

# Temporal Approaches to Transatlantic Music Studies

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Studies of transatlanticism often focus on geography, routes, networks, and connections. Spatial frameworks, such as cis-Atlantic, transatlantic, and circum-Atlantic, help us to map the circulation of musicians, repertoire, and ideas about music.<sup>1</sup> Temporality is also a critical aspect of transatlantic music studies, one that offers a theoretical complement to spatial frameworks. Scholars of the Atlantic world have used frameworks that are oriented around geography and the physical movement among spaces articulated by natural and constructed boundaries, to track, analyze, and critique largescale historical changes such as the formation and consolidation of empires, the development and implementation of trade networks, and the forced and voluntary migration of populations. Temporal frameworks attend to the processual nature of such structural unfoldings. As this essay seeks to demonstrate, temporal approaches also foreground the importance of the human experience of and responses to those forces.

Time and temporality are notoriously complex concepts, so for the purposes of clarity I limit my consideration of time by using two conceptual categories: temporalities, the experiences of and beliefs about the passage of time; and historicism, the idea that the past is distinct from the present and future and must be understood on its own terms.<sup>2</sup> Music, as a durational form, organizes time, but for the

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1 This essay is adapted from a keynote talk delivered at the »Music Across the Ocean: Processes of Cultural Exchange in a Transatlantic Space, 1800–1950« symposium, September 7, 2022. My thanks to Melanie Unsel and Clemens Kreutzfeldt for comments on an earlier draft, to Melanie, Clemens, and Carola Bebermeier for the invitation to speak, and to the symposium participants for an engaging conversation about transatlanticism, music, and temporality. On cis-, circum-, and trans-Atlantic frameworks see David Armitage, »Three Concepts of Atlantic History« in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York, NY, 2009), 11–27. On the application of these frameworks in music studies, see Glenda Goodman, »Transatlantic Music Studies« in *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2015), <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/42059/chapter/355876765> (accessed February 14, 2023).

2 In the version of this work that I shared at the symposium I included a third concept: periodization, or the division of time into segments. I discussed the interdisciplinary challenges of reconciling different divisions of the past. I argued that periodization, while a useful first

purposes of this essay I am not addressing questions of how music itself intersects with temporality.<sup>3</sup> Rather, through temporality and historicism, I focus on the epistemological and ideological aspects of time in the modern Atlantic world. Doing so yields new analytic and historiographic methods for transatlantic studies.

In what follows I frame temporality as an analytic method that we can use for accessing aspects of past peoples' experiences with transatlanticism. I highlight nostalgia, fantasy, and what I call temporal anxieties, or fears about disparity and belatedness that stemmed from the experiences of separation and delay that the ocean generated. Second, I discuss historicism, which I argue has been a significant, if not always well understood, historiographical method for transatlantic studies. I share a microhistory of the life and work of the early twentieth-century German-American musicologist Oscar Sonneck, who laid the groundwork for the field of American music studies. Sonneck's writings show how his concern about cultural belatedness – the temporal anxiety I identify as key to transatlantic studies – was matched by his belief in the power of historicism to make sense of music in the Atlantic world.

## Temporalities

The human experience of time is diverse. Inquiry into the musical activities that happened in and around the Atlantic world do not fit easily into one temporal schema. Indeed, the idea of a singular, universal time reflects only one temporality, one that we might also call a Western colonialist temporality. This temporality idealizes progress and assumes a linear experience of time. Scholars from multiple fields have offered critiques of the hegemonic colonialist model of temporality and described alternative ways to understand time beyond the colonialist model. Postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe claims that every very age has multiple temporalities.<sup>4</sup> Kevin Bruyneel and Mark Rifkin separate out »colonial time« from sovereign Indigenous temporalities.<sup>5</sup> Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman argues that

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step for organizing one's parameters of study, causes problems when one is working transatlantically because traditional musicological divisions do not translate well to the historicist frameworks of Atlantic studies. However, for the purposes of coherence and constraints of space, I have eliminated the short section on periodization from this chapter.

3 Russel West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London etc., 2013), 16–17.

4 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), 19. Also see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); Winfried Siemerling, *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past* (Montreal, 2015).

