

**Bigamy Scandal Sinks Sacred  
Music Group! A Case-Study of the  
Rise and Fall of the Church  
Music Association, 1869-1874**

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**presented to**

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# Beethoven: Missa Solemnis ("Benedictus")

Timpani in D, G

Tromboni  
Alto e Tenore

Trombone Basso

Violino Solo

Violino I

Violino II

Viola



ppp

dimin.

p

Soprano

Alto

Tenore

Basso

Soprano

Alto

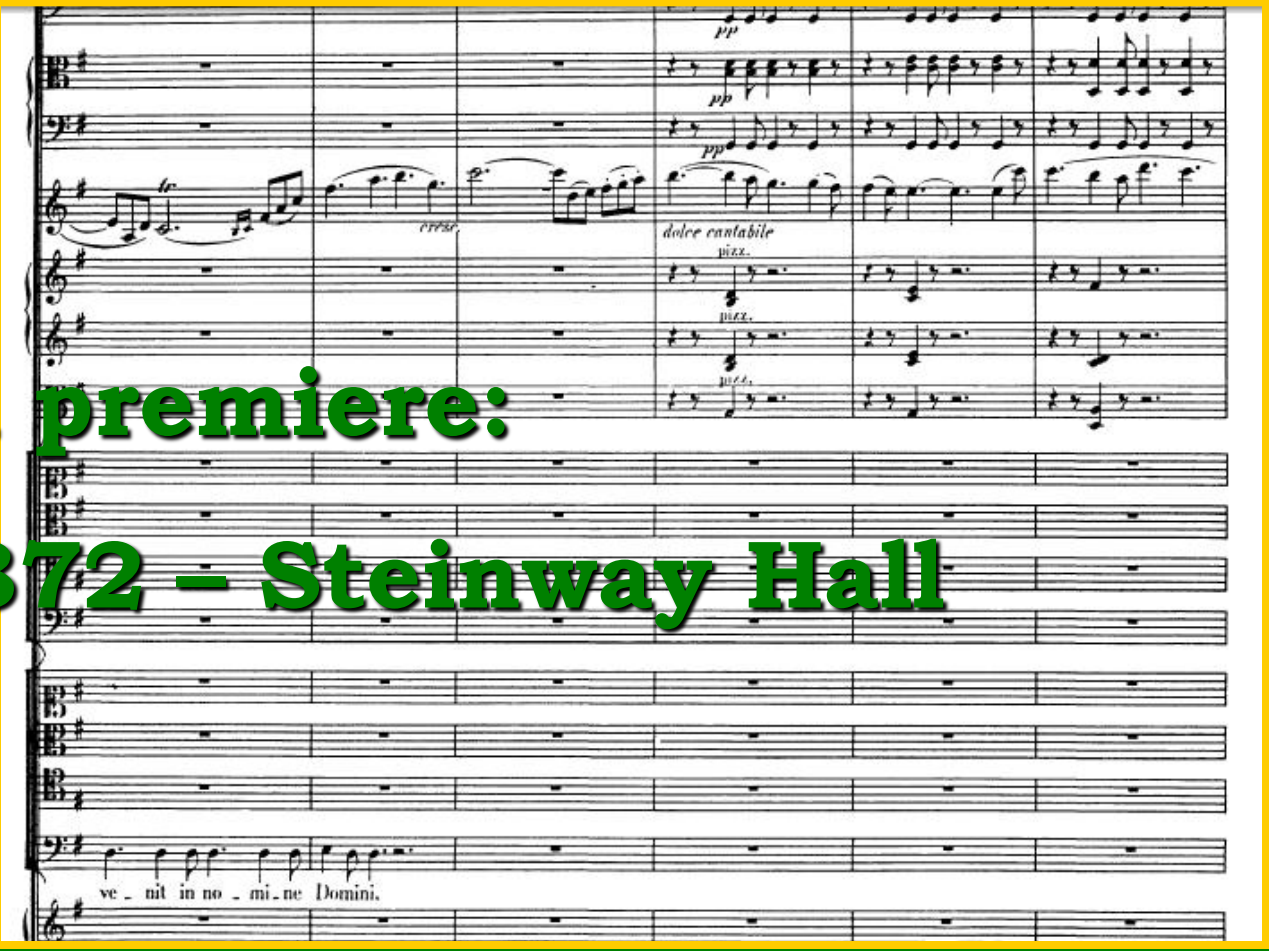
Tenore

Basso

Organo

Violoncelli

Basso



pp

ppp

dolce cantabile

vizz.

vizz.

vizz.

ve - nit in no - mi - ne Domini.

