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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# Sense And Nonsense: Exploring The Implications Of Gender Roles As Reflected in the Work Of Lowell Mason

By Carol Pemberton

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**W**ith respect to the issue of gender roles, we live in the best of times and the worst of times. In 1992 we suffer no shortage of viewpoints, no absence of rhetoric, no shyness on the part of impassioned advocates of this or that political stance. As a general principle, open discussion of diverse opinions is all to the good.

Yet, in other ways, we live in difficult times, for much of what we hear leaves us bewildered and torn. Consensus and social stability are gone. Like all previous generations, we must deal with sensitive issues concerning human relationships, but now we face them more on our own than did earlier generations. We are left to sort out, as individuals, what makes sense and what doesn't.

This paper makes no attempt to define which interpretations of gender roles are sensible and which aren't—whether in this or any other generation. Rather, this paper describes nineteenth-century attitudes about women as reflected in Lowell Mason's life and work. It also explores the implications of those attitudes for music education, and not just in Mason's day. It will be shown that nineteenth-century attitudes tell us more about music education and about ourselves than might at first be supposed.

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## What We Know About Lowell Mason's Attitudes

What Lowell Mason thought about women and their roles in society is not in the least ambiguous; he expressed his views repeatedly, and without being at all subtle. As was typical in his day, Mason put women on pedestals as pure-minded creatures, eager to serve others, and saintly in thought, word, and deed. He also subscribed wholeheartedly to the cliché "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

Mason never questioned the traditional middle-class view of gender roles: a woman's place was in the home, rearing children and serving God, the family, and the community. It is important to remember that Mason did not invent these attitudes: he merely absorbed and reflected them. Because he was so prominent as an educator and textbook author, however, he was in a position to reinforce views that can now be seen as paternalistic and patronizing.

Mason's views of women fit perfectly with his personality overall. The quintessential middle-class, nineteenth-century American male, Mason embodied the Protestant work ethic. He set goals and pursued them tirelessly. He was an idealist with pragmatic approaches to the challenges he found in business, music, publishing, and teaching. As an educator, he was an idealist who encouraged students of all ages, all social classes, and—we can presume—both genders.

One trait that set him apart was his philan-

thropy. As soon as book royalties made him wealthy, he became a benefactor with few peers. We know that Mason gave away large amounts of money, but specifics are hard to come by. We must read between the lines for a glimmer of how much he gave away and to whom.

References to Mason's generosity appeared during his lifetime. An account published in 1852 (when Mason was 60 years old) estimated his wealth at \$100,000, then added "His wealth...would have been far greater...were his benevolence less." By that time, Mason had helped his eldest sons, Daniel Gregory and Lowell, Jr., get established in the publishing company, Mason and Law, and he had underwritten first-rate educations abroad for his younger sons, Henry and William. Nonetheless, his remaining wealth was equivalent to about \$2,000,000 in 1992 purchasing power (Pemberton, 1988, p. 32).

Another account, published in the July 14, 1854, edition of *The Boston Evening Transcript*, states that Mason was able to "amass a splendid fortune and give away another fortune." Even if the latter part of that statement is somewhat exaggerated, Mason must have given away substantial sums of money.

But to whom? The most famous answer is Alexander Wheelock Thayer, who acknowledged Mason's support for part of his research on Beethoven. That support is known only because Thayer publicly acknowledged Mason's generosity. Apart from Thayer, few other recipients—other than Mason's family members—are known by name. We do know that Mason contributed totally or substantially to the support of his widowed mother-in-law, her sister, and his own parents.

Though the evidence is sparse, we know that Mason provided financial aid to talented music students, both men and women. Sometimes he had a vested interest in their support, in that his own work benefited as a result. One example occurred in 1832 when Mason was organist/choir director at the Bowdoin Street Church in Boston. Mason heard of a fine young soprano named Anne Folsom, so he went to visit the 21-year-old and her parents in Exeter, New Hampshire. After he heard Anne sing, he invited her to

move to Boston and sing in the choir. She lived with the Masons and attended a private school, Mt. Vernon School, where Mason taught (Pemberton, 1985, 50). Anne Folsom benefited, but so did Mason's church choir.

