Lynch
MSS Sigourney, Lydia A. Sigourney Letters

New York Public Library
Duyckinck Family Papers
John Bigelow Papers

New York University Archives
Theodore F. Jones Papers 1913-1955

University of Virginia
Nathaniel Parker Willis Collection of Papers

Yale University Archives

Western Reserve Historical Society