American premiere:  
May 2, 1872 - Steinway Hall



# **The infrastructure for “classical” concert music in 19<sup>th</sup>-century USA took time to emerge...**

**NY Philharmonic – 1842, musicians’ cooperative**

**PT Barnum’s Jenny Lind tour – 1851, media hype**

**Civil War “Sanitary Fairs” – charitable benefit events in major cities; philanthropy**

**Boston Symphony – 1880, ownership & micromanagement by millionaire music-lover H Higginson**

**Metropolitan Opera – 1883, private boxes for the conspicuously *nouveau riche* (no strings attached!)**

**Chicago Symphony – 1891, wealthy guarantors**

# **George Templeton Strong (1820-1875)**

**Wealthy Wall Street attorney**

**Connoisseur of great music**

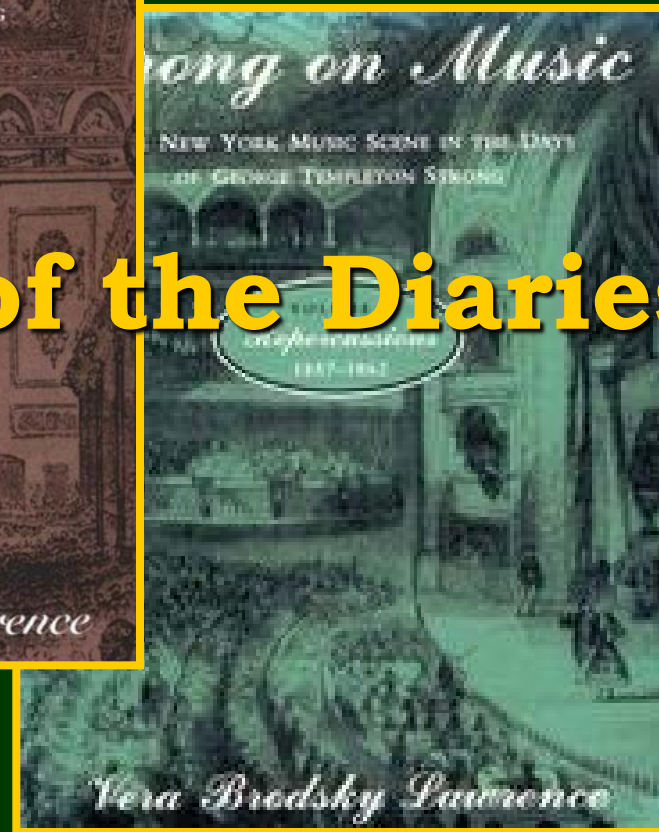
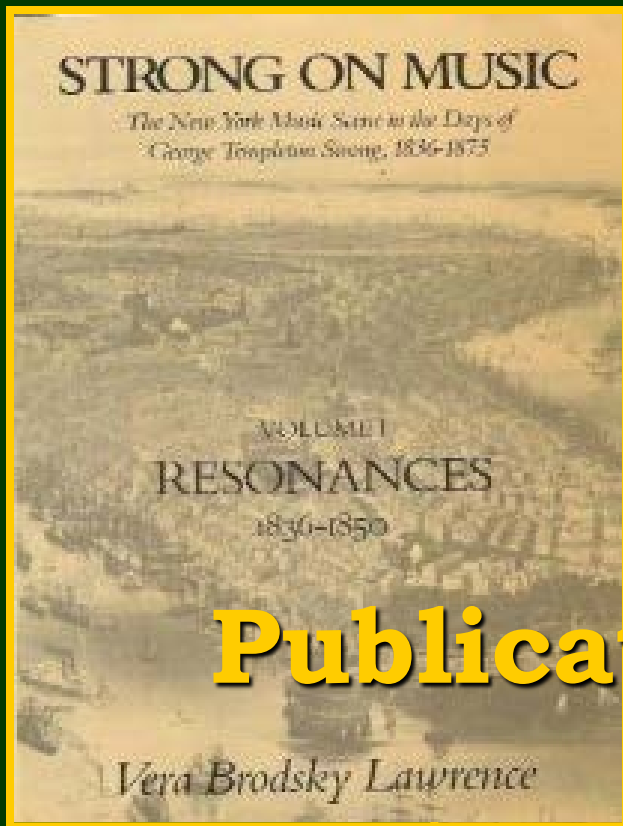
**Vestryman at Trinity Episcopal**

