

# THE CONCERT ROOM.

[HENRY C. WATSON]

Published in *The Broadway Journal*  
March 8, 1845 (1:10)

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University of Arizona Antebellum Magazine Edition Project  
February 13, 2015

THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>. – The *third* Concert of the *third* season took place at the Apollo Saloon<sup>2</sup> on Saturday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, when, as usual, there was a perfect crowd, an intolerable heat, and no ventilation. Since the room has been hung with the bar-room drapery, it seems impossible to breathe with freedom or comfort; added to which the sound is entirely destroyed, and the decorations are in the worst possible taste. We should be glad to see the room as it was.

The programme was as follows:

## PART I.

Sinfonia Eroica (No. 5)	-	-	-	Beethoven
Movements	1	Allegro con brio.		
“ “	2	Marcia funebre. Adagio.		
“ “	3	Scherzo. Allegro vivace.		
“ “	4	Finale. Allegro molto.		
Rondo. Finale del Furioso,	-	-	-	Donizetti.
“Che d’Alla Goija.”	-	-	-	Madame Arnoult.
Sinfonia Concertante (No. 2.)	-	-	-	Lindpaimtner.
Flute, oboe, clarionette, horn and bassoon.				
Messrs. Kyle, Weisse, Groeneveldt, Reiff, and Trosji.				

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<sup>1</sup> The New York Philharmonic Society was founded in 1842; this performance captured the symphony orchestra in only its third year. It is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States (“Overview”).

<sup>2</sup> The New York Philharmonic’s current website lists its home as the Apollo Rooms, not the Apollo Saloon, from December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1842, until April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1848. The website does not list the Apollo Saloon as home to the Philharmonic until March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1849. Perhaps this particular performance (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1845) happened to take place at the Apollo Saloon despite the Philharmonic’s usual home at the Apollo Rooms (“Orchestra Homes”).

## PART II.

Descriptive Overture. The Naiads, (Die Najaden.)  
First time in America, - - W. Sterndale Bennett.  
Grand Air—Grace. Robert le Diable. Mad. Arnoult, Meyerbeer.  
Dialogo Brillante—flute and clarionette. - - Bochsa.  
Messrs. J. A. Kyle and T.W. Groeneveldt.  
Grosse Fest Ouverture und Sieges Marsch (first time.) F. Ries.  
*Componirt fur das Niederheinische Musick fest in Colon 1832.*  
Director, Mr. Louis Wiegiers<sup>3</sup>.

The symphony Eroica, of Beethoven<sup>4</sup>, is so well known to all who visit these classical Concerts, that a particular description will not be necessary. The design is said to have been conceived in honor of Napoleon, when first Consul, but before it was completed, the first Consul had become Emperor, and Beethoven in the deepest indignation vowed that he would never dedicate one of his works to such a renegade from his principles<sup>5</sup>. The first movement is supposed to vindicate the indomitable firmness of the conqueror's mind; the second movement is a dead march; the third, the return from the funeral, and the fourth, a sort of musical history of the times, being a collection of revolutionary airs, worked one into the other.

Of the performance of this great work, we can with justice say that it was executed with great precision; each point was taken up with perfect exactness, and grand effects were frequently produced; but to us the performance appeared hard and mechanical. The conductor never deviated from the exact time at which he started—on, on, on! without pause, without breath—firm, unyielding, and untiring in its motion, his hand seemed a sort of human Metomone<sup>6</sup> that was wound up to go, just so. Too strict attention to mere time, may produce correctness in performance, but something more is wanted to delineate faithfully

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Wiegiers was one of seven conductors that shared conducting duties during the New York Philharmonic's first seven years ("New York Philharmonic Music Directors and Advisors").

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven composed his Symphony No. 3 (known as Sinfonia Eroica in Italian) in 1803 ("Beethoven's Eroica Historical Overview").

<sup>5</sup> *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, in "A GOSSIP ABOUT BEETHOVEN," elaborates on this story: "Recovering from his illness, and being an ardent republican, [Beethoven] composed his 'Sinfonia Eroica' in honor of Napoleon, who, he thought, would establish a republic, based on the Platonic, all over Europe. The original idea of this symphony was suggested by General Bernadotte, afterward king of Sweden, but then the French ambassador to Vienna. A fair copy of it being made, it was intended to be presented to Bonaparte, when news arrived of his having caused himself to be proclaimed Emperor of the French; at hearing of this, Beethoven tore off the title leaf, and flung the work on the floor, with a torrent of exclamations against the 'new tyrant'" ("A GOSSIP ABOUT BEETHOVEN" 277).