5 Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis, MN, 2007); Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC, 2017).

any idea of time that focuses on productive forward movement is »chrononormative«<sup>6</sup> and Carla Freccero argues that queer temporalities attend to how experiences of past, present, and future overlap, can be out of sequence, and are in dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Identifying something as »dated« or »too soon« is in fact clueing into a departure from heteronormative time.<sup>8</sup> Even in the context of the dominant western temporality that underpins much of transatlantic historiography – the temporality that encouraged »progress« in the form of colonialism, militarism, mass migration, and trade – there are subcurrents of alternative temporalities. Using temporality as an analytic category helps bring to light critical aspects of transatlantic music cultures.

Consider experiences of time that are filled with anxiety about being behind. Since linear advancement is a hallmark of western time, falling behind is a great fear. The time it took to cross the ocean exacerbated that fear. As historian Kariann Akemi Yokota argues, U.S. citizens' ambivalent experience of »unbecoming British« after the American Revolution was rife with worries about falling behind in the realms of art and culture, science and education, architecture and landscape design.<sup>9</sup> Those who could afford to worried about the amount of time it took for them to learn of the latest fashions from Europe. Merchants tried to reassure consumers by advertising that their goods were the newest and most recently arrived.<sup>10</sup> Professional musicians who immigrated to the United States in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expressed explicit concerns about the nation's lagging arts. Many of these women and men sought to ply their trades as teachers, publishers, and performers in the new nation, and to do so they encouraged Americans' insecurity that the country was lacking something they themselves could provide.<sup>11</sup> William Selby, an English-born composer, took out an advertisement in a Boston paper in 1782, seeking subscribers for a new periodical that would circulate new compositions of high quality on a monthly basis.<sup>12</sup> According to Selby, establishing this periodical would help furnish the emerging nation with the polished image it needed. The United States

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6 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC, 2010).

7 Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC, 2006).

8 On such departures, particularly regarding futurity, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY, 2009); also see *Afrofuturism: A Special Issue of Social Text* 20, no. 2 ed. Alondra Nelson (2002).

9 Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York, NY, 2011).

10 Glenda Goodman, »Bound Together: The Intimacies of Music-Book Collecting in the Early American Republic« in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 145, no. 1 (2020), 1–35.

11 Nicholas Temperley, *Bound for America: Three British Composers* (Chicago, IL, 2003); Glenda Goodman, »The Power to Please: Gender and Celebrity Self-Commodification in the Early American Republic« in *Consuming Music, Commodifying Sound*, ed. Emily Green and Catherine Mayes (Rochester, NY, 2018), 176–202.

12 *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (Boston, MA, 1782), January 31.

was advancing in the sciences and philosophy, but behind in the arts. Selby queried, »Why may she not be *In song unequal'd as unmatched in war.*« Selby identified a temporal disparity between the United States and European nations and wished to help rectify it.

Scholars recognize that Euro-Americans were intensely concerned about the cultural lag between the U.S. and Europe.<sup>13</sup> Writing about the effort eighteenth-century American artists made to »keep up« with stylistic and technical innovations in European painting, art historian Jennifer Roberts reminds us that

Every scrap of knowledge that American colonists had about England, every image, every object, every memory, had to be physically transported thousands of miles across the water on a ship. »England« was a cargo of ideas, accessible only as a vitiated packet of information: percolated, modularized, dehydrated, pickled, or pressed. It arrived in schematic form and needed, upon arrival, to be concretized.<sup>14</sup>

I appreciate this quote because it makes viscerally evident just how challenging it was – and in many ways, still is – to transmit knowledge. Especially when communicating knowledge was subject to the whims and dangers of transoceanic travel. And on arrival, artists (and musicians and composers as well) had to reassemble the pieces of information into something as closely approximating the European original as possible. Thomas Selby's magazine proposal was in part an attempt to assist in that integration of musical information. But he encountered the frictions of print publication when he tried to start the magazine. The periodical never materialized, illustrating the very problems he diagnosed and was attempting to redress.<sup>15</sup>

Anxiety of falling behind is one expression of temporality, and another is the wish to go back in time, or, more accurately, longing for a prior time. Nostalgia shows how temporality was present within musical works in the form of stylistic traits and topical themes. Unlike the anxiety of belatedness that deviled provincial Americans, nostalgia was actively cultivated by composers, particularly songwriters who churned out sentimental popular songs in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> One subset of this genre were the so-called »Indian songs« that flourished from the 1830s to the 1860s. U.S. and English songwriters published nearly 60 songs that featured

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13 By no means was the concern about lag, or provincialism more broadly, solely a uni-directional matter. See, for example, scholarship on western Europe's relationship to eastern Europe and Russia: Larry Wolfe, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 1994); Kevin Karnes, »Inventing Eastern Europe in the Ear of the Enlightenment« in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 1 (2018), 75–108.