Throughout his life, Mason worked with women musicians in the churches and schools, but we know very little about those working relationships. He cultivated the talent of women choir members, but we can't read much into that fact, except that Mason was determined to improve his choirs, and training the singers was a step in that direction.

In reference to the "real" work of the world, Mason wrote about men and only men, for it was axiomatic that men were the doers. For instance, in describing his purchase of the Rinck Library and his shipping it back to America in 1852, Mason wrote about its potential to further the goals of up-and-coming men in the profession:

If it [the library] arrives safely, it must be useful to some of the young men who are looking forward to the musical profession. There are now many young men who are beginning to feel the necessity of a more liberal education for the profession of music than has hitherto been supposed important. (Mason, *Musical Letters*, pp. 143-144).

In such passages, Mason's attitudes inadvertently show through: Men are out in the world as the doers; women are in the background as care-givers. When he found a talented woman active in the music profession, Mason praised her artistic talents, but he could not stop there. In *Musical Letters From Abroad*, after devoting several pages to a glowingly account of Madame Sontag's singing talents, Mason adds these observations:

Her appearance is highly interesting...She is indeed a fine looking woman; youthful and active, when she appears in public, as a young lady of eighteen....Mad. Sontag has the reputation of being an excellent woman, a faithful wife, an affectionate mother, and a warm-hearted friend. (50)

Such a passage can be ignored as an extraneous digression, inconsequential in and of itself. Yet, when contrasted with Mason's descriptions of male artists, it is striking. Not one of them is subjected to gratuitous commentary about physical attractiveness, parental devotion, or marital fidelity.



This portrait of Lowell Mason is an enlargement of a tintype that is said to be of Ransom's portrait of Mason. Could Ransom's rendering of Mason as he would have appeared in about 1850 be based on a Daguerreotype, or was it done from life? We do not know. Frances Elliot Clark apparently borrowed a tintype of the Ransom original from Mina Mason van Sinderen and had an enlargement (27" x 35") made in pastels for the display of the Victor Phonograph Company at the San Francisco World's Fair, 1915. The enlarged portrait was later displayed at the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago and then presented to the MENC in 1936. It hung in the Chicago office until 1956, when MENC moved to Washington, D. C. The MENC Historical Center has both the tintype and the framed enlargement. *Credit: Music Library, University of Maryland at College Park (Frances Elliot Clark Collection).*



## What We Can Reasonably Infer

The record of Mason's life, considered in its entirety, shows that he had an uncanny sense of political and economic opportunities. He sized up situations and seized opportunities; he rallied supporters and outwitted opponents—all this, with unfailing political savvy.

Therefore, the first reasonable inference is that if Mason were here today, he would absorb and reflect the cultural currents of 1992. He would adopt a nonsexist view of women, or he would become more discreet in his statements.

Second, because Mason worked closely with educational leaders of his day, it is reasonable to infer that he absorbed much of their thinking. These people uttered statements that must have seemed sensible to them, indeed, statements they may have regarded as "timeless truths;" yet they, too, reflected their era as much as they shaped it.

We can presume that Lowell Mason heard educator George B. Emerson speak at the American Institute of Instruction in Boston in August, 1831. Emerson's lecture was entitled "On the Education of Women." (The text was later published by Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins.) In 38 published pages, Emerson says little that surprises a twentieth-century reader. He states that the purpose of education is to prepare girls to be dutiful daughters, wives, and especially mothers. For instance, he stresses that women should master language skills so that they can better teach their children.

Apparently women of the time agreed. A recent study of Emma Willard (a pioneer on behalf of women's higher education and the person responsible for the establishment of the first women's college) concludes that "Willard put forward a program for women that was based more on their structural place in society than on any inherent moral or psychological characteristics" (Coughlin, 1991).