<sup>6</sup> Likely a type for "metronome," a device that clicks to keep a steady beat that musicians often use for practice. The Oxford English Dictionary returns no results for "metomone," and no alternative spelling is evident.

the mind of the composer. We believe that Mr. Weigers will make an able conductor, but on this occasion he has attended less to the intellect than to the mechanism of the art.

Madame Arnoult sang one of Donizetti's<sup>7</sup> mawkish arias, which coming directly after Beethoven, was as grateful to the ear as tepid water to the palate after a draught of Burgundy.

We cannot refrain from asking of the Board of Government<sup>8</sup> why such an incongruous mixture of style is allowed to appear at such a concert. We have asked this question repeatedly before, and have at various times received assurances that there would be a change for the better. We placed but little faith in such assurances, but even that little was thrown away; for it seems that for the mere chance of catching a few dollars in extra tickets from some of the "upper ten thousand<sup>9</sup>," they would insert anything in their programme. After the comparative failure of Castellan, and the positive and unmistakable failures of Valtellina and Signora Amalia Ricci<sup>10</sup>, we did think that the "Government" would learn wisdom, and have done with the Donizettis, Marliani<sup>11</sup>, Riccis<sup>12</sup>, and a host of other 's. But experience is never considered of importance until it is bought dearly.

Madame Arnoult executes most of her passages with exceeding delicacy and precision; her voice, however, is weak and incapable of producing any great effect. Her style is so evidently that of an amateur, that we fear a long time must elapse before she can do herself credit before the public.

The Instrumental Quintett was a truly admirable performance, in every way worthy of its intrinsic beauty. We have really no choice among those admirable artists, Messrs. Kyle, Weisse, Groeneveldt, Trosji and Reiff. We were kept in a continual round of admiration from its commencement to its close, and we can only say now, that so perfect an instrumental performance was never before heard in this country.

The second part commenced with Sterndale Bennett's<sup>13</sup> descriptive overture of the Naiads. It is a remarkable composition in every respect. Its conception indicates a fancy at once brilliantly imaginative and highly refined, and the instrumentation displays an intimate knowledge and familiar acquaintance with the particular genius of the different instruments.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaetano Donizetti, an Italian composer.

<sup>8</sup> Likely the equivalent of the New York Philharmonic's present-day Board of Directors. The title "Board of Government" must have been used at the time of publication; an 1844 issue of *The Anglo American: A Journal of Literature, News, Politics, the Drama, Fine Arts, Etc.* refers to "The Government of the New York Philharmonic Society" within an article about the orchestra's third season (Paterson 619).

<sup>9</sup> A term that began to circulate around this time that refers to the upper classes or richest members of society ("Upper, Adj.").

<sup>10</sup> Castellan, Valtellina, and Signora Amalia Ricci are likely little-known musical compositions by the composers listed later in the sentence. It is difficult to find information about or any traces of the pieces themselves.

<sup>11</sup> Marco Aurelio Marliani, an Italian composer.

<sup>12</sup> Federico Ricci, an Italian composer of operas.

<sup>13</sup> William Sterndale Bennett was an English composer. Felix Mendelssohn (see note 14) "took Bennett under his wing" after hearing him play (Temperley 208).

Bennett was a pupil of Mendelssohn<sup>14</sup>, and his compositions bear somewhat of the impress of that great master's mind. We do not by any means assert that Sterndale Bennett is a coyist, but all his works have a tinge of the intellectual beauty which is the characteristic of the writings of Mendelssohn. In his instrumentation this similarity is singularly striking; he treats passages as Mendelssohn would have treated them; many of his combinations smack of his great model, but his conception is his own, and one of more singular and attractive beauty we have rarely heard. Its reputation in Europe is second only to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Fingal's Cave*<sup>15</sup>. We were by no means pleased with the performance of this work, for it was exceedingly unequal. Some passages were given with great delicacy, while others were crowded and indistinct. Another rehearsal or two would have made both the conductor and the band more familiar with the intention of the composer, and also more at ease with each other.

Madame Arnoult sang a portion of a scena [sic] from *les Huguenots*, by Meyerbeer<sup>16</sup>, we regret to say very badly indeed. Not only was she continually out of time to a painful degree, but she failed in several passages, particularly two chromatic passages, which were very bad in taste, but still worse in execution. With every wish to be lenient to one who has so recently adopted the profession, we are yet compelled to speak the truth of all alike.