14 Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, CA etc., 2014), 46.

15 Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, MA, 1968).

16 Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York, NY, 1979).

Native American subjects.<sup>17</sup> These songs were written during and after the genocidal Indian Removal policy that saw the U.S. government force tribes off their land. The repertoire expressed the prevailing colonialist belief that Native Americans had two choices: assimilate or vanish. Frequently ventriloquizing Indigenous individuals, the songs feature characters who are struggling with loss and pining for the past. The approachable major keys of much of this repertoire is incongruous with the lamenting content of the lyrics.

A typical example is *The American Indian Girl*, an 1835 song with lyrics by J. M. Smith and music by Charles E. Horn.<sup>18</sup> Horn was English and composed in the popular Italianate style of the day. Above a steady arpeggiated accompaniment this largely diatonic F-major melody contains no musical markers of exoticism; if not for the lyrics, the song's »Indian« character would be fully masked. The first-person lyrics present a nameless »American Indian Girl« who yearns for the ancestral land from her childhood. The sheet music has an epigraph that describes her as »residing in one of the early settlements« meant to conjure a generic colonial village. The song is her response »upon being asked in the course of her education, whether she did not think her present situation and prospects more happy than when wandering in ignorance among the woods.« The lyrics of the first verse suggest that she was kidnapped or forcibly removed to the »white man's home« where she was told she would »soon forget my woodlands wild.« In the second verse she describes being promised a reunion with her loved ones in heaven, a scenario whose appeal fades and leaves her still pining in the present. The final verse finds her walking in a forest, in mourning, wishing she could be back in her »native land.«

*The American Indian Girl* is devastating, not least because it describes the very programs of forced relocation and education that actual Native American children were subjected to in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But let us remember that this song was written to bring nostalgic pleasure to white listeners. They wanted entertainment. Musical depictions of exoticized, romanticized Native longing provided an escape from, and justification of, actual modern violence. The song encompasses two separate but concurrent temporalities: a stylistic one indicated by the nostalgic musical theme, and a much uglier historical one of Native dispossession.

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17 Michael Pisani, *Imagining Native American Music* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 333–35.

18 Charles E. Horn and J.M. Smith, *The American Indian Girl*, (New York, NY, 1835).

NO

3-OCT 30  
Copy 1973

*The American Indian Girl*  
A FAVORITE  
**Ballad.**  
The Words by  
**J. N. SMITH JUNR**  
Composed by  
**CHARLES E. HORN.**

By Provision Indian Girl existing in one of the early collections upon being added to the series, the publisher, whether the sheet be printed elsewhere and printed upon paper other than that of the original publisher, is not to be held responsible for the same.

New York: Published by BROTHERS FORD & COMPANY, 229 Broadway.

VOICE.  
WITH SIMPLICITY.

PIANO  
FORTE.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1853, by DULIS & HATON, in the Office of the Clerk, of the Southern District of New York.

Fig. 1: The first page of the score to *The American Indian Girl*

A different example of temporality can be found in the wild west shows that were immensely popular on both sides of the Atlantic. In the mid-afternoon of April 16, 1887, a steamship called *State of Nebraska* dropped anchor off a pier in Gravesend, England. After departing from New York, the ship had crossed the Atlantic in two weeks. Aboard was the celebrity Colonel William F. »Buffalo Bill« Cody and his *Wild West Show*, consisting of some 800 people, and numerous animals, including 180 horses and eighteen buffalo. The skits and stunts of wild west shows featured skills unique to the American West. Seventeen thousand carloads of rock and earth were required to recreate the Rocky Mountains in the outdoor venue. There were marksmanship displays, sharp shooting, racing, scouting, and rodeo, as well as pretend train robberies and creative reenactments of historical battles that claimed

to be authentic. Musical entertainment came from the Cow Boy Band. Buffalo Bill Cody's *Wild West Show* was a hit with audiences who were eager to experience the excitement and danger of the so-called American frontier. British audience members were especially enamored with the 97 Native American performers, many of whom were Oglala Lakota.<sup>19</sup> The thrilling entertainment ran for over 300 performances in London in 1887. 2.5 million tickets were sold. Even Queen Victoria attended.