**Host of large musical soirees  
in the music hall of his “Palazzo”**

**Meticulous diarist and observer, from a young age,  
of Manhattan life, culture, politics, and music**



**Musicologist Vera Brodsky Lawrence's well-commented edition (published from 1988-1995) did not reach volume 4 & CMA**



## **Publication of the Diaries**

**(An earlier 1952 abridgement by urban historians Nevins and Thomas included only some musical entries about CMA)**

# **James Pech (1830-?), “Mus. Doc. Oxon.”**

**English organist, choral director,  
composer of songs & small piano  
pieces, essayist**

**By accounts, a remarkably  
knowledgeable and gifted  
conductor, active throughout  
Manhattan**

**Also remarkable for his writing of copious  
analytical program notes**

**Still in London late in 1860; by 1865, in Montreal;  
by 1866, in New York, hired by Trinity Church**



# **Church Music Association**

- **Established in 1869; prospectus mailed in June**
- **GT Strong, president (finance & operations); Dr. James Pech, musical director and conductor**
- **Membership in volunteer chorus by audition only; performances to include paid “ringers” and a full-size hired orchestra**
- **Performances (three, in Steinway Hall) are for subscribers only! 80 subscribers purchase 20 tickets each, to share with personal guests**
- **Rules for proper concert behavior will be enforced!**

- Rehearsals begin in late fall, 1869 at Trinity Church for CMA's debut in January, featuring Mozart's Twelfth Mass and the 1<sup>st</sup> act of Weber's *Oberon*
- The concerts are acclaimed successful among the music lovers attending (perhaps more as high-society events than as aesthetic experiences?) and the CMA fiscal model proves to be sustainable through three seasons...

### A Fashionable Concert at Steinway Hall.

The Church Music Association is an organization that has created quite a sensation among the fashionable people of the city. It is under the auspices of the clergy and laity of the Episcopal churches of this city in general, and of Trinity Church in especial. Upon its Executive Committee are Mrs. Astor, Mrs. Cutting, Mrs. Mott, Mrs. Sam. Barlow, Mrs. Dix, and other prominent ladies.

Its purpose is to organize a chorus from the most proficient amateurs, having regard also to the social position of the members. As amateurs are not altogether to be trusted, there is a nucleus of German professionals to give them steadiness and courage. In all there are about 150 in the chorus, and they are supported by an orchestra of some fifty pieces. Dr. Pech, an organist of Trinity parish, conducts.

They give three concerts; no tickets are sold. The affair is supported by the subscribers, of whom there

any one who heard the rehearsals would have supposed possible. Though some two thousand persons were present, the concert was a private one, and is entitled to immunity from criticism, and we therefore make none. A marked feature of the occasion was the conductor, Mr. James Pech, "Mus. Doc. Oxon.," or Oxford musical doctor. His peculiarity as a conductor is that he kicks time. The method, though singular, might be pardoned as an eccentricity if he kicked at the same time with his beat; but as the two were seldom together, his orchestra, totally unused to such proceedings, were at a loss whether to give their attention to his feet or his hands, and, between the two, floundered badly in their time. Dr. Pech has also signalized himself by a printed analysis of the music, interspersed with biographical references to himself and his own emotions at various epochs of his life. Among the singular statements that he makes is one to the effect that if he had been