Beginning in 1845, Mason was a close associate of Horace Mann. We can be sure that Mason knew Mann's thinking about women and their roles in society. In 1853, Horace Mann published some of his ideas under the title "A Few Thoughts on the Powers and Duties of Women." Mann begins

with this observation:

In much of what has been addressed to women, they have been treated with disrespect. They have been flattered, and flattery is disrespect. Through all time, they have been assiduously taught that the garniture of the body was more precious than the vesture of the spirit...(11-12)

Mann went on to argue for a gender-based division of labor. Little is new or noteworthy in his arguments, except for a striking comparison he uses to point out how unsuited men are when it comes to tending small children: "A man, superintending a nursery of children, is like an elephant brooding chickens,—the more lovingly he broods, the more awfully he flattens them." (27)

(In addition to showing his sense of humor, Horace Mann demonstrates that gender stereotyping distorts reality and praises one gender at the expense of the other. The passage in which Mann praises the nurturing capacities of women demeans men, denying their capacity for tenderness toward children.)

Mann went on to summarize the limits on women's education, concluding that women's education is for training children: "The rulers of our country need knowledge, (God only knows how much they need it!) but mothers need it more; for they determine...the very capacity of the rulers' minds to acquire knowledge and to apply it." (65)

Lowell Mason's writing shows that he agreed with Horace Mann and other educators of his day. Thus it is reasonable to infer that—like his contemporaries—Mason was both reflecting and promoting current views.

## Attitudes Mason Reflected and Promoted in Children's Songbooks

The clearest indication of Mason's attitudes about women is found in the texts of his songbooks for children. Mason was zealous about having those texts be just right in every sense, whether concerning gender roles or anything else.

In his prefaces, Mason stresses that he upholds a high standard for his texts because texts have a powerful influence over students, for better or for worse. Of course, he regards his texts as positive influences. A

typical preface is found in *Mason's Normal Singer* (1856). There Mason's words show how earnest he was and how confident about the caliber of his texts. His use of the word *normal* reveals that confidence; it also reveals that he believed he was expressing cultural norms:

We believe that every sentiment expressed in these little poetic pieces is *normal* [italics added], such as an intelligent and conscientious parent or teacher would...desire to encourage, even to outward, habitual, persevering action. The introduction into schools of such songs as tend to mere levity, frolic, or idle mirth; or such as are low, coarse, or vulgar in thought or in language; or such as contain equivocal or ambiguous expressions, is most deeply to be regretted. Parents, teachers, and others can not guard this avenue of evil with too watchful an eye. Such pieces have found no place in the "Normal Singer." We have not knowing allowed the expression of any feeling or sentiment, which, when taken in its proper meaning, and understood according to its proper relations, is not believed to be *normal, or in accordance with purity and goodness*. [Italics added] (iii)

In fact, to become a successful textbook writer, Mason *had* to express the norm. By their very nature, textbooks express accepted ideological positions and reinforce established cultural attitudes; viewed from the historical perspective, textbooks are evidence of acculturation in a given time and place. There is, then, every reason to believe that Mason's textbooks express the norm of his culture, though perhaps he escalates his claims a bit by equating his version of what is "normal" with "purity and goodness."

And what do Mason's song texts reveal? The first impression is that women are pure, kind, sweet, and patient—in short, so saintly that they are to be admired and sheltered from the cruelties of this world. Ordinarily, women are seen in the context of home or garden, with children or nature. They are reverent and humble servants of God. Motherhood is the main topic, and mothers are revered, but women in general are depicted as saintly creatures.

"Laura" is a typical example. The text to "Laura" appeared in many mid-nineteenth century school books. It had various musical settings, with the words slightly revised to

accommodate different settings. One reason for the text's popularity may well be the fact that "Laura" represented the prevailing cultural image so well:

#### *Laura*

A maiden, like my Laura,  
You no where else will find,  
So good, so sweet, so gentle,  
So faithful, true, and kind.  
She's dear to me,  
And well deserves to be,  
For a maiden like my Laura  
You no where else will find.

Oh, could you hear her singing  
Like birds at break of day!  
Oh, could you see her blooming  
Like flowers of early May!  
But vain to raise  
A song to tell her praise—  
For a maiden like my Laura  
You no where else will find.

She's ever kind to others,  
From duty never swerves;  
She tends the sick and suffering  
Her neighbor loves and serves;  
And yet her love  
Is given to things above—  
For a maiden like my Laura  
You no where else will find.

*The Song-Book of the School Room*, Mason and  
Webb, 1851, pp. 130-131;  
*Mason's Normal Singer*, 1856, pp. 60-61.