The *Wild West Show* is a fascinating example of temporal fantasy. The show was part of the American Exhibition at Earls Court, which aimed to highlight the modernity of the United States. The show thematized a belief in civilizational progress that was so fundamental to modern U.S. imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century. The show itself was called »The Drama of Civilization« and it consisted of four acts, or »epochs.« The first epoch was called »The Primeval Forest« a romanticized vision of ancient Native American life that was followed by skits about violent clashes with settlers in which the Lakota performers were the attackers, as well as skits about mining and white frontier life. The *Wild West Show's* musical, theatrical, and visual spectacle manifested a generation of white Americans' collective memories about Native American people and the Plains Indian Wars. Coming at the turn of the twentieth century, amid the feeding frenzy of European and U.S. imperialism and historian Frederick Jackson Turner's influential »frontier thesis«, the *Wild West Show* also exuberantly celebrated white racial victory in the American west.<sup>20</sup> In one extravaganza, audiences were shown the drama and the trauma of the American West, from a purportedly timeless past to very recent events.<sup>21</sup> As audience members watched skits about modern violence on Native land, they viewed the Lakota

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19 On the show in London, see Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana, IL, 1999), 86–123. The show toured Europe eight times between 1887 and 1906. On its popularity in London and on the European continent, see Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York, NY, 2005), 282–357. On the Lakota performers and their reception in London, see Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2016), 196–201. On the prior history of Native Americans visiting England, see Alden T. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500–1776* (New York, NY, 2006); Jace Weaver, *Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World 1000–1927* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017).

20 On those prior depictions, see Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849* (Durham, NC, 2014); Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music*. The scholarship on U.S. western history, Turner, and the »frontier« is vast. See, for example, Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (Berkeley, CA, 1997); Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, NY, 1987).

21 Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 256–81. On the use of music to reinforce a Native-»savage«/white-»civilized« binary, see Michael Lee Masterson, »Sounds of the Frontier: Music in Buffalo Bill's Wild West« PhD thesis, University of New Mexico, 1990.

performers as people from an earlier time period, and witnessed the staging of the modern U.S.'s present and future supremacy.

Performances like the *Wild West Show* foreground the importance of nostalgic fantasy as a complement to modernity's future orientation. Like the period's equally popular and entertaining world's fair expositions and blackface minstrelsy shows, wild west shows were beloved on both sides of the Atlantic and used racist stereotypes to celebrate diversity in such a way that reinforced racial hierarchy. The show's organization into distinct periods in history, or »epochs«, argued in favor of the »progress« resulting from U.S. land grabs and forced assimilation programs, progress that was presented as both inexorable and hard-won.

White composers, dramatists, songwriters, and performers had been depicting racialized fantasies about the »New World« for centuries. In some ways, wild west shows were part of a long entertainment tradition. But the *Wild West Show* also spoke to a specific ambivalence about modernity, especially industrialization and urbanization. As one newspaper account put it, »these dusky Indians, with their unearthly streaks of colour on their faces, and their monotonous, and hollow cries as they ride past [...] remind us of the earlier forms of savage man whence we have evolved, not [...] always in the right direction.«<sup>22</sup> Historian Coll Thrush argues that Londoners were worried about »over-civilization« a condition of urban life that was particularly dangerous to men whose office work and suburban family life sapped their virility and left them incapable of mustering the vitality to carry out the aims of the British empire.<sup>23</sup> The physical feats of the *Wild West Show* reminded audiences of the robustness and mental fortitude they feared was being lost.

One other transatlantic temporal theme highlighted by the *Wild West Show*: the show's success was itself a salve for white Americans' anxiety about being culturally »behind« Europe. Europe had long served as the benchmark against which American culture was evaluated. When nearly all U.S. arts and culture relied on transatlantic role models, the *Wild West Show* illustrated how Americans could »catch up« by presenting something Indigenous and »primitive.« In both positive and negative ways, the show illustrates the importance of ideas about and experiences of time in transatlantic culture.

I have used these examples to demonstrate how attention to temporality illuminates features of transatlantic culture. Temporality also helps make sense of clues in the historical record that express awareness of, and grappling with, the effects of temporal disparity and asynchrony. These include concerns about being outdated,

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22 *The Sunday Chronicle*, October 17, 1887 (quoted in Thrush, *Indigenous London*, 199).