opened clear (after a spell of drizzly weather) but with a temperature of 8° Fahr.:  
Yesterday of A. M. left Boston with dear little Lucy, the nicest kindest warmest hearted of little girls, and the most unselfish thoughtful for others in the  
small matter that make up the sum of common life. Snow from Boston to Springfield, sunshine thereafter, but the ride was Arctic. Home at seven.  
Trouble ahead. Rev. Cooke tells me of charges against Dr. Pech, to be investigated by letters of enquiry. He is accused of assuming an Academic title  
that does not belong to him - and of marrying in America, though already married in England. I trust these charges may prove unfounded. His professional  
rivals & competitors hate him bitterly because he has succeeded where they have failed, and they may have convinced themselves, without due examination  
& enquiry, that this that in the other rumor is true, & committed themselves to the ascription of its truth. But I have forebodings. There has been, from  
the first, a certain mystery about this gentleman.  
Connolly is in jail - for want of bail who can justify ~~it~~ to the amount of one million. "Dicite Io Deum, et Io fidicite Deum!" -

*from the diary entry for November 30, 1871 (vol 4, p 371):*

**“Trouble ahead. Rev. Cooke tells me of charges against Dr. Pech, to be investigated by letters of inquiry. He is accused of assuming an academic title that does not belong to him—and of marrying in America though already married in England. I trust these charges may prove unfounded; his professional rivals and competitors hate him bitterly because he has succeeded where they have failed... But I have forebodings. There has been from the first a certain mystery about this gentleman.”**

# ***Missa Solemnis* rehearsals begin...**

- **“...these movements begin to glimmer out into form and comeliness...**
- **“...anxious council over the asperities and arduosities... agreed to introduce four experimental ‘saxophones’ at next rehearsal to steady the aberrant voice parts...”**
- **“...extraordinary work, keeps my attention riveted...collars me with its first chord and holds me tight...no words can define the peculiar something...”**
- **“...our programmes are still in the printer’s hands. It is Pech’s fault for writing a programme as big as a bible...”**
- **“...first orchestral rehearsal was satisfactory... White declared it the most marvelous music...critics say that it is not so much a church service as something transcendental”**

## **Performance: Thursday evening, May 2, 1872**

*The New York Tribune said:*



**“When the orchestra is imperfectly trained and the chorus weak, ragged, and uncertain, there is no music more disappointing. Whether to praise the Church Music Association for their zeal, or to blame their rashness in attempting a task for which they were so obviously unfitted, we find it difficult to decide.”**

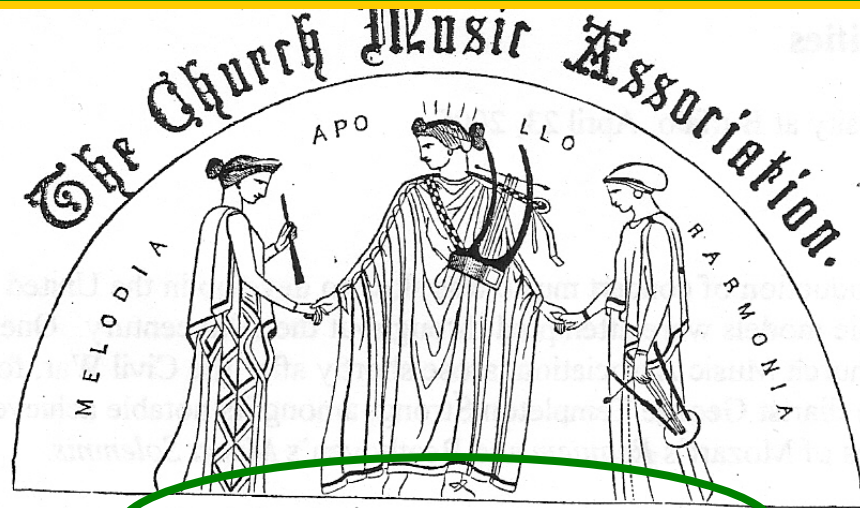
*But Strong wrote:*



**“Chorus and soli were admirable, considering! Audience large, interested, silent—Applause after every choral movement—People were excited by the fiery and magical orchestration—It is the greatest of musical works...”**

SEASON,  
1871-72.

No. 3,  
THURSDAY,  
MAY 2d.



Il piu grand' omaggio alla musica sta nel silenzio.

