

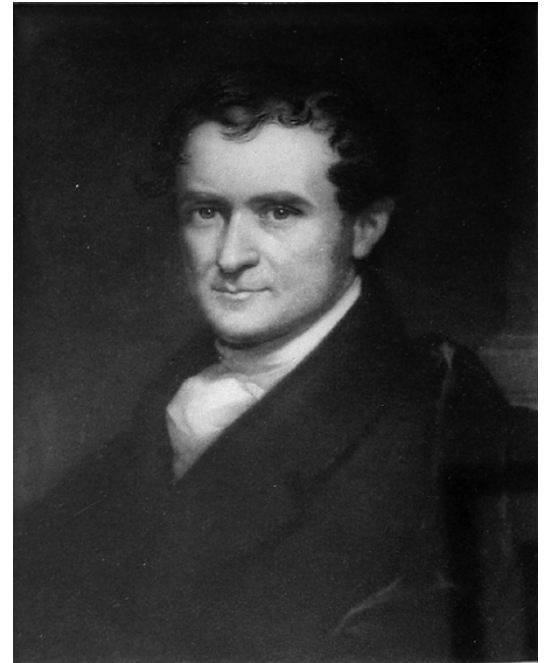
# A Brief History of The Harvard Musical Association

In July 1837, a group of Harvard graduates who as students had been members of the Pierian Sodality of 1808 called a meeting of some fifty prominent citizens of Boston. Its purpose was the organization of a new society, the chief object of which would be "...the promotion of musical taste and science in the University...to enrich the walls of Harvard with a complete musical library...and to prepare the way for regular musical instruction in the College." By general agreement the organization now known as The Harvard Musical Association was created shortly thereafter. Its objective proved elusive.

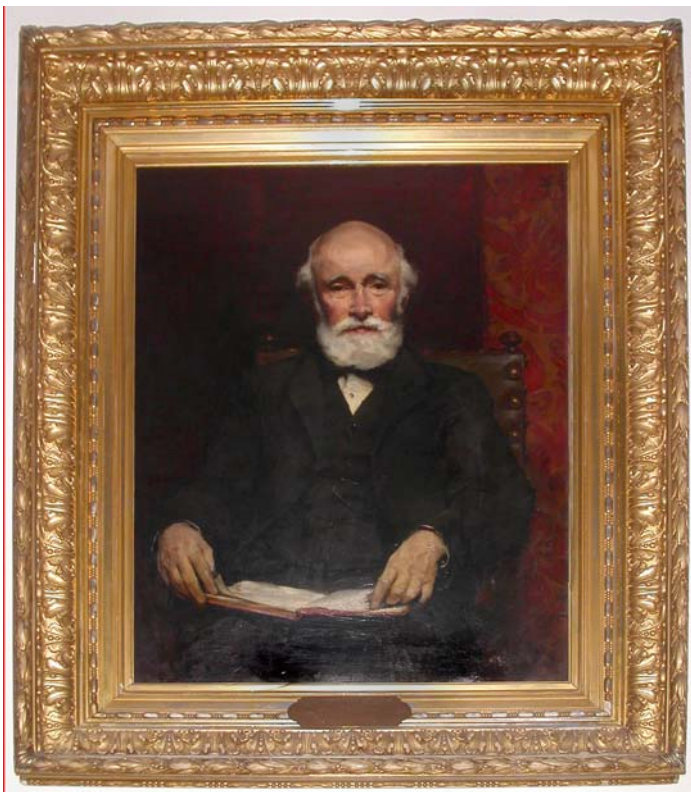
Although the new Association sent a series of resolutions on the teaching of music to Josiah Quincy, Harvard's President at that time, no reply was received. As has happened at various other times, proposals from outsiders for the improvement of the College were considered presumptuous. In fact, it was not until 1862, when John Knowles Paine was appointed Harvard's first professor of music, that music became an established part of the curriculum.

The new Association was more successful with its library. It soon assembled many books and scores which, although they never enriched the College, were assessed by the Salem Register in 1843 as constituting the "largest and best musical library in the country."

Initially known as The General Association of Past and Present Members of the Pierian Sodality, the name of the Association was mercifully shortened to its present form in 1840. In light of the College's attitude, however, the membership agreed not to mention Harvard College at its meetings (a ban that remained in effect for twenty-four years) and turned its not inconsiderable capacities toward the advancement of music in Boston.



**Henry Ware, Harvard 1812, President HMA 1838-1849**



**John Sullivan Dwight, HMA President 1873—1893**



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE NEW MUSIC HALL, BOSTON.

From 1844 to 1849 the Association sponsored a series of chamber music concerts open to the public. In 1850 under the leadership of a member, Dr. Jabez Upham, the Association raised in sixty days the immense sum of \$100,000 to build a new Music Hall between Tremont and Washington Streets. This hall, seating over two thousand, was dedicated by Jenny Lind in 1852. Ten years later the members of the Association raised an additional \$60,000 to install in the hall an organ built in Germany by Walcker. Regarded as the largest organ in the United States, this instrument contained 5,474 pipes and 84 registers and may now be heard (much altered by Æolian-Skinner) in its own hall in Methuen.