23 Thrush, *Indigenous London*, 173–203. On related arguments about the United States, T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, NY, 1981); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, IL, 2000).

and complaints and worries about the breakdown in transatlantic communications. Missing letters, connections sundered by death or relocation, networks that lose key links – these are all communication problems that reveal intractable transatlantic temporal disruptions. We can also look for what resulted from these disruptions: knowledge that was increasingly obsolete, frustration with lack of news or new music, boredom.

An example of temporality revealed through disconnection comes from one of the most prominent musical figures in transatlantic history, the New Orleanian virtuoso pianist Louis Gottschalk. Describing his return to the United States from Paris in 1853, Gottschalk mentions that he was startled to find that the attention he received in the glamorous »capital of the world« did not translate to the American towns he passed through. In his diary he wrote, »my reputation, wholly Parisian, had not, thus to speak, crossed the Atlantic. Two or three hundred concerts, given in Belgium, in Italy, in France, Spain, Switzerland etc., had given me a name; but this name, so young, was not yet acclimated in America.«<sup>24</sup> What good were his international bona fides when he struggled to sell enough tickets to cover the costs of his first U.S. tour because his reputation had not yet arrived? His choice of the phrase »not yet acclimated in America« reinforces the idea that there were fundamental differences between the United States and Europe. »Acclimate« was used to describe species' habituation to both new social and new environmental circumstances.<sup>25</sup> North America had been described by Europeans as lush, dangerous, and primeval compared to Europe since the sixteenth century, and botanical and agricultural questions were particularly motivating for settlers who wished to understand what and why certain plants and crops thrived in the so-called New World. The term captures the hope, hubris, and limitations faced by those who would transplant and transform the environment. Gottschalk's use of the term to describe his own career's habituation the United States indicates both his sense of inevitability in acclimation as a process, and his impression that America's cultural tardiness limited his ability to influence that process.

Not all transatlantic temporal awareness was negative. Migration from east to west across the ocean in search of new opportunities could express a desire to go back in time, to remove oneself from a fallow scenario and (re)discover bygone glory in a new setting. To go to a place that was »behind« in order to begin again. Although I've elaborated how a temporal analytic works with clues related to worries of dis-

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24 Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Clara Gottschalk, transl. Robert E. Peterson (Philadelphia, PA, 1881), 124. Gottschalk wrote this remembrance nearly a decade later, on February 15, 1862.

25 »Acclimate, V., Sense 1.a and 1.b« *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5169327977> (accessed February 29, 2024).

connection and being left behind, one could also focus on expressions of optimism, futurity, and a belief in forward progress.

## Historicism, Historiography, and Transatlantic Ambivalence

Historicism, or the method and practice of understanding the past, its relationship to the present, and predictive power for the future, represents the second approach to temporal transatlantic studies I wish to explore. I do so through a microhistory of the early Americanist and first music librarian at the United States Library of Congress, Oscar George Theodore Sonneck.<sup>26</sup> A microhistory, rather than a broader survey, allows me to delve deeply into a figure who not only was quite influential in transatlantic music scholarship, but whose experiences themselves typify the very transatlantic connections this essay and larger project aims to flesh out. Sonneck was born in 1873 and died in 1928, and his name is still prized among scholars of American music in the United States. Many of his colleagues and intellectual inheritors helped establish musicology in the United States as it exists today, including Otto Kinkeldey, Wiley Hitchcock, and Irving Lowens. The Society for American Music, founded in 1973, was originally named the Sonneck Society. In Oscar Sonneck's life and career I trace his own transatlantic biography, his focus on documenting historical transatlantic musical connections between Europe and America, and his ambivalence about the present and future of those connections from his vantage point in the early twentieth century. The temporal themes in this foundational figure's life and work reveal the importance of historicism within the history of transatlantic music studies.

Both Oscar Sonneck's career and his identity had a transatlantic orientation. He was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, worked in Washington, D.C., and died in New York City, but his ideas about music were heavily influenced by German culture. His parents were immigrants from Prussia, and he was only a toddler when he moved from his birthplace to Frankfurt a.M. with his mother (his father had died).<sup>27</sup> He grew up in Kiel, Munich, and Sondershausen. His German education cultivated in

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26 Sonneck also worked as an editor at Schirmer music publishers and founded the academic journal *Musical Quarterly* in 1915.