The song texts assure readers that a saintly woman, such as Laura, lives a happy life:

#### *The Farmer's Wife*

Who hath a happier smile than she  
Who waits in yonder sward [meadow],  
Beneath the spreading walnut tree,  
The coming of her lord;  
Who makes his hearth gleam fresh and  
bright,  
When daily toil is done,  
And sheds around a holier light,  
As swiftly fades the sun;

Who, open hand and hearted, meets  
The cheerless, fainting poor,  
And kindly looks on all she greets,

That pass her lonely door?  
 'Tis she, the merry farmer's wife,  
 Who sets his chair beside,  
 And tells him, what a happy life  
 It is to be his bride.

And when misfortune's cares arise,  
 And earthly hopes grow dim,  
 She'll point him upward to the skies,  
 And place her trust in Him,  
 Who, rich in love, with goodness rife,  
 Rules over land and sea:—  
 Then blessings on the farmer's wife,  
 Wherever she may be!  
*The Song-Book of the School Room*, Mason and  
 Webb, 1851, p. 79

If women really were so happy, one reason could have been that they were presumed to hold tremendous power. The cliché says it all: The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Mason's song texts affirm that idea, as in this example:

*My Country-Women*

Of you I sing, my country-women!  
 To you is given the nation's fate!  
 On you the future race is leaning,  
 And asking if they may be great.

Not in the field, the camp, the senate,  
 Is your pure star of glory seen;  
 But in the sacred, home-loved circle  
 Shines out that heavenly ray, serene.

No thirst of fame your souls deluding,  
 Draws you from duty's path away;  
 To you the holy trust is given  
 To mold the future hero's clay.

'Tis yours to form, to raise, and nourish  
 The future glories of the state;  
 On you the future race is leaning,  
 And asking if they may be great.  
 —*Mason's Normal Singer*, 1856, pp. 166-67

### **Making Sense of the Historical Record—Or Finding the Implications**

What sense do we make, here in 1992, of these mid-nineteenth-century texts and the

attitudes underlying them? In "A Few Thoughts on the Powers and Duties of Women," Horace Mann said that "all writers get ridiculous on this topic." (35) To keep from getting ridiculous, we can start by admitting that the gap between nineteenth- and twentieth-century sensibilities simply cannot be breached.

It can also be argued that the past 150 years have brought some changes in attitudes toward women, yet overall, the changes are more in style than in substance. Though many people now hold attitudes very different from Lowell Mason's, others still think along the same lines as he did. The twentieth century is characterized by open, candid talk about sexist attitudes on the one hand, but on the other hand, by thinly veiled sexist attitudes and subtle acting out of those attitudes.

Leaving aside interpretations of attitudes and the demonstrations of those attitudes—then or now—we can find several significant implications in this telling glimpse into the past century.

First, anyone serious about understanding music education in any era must understand its cultural context, and that context includes more than any one generation. Nothing about music education, or education in general, makes sense outside the cultural context. (Herein lies a rationale for music education history, should any reader be seeking a rationale.) Furthermore, the writings of any era tell more about the prevailing culture than is superficially apparent.

Future historians will look at the late twentieth century and examine the attitudes reflected in our writings. Surely they will discern that this era is marked by social instability and the absence of consensus about "normal" gender roles.

From our perspective, the nineteenth century appears to have been the heyday of what we call sexism. But it also appears to have been an era of stability and consensus concerning gender roles. Consequently, it was not difficult for a textbook writer to determine what was "normal," hence acceptable, and to select texts accordingly. Users were obviously comfortable with Mason's texts and with the perpetuating of the attitudes they expressed; had it been otherwise,

Lowell Mason could never have made a fortune on the sales of his books.

When we look at nineteenth-century textbooks, we may be tempted to dismiss them as relics or curiosities. We flatter ourselves that we don't have those old-fashioned notions. Perhaps before jumping to self-serving conclusions, we might read more closely into those texts and into contemporary life. We may find that some attitudes reverberate across the generations. If so, it is reasonable to assume that today's thinking will echo across future generations.