The Organ in the Music Hall, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.



**The Boston Music Hall Organ in its present home in the Methuen Music Hall, where it may still be heard in frequent summer concerts.**

## Two HMA Milestones

**SECOND CHAMBER CONCERT**

OF THE  
**HARVARD**  
**MUSICAL ASSOCIATION,**  
Tuesday Evening, November 26,  
AT THE  
MUSIC ROOM OF MR. J. CHICKERING, 334, WASHINGTON STREET.

**PROGRAMME.**

Part 1.

1.—QUARTETT IN G MINOR, OF . . . MOZART.  
Allegro.  
Adagio con moto.  
Rondo finale.

2.—DIVERTISSEMENT FOR FLUTE, OF . BOEHM.  
Theme by CARAFFA. . . MR. WERNER.

Part 2.

1.—RONDO FOR PIANO FORTE OF ALOYS SCHMITT.  
with Quartett accompaniment. . MR. LANGE.

2.—QUARTETT IN G OF . . . J. HAYDN.  
Allegro moderato.  
Allegretto.  
Menuetto and Trio.  
Finale Presto.


PERFORMANCE WILL COMMENCE AT 7 O'CLOCK.

☐ Holders of Tickets are requested to show them to the person in attendance at the Door.

DUTTON AND WENTWORTH'S PRINT.

**Program from the first season of professional chamber music concerts in America**

**Harvard Musical Association.**



**THIRD SYMPHONY CONCERT,**  
AT THE  
BOSTON MUSIC HALL,  
**Thursday Afternoon, Feb. 8, 1866.**  
AT 4 O'CLOCK, PRECISELY.  
  
*Conductor, . . . . CARL ZERRAHN.*

**Program from the inaugural season of the HMA Orchestra**

From 1865 to 1882 the Association sponsored public concerts by the Harvard Orchestra, conducted by Carl Zerrahn. Of these concerts, King's Dictionary of Boston reported in 1883: "The greatest works of the greatest masters have been given at these concerts, the standard of whose programmes has been kept at the highest, with the view, in part, of educating the taste of the musical public in what is greatest and best without regard to fashion or popular demand."

The Association's prestige was such that when Richard Wagner encountered difficulty in getting Parsifal staged in Bayreuth, he approached the Association through an American dentist living in Dresden. Displaying his monumental ego, Wagner proposed that if the Association would arrange to give him \$1,000,000 outright, he would agree to come to this country, to live here permanently, and to put on the first performance of Parsifal. Fortunately for the Association, before this extraordinary proposal could be considered, Wagner's difficulties in Bayreuth were resolved. Parsifal was produced in 1882 and Wagner died the following year.

Its standards were not, however, sufficiently high for Henry Lee Higginson. In 1881 he engaged Georg Henschel to conduct the new Boston Symphony Orchestra, which hired many individuals who played in the Harvard Orchestra. Higginson started with twenty concerts per season, compared with the Harvard Orchestra's ten, and he also sold tickets at prices which the Association considered "unprecedentedly low." The result was that Major Higginson incurred his renowned, albeit expected, deficits. The Harvard Orchestra was disbanded the following year, but not until it had turned over to the Association its surplus of more than \$1,000, providing an example of fiscal integrity rare in the circle of symphony orchestras.

Social evenings for members and guests were held first in Cambridge and then in such legendary Boston hostelries as the Revere House, the Tremont House, the original Parker House, and Young's. Then, as now, the Association would gather ten to twelve times a year to hear some of the leading chamber musicians of the day and to share a post-concert supper. Whether as the white-tie-and-oyster affair of yore or as the baked bean, Welsh rarebit, and ale collation of the present, the social evening remains the heart of the organization.

From its beginning and through the 1880s, the Association's rooms were moved from time to time. Indeed, from 1858 to 1869 its Library was placed in the Athenæum. In 1892 the Association acquired the Malcolm Greenough house at 1 West Cedar Street. Opened with a reception for Antonín Dvořák, this has remained the Association's residence for over 100 years. The main floor was dropped four feet in 1907, which required changing the main entrance to Chestnut Street and taking a new number, 57a. With the proceeds of a generous bequest from Julia Marsh, widow of Charles Marsh (member Eben Jordan's partner), the Association renovated the upper floors in 1913. The third floor, with its warren of leased rooms, was removed and the resulting space conjoined to that of the second floor to create a highly-ornamented, double-height hall (designed by member architect Joseph Everett Chandler) thereafter known as the Marsh Room.



**Julia and Charles  
Marsh**

**ca. 1900**

**By Benoni at left  
and  
Henry Herkimer  
at right**





**The Julia Marsh Room of the Association, December, 2003**

Of the builders of the Association, particular mention should be made of John Sullivan Dwight (see page one), who for many years published a recondite *Journal of Music* and was widely known as one of the nation's outstanding musicologists. It was largely through his efforts that the Library was established, the Music Hall was built, and the Harvard Orchestra was organized. He served as President of the Association from 1873 until his death in 1893, at which time he was a resident in the new house of the Association. His portrait hangs over the fireplace, and his ghost is said still to roam the halls.