27 He had a complex relationship to his German-American identity, at times referring to Germans as »us« and other times as »them.« William Lichtenwanger, »Editor's Preface« in *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, ed. William Lichtenwanger (Urbana, IL, 1983), xx–xxi). During WWI Sonneck didn't support the U.S. joining the war, and he left the Library of Congress in 1917 after he was harassed by the government because of his German education and anti-war stance. He later wrote that he regretted his pro-German identity once the U.S. entered the war. See Sonneck, »Letter to Carl Engel« (Oct. 21, 1921), in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 110–14.

him a love of the arts; he wrote Lieder and poetry, although with more »industry [and] energy« than »talent« as he confessed to his mother in 1894.<sup>28</sup> He returned to the United States in 1899 and beheld a nation that was uncommonly large and diverse, but one that he believed was still in its cultural »infancy.«<sup>29</sup> Sonneck looked around and saw skyscrapers shooting up in cities and modern suburbs sprouting like mushrooms, cities vibrating with modern popular music and private enterprise generating tremendous wealth for some. But there was no national conservatory, many cities had no orchestra and little chamber music, and it was nearly impossible to hear a good opera performed well.<sup>30</sup> For the next three decades, he would try to reconcile how the land of the future was still in many ways so »primitive.«<sup>31</sup>

Sonneck spent his career trying to understand the relationship between American exceptionalism and European cultural patrimony. He wrote 157 books, essays, and catalogues.<sup>32</sup> He loved the music of Richard Wagner, but saw it as his duty to promote American composers whom he thought had merit, including Stephen Foster and Edward MacDowell.<sup>33</sup> He grappled with American identity and music history in an era when U.S. imperialism and international power was on the rise, and when the U.S. was seen as a place of the future rather than one that merely lagged behind.

There are two transatlantic temporal metanarratives to Sonneck's work. First, that in his lifetime, U.S. composers and musicians were in continual cultural debt to

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28 The full quote: »I could rightfully tell myself: if your talents were commensurate with your industry, energy, and above all your ambition, your name would live more than a hundred years hence.« Letter appears in Carl Engel, »Oscar G. Sonneck« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 188–89.

29 »Infancy« appears in Oscar Sonneck, »The Bibliography of American Music« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 22. Reprinted from *Bibliography Society of America, Proceedings and Papers* 1, no. 1 (1904–1905).

30 A national conservatory, orchestras in major cities, and high-quality opera were three themes he wrote about repeatedly. See, for example, »The Musical Life of America« 81; »The American Composer« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 131–32. Reprinted from the *Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers' National Association*, ed. Karl W. Gehrkens (Hartford, CT, 1923).

31 »Primitive« appears in Oscar Sonneck, »The Musical Life of America from the Standpoint of Musical Topography« in *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 77. Trans. by William Lichtenwanger from »Das Musikleben Amerikas vom Standpunkte der musikalischen Länderkunde« in *III. Kongress der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft, Wien* (Vienna etc., 1909). On the relationship between time and U.S. national identity, see Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008).

32 Irving Lowens, »Oscar George Theodore Sonneck: His Writings and Musical Compositions, with a List of Portraits and of Writings about Him: A Bibliography« in *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 235–60.

33 Walter R. Whittlesey and Oscar Sonneck, *Catalogue of First Editions of Stephen C. Foster (1826–1864)* (Washington, DC, 1915); Oscar Sonneck, *Catalogue of First Editions of Edward MacDowell (1861–1908)* (Washington, DC, 1917).

Europe, which Sonneck identified as perpetuating a colonial relationship between the United States and European nations (especially Germany, France, and Italy). This theme comes up in his early writings from shortly after he returned to the United States. »We have remained a European colony« he proclaimed in 1901.<sup>34</sup> Sonneck diagnosed the United States as being stuck in a provincial relationship to European cosmopolitan centers. In essays titled »European Fallacies and American Music« (1901) and »A Plea for Home Products« (1903) he described American composers' desire for European approval and American orchestras' overreliance on European musicians and conductors, while also lamenting Europeans' low opinion of American music. American music deserved this low opinion, Sonneck asserted, because American students who traveled abroad to study did not first learn the necessary languages, then floundered against language barriers. These students valued prestige over actual educational quality, according to Sonneck, and failed to appreciate their access to high-caliber performances.<sup>35</sup> Mimicry, a classic feature of colonial and postcolonial relations, was the result. »Only a few [composers] succeed in gradually weeding out the foreign element in their ideas, whereas the majority continue to write German or French music ›made in America.«<sup>36</sup> Sonneck himself expressed these criticisms by writing in German; many of his early essays were translated into English by his friend and fellow scholar, Theodore Baker. Perhaps Sonneck was aware that the same criticisms for inept handling of expressive conventions that he raised for composition students could pertain to his own communications.