*Executive Committee.*

President—GEORGE T. STRONG, Esq.  
E. H. SCHERMERHORN, Esq. | CHAS. E. STRONG, Esq.  
CHAS. C. DODGE, Esq. | JAMES F. RUGGLES, Esq.  
Rev Wm. H. COOKE, M. A. | JAMES PECK, Mus.Doc., Oxon.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.

Regulations adopted by the Subscribers.

1. There shall be an Executive Committee consisting of four subscribers with the Musical Director. Three shall constitute a quorum. It shall take all measures for carrying out the purposes of the Association as set forth in the printed circular, dated May 24th, 1869, and annexed to the subscription paper, until the further order of a meeting of the subscribers, and shall have power to add to its number.
2. Such meeting shall be called on the written request of any two subscribers.
3. A Treasurer and Secretary shall be appointed, who shall act under the direction of the Committee.
4. No disbursements shall be made, or liability incurred, without the order of the Committee, entered on its Minutes.
5. To prevent the disturbance often caused by persons entering a concert-room during the actual performance of music, the doors will be closed during such performance, and opened at the end of each movement, when there will be a pause, during which those who may be late can enter and seat themselves. Notice of this rule shall be printed on each ticket.
6. The Concerts shall commence at Eight precisely.
7. The second part of each Concert may consist, in whole or in part, of classical secular music.

Details from the front of Peck's 36-page concert program... note the emphasis on silence and etiquette!

32 of the pages were filled with detailed musical commentary in tiny print, complete with notated musical examples. There were no advertisements.

# **The problem with Pech...**

- **Overspent Year Three's budget by 35%**
- **Did not really earn an Oxford doctorate**
- **Did indeed abandon a wife and children in England, then remarried in North America**

*From the diary, May 14:*

**“Pech called last evening... gave me his unfortunate story with seeming frankness and in full detail. In 1849 he ran away with [an older] woman... and married her clandestinely, he then being 19. She proved vicious, false, cantankerous, and incorrigible... after seven years of torment he abandoned her. ...he must change his base and leave New York...”**

**Pech refuses to step down from the  
CMA and is forced out.**

**The public wonders why.**

**The church insiders probably know.**

**An... unspectacular... conductor is  
obtained for Year Four.**

**Singers begin to defect.**

**Some subscribers do not renew.**

**The CMA is crippled without Pech.**

**Strong, in the intimacy of his diary, comes to see Pech as a scamp, swindler, thief, and humbug; admits to being blinded by Pech's obvious musical gifts.**

**For his part, James Pech tries to sue the CMA for non-payment of salary—which he had clearly declined; back-room wrangling takes an entire year.**

**At the outset of Year Five, the CMA is rapidly abandoned by its backers and Strong, demoralized, resigns its presidency.**

## **CMA, the experiment by a musical purist...**

- **Raised standards of performance and audience behavior**
- **Offered an untried model for concert subsidy**
- **Introduced important classical repertoire to American audiences**

**But...**

**Was personality-driven and vulnerable to withdrawal of largesse by the fashionable.**



**“The management was exclusive... the whole interests...depended upon the caprice of a few gentlemen...interested in [this] style of music. It is not strange that its career was brief... Such prestige as comes from social patronage the Church Music Association... had in plenty, and it undoubtedly had the most exclusive and remarkable audiences ever gathered in New York.”**

**—Henry Krehbiel, *Notes on the Cultivation of Choral Music and The Oratorio Society of New York* (1884)**

**Maybe so...**

**But don't forget that Strong was a true aesthete, and the CMA was an arts incubator!**

## Resources Consulted

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## ***Précis.***

**Regular, series concerts of major choral-orchestral repertoire in 19th-century America were risky ventures, and promoters struggled to develop sustainable entrepreneurial models. Prominent Wall Street lawyer and diarist George Templeton Strong, a music connoisseur, devised an ingenious business plan for his part-volunteer, part-professional Church Music Association in 1869, one that relied on advance sale of private subscriptions to the affluent, who then shared their large allotments of tickets with personal guests.**

**But after three successful seasons in Steinway Hall, culminating in the American premiere of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, the group lost its "star," brilliant choral conductor James Pech, when he was found to be a bigamist who had deserted his first family in England. The subsequent demise of the demoralized organization illustrates the precariousness and vulnerability of concert infrastructure at this time.**