Other significant figures in the Association's affairs include Henry Ware, Jr., first President; Henry White Pickering, President from 1852 to 1873; Arthur Foote, the celebrated composer, who importantly shaped the Library during his membership from 1875 to 1937; and Charles R. Nutter, historian of the Association and an active member from 1893 to 1965.

The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by one of the most eminent and urbane of Bostonians, Courtenay Guild. Distinguished in appearance, gracious in manner, Courtenay Guild served as President of the Association for twenty-five of the sixty years he was a member. At his death in 1946, a substantial portion of his estate was bequeathed to the Association and added to its capital funds.

Following the retirement of Richard Wait as President of the Association in 1979, and in light of his unprecedented thirty-one years in office, the concert hall on the first floor was designated in his honor as the Richard Wait Room. A distinguished Boston lawyer, a facile presiding officer, Richard Wait was also instrumental in securing a favorable tax status for the Association and its house. To this unique institution Mr. Wait also left a legacy of trusteeship and civility.

Drawing its initial members from former players of instruments in the Pierian Sodality (now the Harvard–Radcliffe Orchestra) and later from others who in adult life continued to practice their instruments, it is not surprising that members of the Association should have participated in numerous orchestras and ensembles. Notable among these was the Harvard Alumni Orchestra which met under the direction of Jacques Hoffman in the 1920s, giving several public concerts. The current orchestra for members grew out of the efforts of John Codman in 1947. It was first directed by Malcolm Holmes, then also Director of the Pierian Sodality. Following his death in 1953, it continued under the baton of Chester Williams, a member of the Association and former Dean of the New England Conservatory of Music, until his death in 2002. The current orchestra is shyer than some predecessors: its most recent public concert was in 1948.

Support of music by the Association in recent years has taken different forms. In the late 1950s, it offered awards for the best original compositions of chamber music, for which over eighty compositions were submitted. The Association has given scholarship aid to various schools of music and small grants to symphony, opera, chamber music, and ballet organizations. In 1985 it initiated a program of annual awards to promising musicians in the greater Boston area of secondary school age.

In 1987 the Association celebrated its sesquicentennial. Most members would have been hard-pressed to define that term when the year began, but by year's end it had taken on a very special meaning. The Association's most valued achievement was its commissioning of John Harbison's Second String Quartet. The Association also co-sponsored the work's premiere performance by the Emerson String Quartet. A Sesquicentennial Dinner was held at the St. Botolph Club. New works continue to be commissioned from time to time, including in the last several years compositions by John Bavicchi, Arthur Berger, John Huggler, Thomas Oboe Lee, and Thomas McGah.

In October of 1992 the Association marked the centennial of its arrival at 57a Chestnut Street by reproducing the opening of one hundred years earlier. The Wait Room was garlanded with flowers, lobster shells, stuffed quail, and pomegranates, the whole festoon supported by a pair of bucks. These decorations provided a visual clue to the celebratory feast. Champagne and Cotuit oysters were followed by the congregational singing of a Latin anthem written for the Association and a hearing of a 1912 test pressing by the Kneisel String Quartet (two of whose members had performed for the Association in 1892). The house's inaugural concert was performed, consisting of Beethoven's



Archduke Trio, Handel's O, Ruddier than the Cherry, two songs by Bach, and Beethoven's Adelaide. After these auditory and gustatory aperitifs, ninety members of the Association ascended to the Marsh Room where, over the next three hours, a seven-course candlelight feast was consumed. The seven accompanying wines came from the same regions, and in three instances the same vineyards, as those served in 1892. Speeches by Dr. Richard W. Dwight (a member of the Association since 1933) and Mrs. Helen Roelker Kessler (grand-niece of an early member of the Association, Bernard Roelker, whose Fund of Convivial Impulses subsidized the Centennial gala) further enlivened the evening. A midnight of pleasant satiety saw the end of a remarkable day in the Association's history.

Today, HMA library and concert rooms are available during weekdays without charge to musicians for practicing and scholars for research. The Association's Marsh room, the meeting place of The Apollo Club (the oldest male chorus in New England) and the venerable HMA sight reading orchestra, is also frequently a recital venue for area artists and performing groups. The Harvard Musical Association maintains a longstanding tradition of commissioning new works, supporting local non-profit musical organizations, giving prizes and awards to young performers and presenting chamber music performances to members and their guests. The Association is open to the public weekdays 9 – 12 and 1 – 4.

In recent years the Association has done much to improve its house with the construction of an elevator to provide handicapped access, a new kitchen for gustatory needs, and new men's and ladies' rooms to accommodate members and guests. Furthermore, HMA has installed a fire suppression system and archival storage to protect its estimable collections. Establishing its presence on the Web and placing its catalogue on OCLC (HVDMA) represent the Association's further steps towards reaching the cultural and scholarly communities.