The second temporal theme emerges from Sonneck's lifelong commitment to historical research as a way to gain clarity on the nature of the United States' music history, both in and of itself and in relation to Europe. When Sonneck returned to the United States in 1899, he immersed himself in historical research. He spent three years traveling on the eastern seaboard from New England to South Carolina looking at sources that could reveal the musical past.<sup>37</sup> His was a revisionist project. He had read histories of American music by Frederic Ritter and W. S. B. Mathews

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34 Oscar Sonneck, »European Fallacies and American Music« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 15. Reprinted from *Music* 19/3 (1901).

35 Oscar Sonneck, »A Plea for Home Products« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 6. Reprinted from *The Musician* 8/7 (1903).

36 Sonneck, »A plea for home products« 9. Also see Oscar Sonneck, »National Tone-Speech versus Volapük – Which?« in *Suum Cuique; Essays in Music* (New York, NY, 1916), 32–34. Reprinted from *Die Musik* 3/1, vol. 9, (1903/04), 47–53.

37 Sonneck discusses his experiences and gives advice on how to conduct rigorous research in »Suggestions on Research into Music in Early America« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 100–104. Reprinted from a transcript of an address he made to the members of the Historical Research Committee of the Pennsylvania Society of the Colonial Dames of America in 1919.

that focused primarily on sacred music in New England.<sup>38</sup> Sonneck was dissatisfied with the narrow scope and dour evaluation of early American music offered by these armchair historians. In an essay about German influences on U.S. music, Sonneck fumed that these scholars held a »false historical perspective« that made them believe early Americans were only capable of »antediluvian psalmody.«<sup>39</sup> Spending ten-hour days in local archives and libraries, where he read historic newspapers and poured over early scores, Sonneck uncovered a much richer history than stereotypes about Puritan psalmody permitted. Troves of documents showed European, especially British, music and musicians coming to America in the eighteenth century. Three of his books are about early American music: a study of the composers James Lyon and Francis Hopkinson, and two detailed surveys of opera and concert life before 1800.<sup>40</sup> These books diligently show the range and activeness of secular music in the colonial and early national period, when countless concerts and productions peppered the stages of fast-growing cities along the east coast of America.

For the rest of his career Sonneck repeatedly fulminated against historians whom he deemed sloppy and prejudiced. Look at actual historical evidence, Sonneck insisted: »As soon as we have the newspapers to work with we can trace these things [concerts]. Previous to the establishment of newspapers we have to rely on other kinds of records. But to argue that if there are no records people had no interest in music is nonsense.«<sup>41</sup> He saw tangible evidence that early American cities had robust concert lives and wanted to share that insight with those who dismissed U.S. music history. »Down in Charleston, South Carolina, they were giving public concerts as early as they were in Vienna« he proclaimed in 1919, probably referring to the St. Cecelia music society founded in 1766 in that wealthy southern slaving capital.<sup>42</sup> And Beethoven's Symphony no. 1 was premiered 1821 in Philadelphia, a credit to what Sonneck called »Americans' urge to be »up to date« (although he admitted that it also showed that Americans were usually »behind« in their tastes,

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38 Frederic Ritter, *Music in America* (New York, NY, 1883, rev. ed. 1890); W. S. B. Mathews, *A Hundred Years of Music in America* (Chicago, IL, 1889). Ritter is infamously negative about U.S. music history.

39 Oscar Sonneck, »German Influence on the Musical Life of America« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 61. Trans. by Lichtenwanger from »Deutscher Einfluss auf das Musikleben Amerikas« in *Das Buch der Deutschen in Amerika*, ed. Max Heinrici (Philadelphia, PA, 1909).

40 Oscar Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson, the first American poet-composer, (1737–1791) and James Lyon, patriot, preacher, psalmodist (1735–1794); two studies in early American music* (Washington, DC, 1905); *Early Concert-Life in America (1731–1800)* (Leipzig, 1907); *Early Opera in America* (New York, NY, 1915).