The instrumental Dialogo for flute and clarionette, was played in most exquisite style by Messrs Kyle and Groeneveldt. Mr. Kyle played with more brilliancy, precision and feeling than upon any former occasion within our remembrance. He only requires emulation to render him always equal to that evening's performance. He has certainly few rivals, and no superiors in this country, but he lacks somewhat of the true artistic enthusiasm which will lead one always to endeavor to excel himself. Mr. Groeneveldt's solo was spoiled by the band, and he showed them their fault with an emphasis that must have astonished them, and which they are not likely soon to forget.

The concluding overture by Ries<sup>17</sup>, is a brilliant and effective composition, and had it not been so late would doubtless have been encored. It was admirably performed; the wind instruments, as usual, distinguished themselves greatly.

We consider Mr. Weiger's debut as a Philharmonic conductor highly successful. It is true that we cannot award all praise, but what we do say we say most cordially, and with infinite satisfaction we congratulate him upon his highly creditable wielding of the baton.

The next concert will take place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April.



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<sup>14</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, a renowned German composer.

<sup>15</sup> A musical composition written by Felix Mendelssohn in 1830. The official title is "The Hebrides" (Kuenning).

<sup>16</sup> *Les Huguenots* is a French opera composed by Giacomo Meyerbeer, a German opera composer (Tommasini).

<sup>17</sup> Ferdinand Ries, a German composer.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

“The Concert Room” is a recurring musical performance review column in *The Broadway Journal*, the first of which ran in the January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1845 issue. The author, Henry C. Watson, was announced as the journal’s music editor in the February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1845 issue. Because this note proclaimed Watson to have “entire control of the Musical department of the paper,” it can be safely assumed that he is the author of this piece (“Other 2 -- No Title”). This particular rendition of “The Concert Room” both praises and scrutinizes elements of the New York Philharmonic Society’s performance on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1845.

The most compelling component of this review is not the judgment that it places on this particular performance, but the small summary it provides of the context behind Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Sinfonia Eroica*. According to Watson, Beethoven composed the piece with his reverence of Napoleon Bonaparte in mind, but when Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France, Beethoven lost all respect for him. This story, though it could sound like a mere rumor, seems like it was surprisingly common knowledge, at least among literary and artistic crowds. An article titled “A GOSSIP ABOUT BEETHOVEN” in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* tells this story in greater detail (refer to endnote 5 for the full passage), confirms Watson’s account, and provides extra context surrounding Beethoven’s problems with Napoleon.

While Beethoven composed this piece in 1803, what kind of information and news about Napoleon’s behavior circulated in the United States? In other words, would people reading this journal in 1845 have as much knowledge about the Emperor as did the people of 40 years prior? The latter question is difficult to address with any certainty, but the former finds answers within older publications. It seems that similarly to Beethoven’s thoughts, opinions about Napoleon shifted as he elevated himself from First Consul to Emperor. An 1802 French-written article published in *Balance and Columbian Repository* reports that the French Senate “cannot express more solemnly to the First Consul the gratitude of the nation, than in giving him a splendid proof of the confidence with which he has inspired the French people” (“From France” 222). Then, the *Christian Observer*, in its 1804 “View of Public Affairs” column, offers a more hesitant view on Napoleon’s intentions after he became Emperor: “On the 30th Floreal (May 20th) Bonaparte was proclaimed Emperor at Paris with great pomp. The French armies seem to have universally concurred in this new revolution; and addresses have also been received upon it from almost every part of France” (“VIEW OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS” 383). Obviously, because Napoleon’s rule in France began in 1804 and this article was not published until 1845, readers of “The Concert Room” viewed the Emperor as a figure of the past, not as a current foreign leader, which must be kept in mind.

The remainder of the article recounts Watson’s impressions of the performance, including his takes on the individual performers and the musical selections. His prose is scattered with references to other composers, compositions, and general art forms, proving that he is quite well-acquainted with the material that he writes about. At times, his references can seem a bit show-offish, but his close analysis of the details of the performance confirm that he took care to pay close attention to each musical and aesthetic element. “The Concert Room” should be read not as a glimpse into the musical and artistic

content of the time, but rather as a glimpse into the processes by which avid consumers of art perceived that content.

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