Second, whether then or now, education is a means of socialization and acculturation. Music education is part of that process. Lowell Mason never—to my knowledge—uttered the words “socialization” and “acculturation,” but he knew what education is all about. His life and career testify to his faith in the power of music education to socialize and acculturate.

The unstated—and probably unconscious—intent behind these mid-nineteenth-century texts is exactly the intent behind nineteenth-century education more generally: that is, it conditioned individuals to know and accept their expected social roles. Apparently, this social-conditioning process worked where women were concerned. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, reflecting upon contemporary education in “The Seneca Falls Declaration,” concluded that its result is “to destroy [a woman's] confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life” (Kraditor, 1968, p. 186).

Third, this glimpse into the past reminds us that every generation takes seriously the issue of what constitutes appropriate teaching material. Mason and other pioneer music educators sought materials that they believed would not merely enhance musical learning, but also develop character. Mason's writing leaves no doubt that he was proud of the material he had chosen and confident of its power to accomplish both of those goals.

Judging by today's journals and conference sessions, there is an ongoing, serious debate over what music to teach, and not entirely on musical grounds. Meanwhile, other disciplines are embroiled in controversies over what ma-

terials to teach. The prevalence of these debates demonstrates that educators cannot settle these critical issues for once and for all. On the contrary, these issues must be addressed anew by every generation.

A corollary issue is how much impact texts actually have on music students. We might reasonably infer that in Mason's day, texts and music had more impact on students than do teaching materials today, but the selection of teaching material *does* have an impact in any era, including our own. Consequently, selection of appropriate teaching materials is a legitimate issue of perennial concern.

Finally, any time we look into an emotionally charged issue like sexism, we must contend with our own biases. We historians cannot escape our own personalities and conditioning, no matter how dedicated we are to seeking the truth. One of the toughest challenges historians face is balancing their emotional responses with objective detachment. Total detachment, total objectivity, is neither possible nor desirable, because it would lead to cold, sterile historical writing. Yet to a considerable extent, that objectivity is necessary. (For more analysis of this issue, see Pemberton, “Revisionist Historians,” 1987.)

Readers who are not historians might use Lowell Mason's song texts as a chance to test their own objectivity. As you look at those texts, consider how you respond. Can you read them without emotion? Can you dismiss them as heavy-handed or write them off as quaint curiosities? Do these texts make you disgusted or angry—even at a distance of 150 years?


Perhaps these texts and their underlying premises make sense, not just in the light of historical context, but in the light of your personal beliefs. If so, those beliefs color your reactions. On the other hand, these texts and the underlying premises may strike you as nonsense. If so, your reactions are still colored, but differently. Each reader is left to sort it all out: Sense? Or nonsense? The answer is, in part, already in each reader's mind.

The only way I have ever been comfortable with Lowell Mason is to place him in the context of his times. Dragging him into the

present and measuring him by today's standards does not serve Mason well, nor does it serve us well: It distorts Mason's career, and it destroys historical integrity.

As for gender roles and gender stereotyping: Such silliness is a luxury humanity cannot afford. If ever there was a time to put aside such nonsense, this is the time. We cannot afford to demean or waste intelligence, energy, training, and talent—no matter whose it is. Humanity has seen more than enough nonsense. Now it's time for sense.

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Rose Marie Grentzer (1914-1985) served with distinction on the faculties of the Juilliard Conservatory, the University of Michigan, the Oberlin Conservatory, and the University of Maryland at College Park. She co-authored the *Birchard Music Series* and directed the annual American music awards of Sigma Alpha Iota, the national professional music fraternity. Professor Grentzer, a native of Pittsburgh and graduate of the present Carnegie Mellon University, was the wife of Harold Spivacke, who for many years was Chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress.

At Maryland from 1955 until her retirement in 1974, Professor Grentzer founded the graduate program in music education and brought national and international acclaim to the University through appearances of her Madrigal Singers. She made a lasting contribution to research in music education through her role in establishing the Music Educators National Conference Historical Center at the University of Maryland at College Park. The example set in creating that unique repository has led to the establishment there of the archives of numerous other national and international music organizations. The Rose Marie Grentzer Fund supports the work of the MENC Historical Center and its outreach programs.