41 Sonneck, »Suggestions on Research into Music in Early America« 101.

42 Sonneck, »Suggestions on Research into Music in Early America« 101.

given that the premier came two decades after the symphony was composed).<sup>43</sup> Like other historians of his generation, Sonneck believed that empirical evidence in the form of written archival documents could set the record straight and clarify America's relationship to Europe. That relationship was still unequal, but his historical research showed that »In Charleston, Boston, Philadelphia, and so forth life was primitive, colonial, provincial, but it was there.«<sup>44</sup>

How did someone with such a strong belief in the power of historicism find himself mired in insecurities about the United States' cultural belatedness? Sonneck's ideas about music in his time, about American music history, and about methodologies for studying music, used transatlantic comparisons as a point of orientation. With Europe as the benchmark against which he evaluated American music history, he was trapped in a historicist game in which the U.S. was always either falling behind (as expected) or doing surprisingly well at keeping pace. No wonder Sonneck's historicist writings about U.S. music are saturated with ambivalence, impatience, and insecurity. What is more, his dilemma of wanting to show that the U.S. had a music history worth considering, but one that was only sometimes worthy of direct comparison to Europe, continued to bedevil many subsequent music historians and critics in the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> Although Sonneck couldn't escape those expectations, he had a term for them: »chronological chronic-improvement theory.«<sup>46</sup>

Sonneck knew as well as anyone that nothing chronically improves over time. Yet he found a way to express faith in the future. Sprinkled in his writings are mentions of the importance of future generations. Sonneck believed in the need for good music education for children. America's commitment to individualism and privatization at the expense of the public good drove him mad. But he was not just interested in the need to bolster music in society. He was also fixated on biology. In a striking writerly tick, he used biological metaphors that pertain to human life cycles, especially embryos. He repeatedly referred to »embryos« and even »hypoblasts« (which is part of an embryo).<sup>47</sup> Embryonic composers, as Sonneck put it, were composers who

43 Sonneck, »German Influence« (as in fn. 39), 70–71.

44 Sonneck, »Suggestions on Research into Music in Early America« 101.

45 See, for example, the testy exchange between Joseph Kerman, Edward Lowinsky, and Donald McCorkle in 1965–1966. Joseph Kerman, »A Profile for American Musicology« *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18, no. 1 (1965), 61–69, 68. Also see the responses: Edward E. Lowinsky, »Character and Purposes of American Musicology: A Reply to Joseph Kerman« *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18, no. 2 (1965), 222–34; Joseph Kerman, [Letter from Joseph Kerman], *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18, no. 3 (1965), 426–27; Donald M. McCorkle, »Finding a Place for American Studies in American Musicology« *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19, no. 1 (1966), 73–84.

46 Oscar Sonneck, »Music and Progress« in *Suum Cuique*, 18. Originally in *New Music Review*, 1908.

47 Oscar Sonneck, »The Communistic Cell: A Symphonic Hypoblast by Bill Jones, op. 100« in Lichtenwanger, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, 152–57. Reprinted from the *Musical Courier*

had not fully developed.<sup>48</sup> But there is a future orientation in his use of the metaphor as well. In the microscopic collections of cells that are helpless, incapable, not persons, Sonneck seemed to place his hope, believing they represented potential musical talent for the future.

I close by signaling other ways we might orient toward future work in transatlantic studies. I have been fairly critical of the two components of a time-focused methodology I've presented here – the experience of time and the practice of historicism. I've framed these approaches as functioning within and helping to support the Western, straight, colonialist understanding of time, which limits our understanding of more diverse experiences of time and histories within the Atlantic world. My hope is that by identifying how these methods work in transatlantic studies, future scholarship can be both critical of colonialist temporal frameworks and more inclusive of approaches that operate outside of them. But scholarship that uses time-focused methods can go far beyond what I've outlined here – embracing new work on historic and contemporary experiences of sound and environment outlined in animal and environmental studies perhaps, or assessing Atlantic cultural history's mutually-reinforcing relationship with the Anthropocene. One needn't believe in the »chronological chronic-improvement theory« to hope for new futures for transatlantic studies.

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94, no. 8 (1927). He also discusses »embryo« composers in »The American Composer« (as in fn. 30), 153.

48 Sonneck and his wife never had children and perhaps he returned to this metaphor as he nursed a private loss or regret.

