

Title: Johnson Versus Mason: Musical Politics, 1843 Style

Author(s): Jacklin Bolton Stopp

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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.

Johnson Versus Mason: Musical Politics, 1843 Style

By Jacklin Bolton Stopp

Empire State College-SUNY

On the morning of August 24, 1843, the highly respected Boston musician, Artemas Nixon Johnson (1817-1892),¹ arrived at the city's Odeon building to attend the opening of the annual meeting of the American Musical Convention,² scheduled to be held through September 1 (except Sunday, August 27). On its fifth day, Johnson, as a guest lecturer, spoke about his recent European study and travel to its nearly 350 registrants. Johnson's presentation was introduced by the first Professor of the Boston Academy of Music, Lowell Mason (1792-1872), who had influenced the direction of the convention since its formal inception in 1838. In 1843, however, Mason's customary domination would abruptly cease.

That year, press coverage of the convention would focus instead on Johnson, Mason's former pupil, protégé, and co-worker. In addition to being a guest lecturer, Johnson was nominated and chosen the convention's First Vice-President. He also served on at least six committees and individually proposed two amendments to its constitution and by-laws, each of which was carried.³

Early Johnson-Mason Relationships

Until 1843, the Middlebury, Vermont-born Johnson had idolized Mason.⁴ Johnson's awe of this musician had begun when a youth, the result of his family's attendance at a service of Boston's Hanover Street Church (Trinitarian Congregational). There, Lowell Mason was the acclaimed organist and choir

leader. About five years later, 15-year-old Artemas joined Mason's recently founded Juvenile Choir just in time to appear in its third concert.⁵ This was an exceptional experience because, before the advent of American public school music, there were very few opportunities for young people to sing in a chorus of unchanged voices, much less one that numbered about 200 singers.

The debut of Mason's Juvenile Choir on June 13, 1832, not only served as a catalyst for Johnson's later membership but also for the formation of the Boston Academy of Music. This altruistic organization had an indelible influence on Johnson's life as well as on that of Lowell Mason.

Established in January of 1833, the academy was an association of men (mostly businessmen) who had united to improve local church music (primarily Protestant). Looking toward this goal, a major desire was to influence the Boston city government to introduce the teaching of music (vocal, in the sense of choral) into its public school curriculum. To realize this and other aspirations, Mason was hired to develop the requisite courses and to give the instruction.

From the outset of the Boston Academy of Music's program, Johnson participated during his free time. When initially enrolled, he was one of the competitively selected students attending the city's all-boy English High School,⁶ now considered the nation's first public high school. He graduated in the Class of 1833 and became a clerk in a large wholesale hardware store in Boston.⁷ Although he was employed the customary six-day work week, Johnson used evenings and any other free time to take courses as they were offered by the Boston Academy of Music.

Two courses introduced by Mason during the summer of 1834, the Teachers' Class and

Jacklin Bolton Stopp is an Independent Scholar in American Music. She currently serves as a tutor in music for Empire State College-State University of New York, Lockport.

the Mixed Chorus, proved to be of major importance, and Johnson was a charter member of each. In August, he attended the initial Teachers' Class,⁸ a course primarily designed for training church musicians. Johnson attended this and subsequent classes as a nonregistrant,⁹ probably because he assisted Mason, this class's only teacher. In 1834, Johnson could have demonstrated his changing voice, because this was his vocal status when he became a founding member of the Boston academy's oratorio organization, known as the Mixed Chorus.¹⁰

By 1836, Johnson had probably taken all of the courses offered by the Boston Academy of Music. This meant that he had studied not only under Mason but also under the Boston academy's second professor, George James Webb. (This Englishman, an extremely fine musician, had been hired in 1833 when burgeoning enrollment made it evident that one person could no longer handle the academy's increasingly successful program.) Under their instruction, Johnson was probably trained in voice, piano, organ, vocal (choral) pedagogy, choral singing, and thorough-bass, thus receiving exceptional training at a time when the United States did not yet have a permanent music conservatory. But these courses did not constitute Johnson's total musical background.

For several years, this full-time clerk had held a second job in what is now Greater Boston. After a short stint as organist at the Congregational Church in Jamaica Plain, he had served in the same capacity for three or more years at the prestigious Harvard Church (Unitarian) in Charlestown.¹¹ Apparently buoyed by success in these endeavors, around the age of 20 Johnson became a full-time musician and thereupon took the professional name of A. N. Johnson.

About this time, Johnson began a working relationship with Mason, apparently the result of taking a position as both organist and choir

leader for Boston's Franklin Street Church (Trinitarian Congregational).¹² There he implemented its music program under Mason's discreet supervision while Mason continued to direct and execute the music program for Bowdoin Street Church (formerly Hanover Street Church), presumably with the assistance of a few of his best organ pupils.

The Mason-Johnson collaboration was convenient in that the congregation of Franklin Street Church sublet space in the Odeon, the building rented by the Boston Academy of Music for its classes and concerts. Just before Johnson became identi-

fied with this church, the Boston academy installed a fine organ built by the eminent Thomas Appleton. The instrument, which cost \$5,500, consisted of three manuals, 27 stops, and two octaves of pedals.¹³ During the week, it was generally played by Webb in his work for the Boston academy; on Sundays, Johnson commanded this highly acclaimed instrument for the services of Franklin Street Church.

There is no doubt that the Mason-Johnson collaboration was very successful. Around

“Mason had used questionable means in an unsuccessful effort to control the 1843 [American Musical] convention's presidential election.”

1840, this team added musical responsibility for Park Street Church (Trinitarian Congregational).¹⁴ This was a realistic extension of their cooperative efforts, because Johnson had taken on an assistant, George F. Root (1820-1895).¹⁵ (Root later became a famous musician, especially known as a composer of Civil War songs; his “Battle Cry of Freedom” recently served as major background music for the television series, *The Civil War*.) By this time, the Mason-Johnson style of supervisor-implementor collaboration was being applied to the infant music program for the Boston Public Schools.

With the opening of the 1838-39 school year, the Boston Academy of Music saw the realization of its goal to secure the introduction of music into the city's school curriculum, a first not only for Boston but also for

1792



1872

LOWELL MASON

This portrait engraving of Lowell Mason originally appeared on the musical program for an event honoring Mason and sponsored by the National Federation of Music Clubs on June 9, 1929. The artist is unknown, and the engraving is a variant of the engraving that appears on the cover. *Credit: Music Library, University of Maryland at College Park (Lowell Mason Collection).*

the nation. For this pioneering venture, Mason was hired as Master of Music (superintendent). In addition to himself, only one music teacher, Jonathan C. Woodman, was employed.¹⁶ The following year, however, Mason acquired his first music faculty through a “package arrangement” with A. N. Johnson, who became Mason’s chief teacher. Johnson brought along three men enrolled in his apprentice program: George F. Root, his most advanced student; and two just beginning their apprenticeships, Johnson’s brother, James Johnson, Jr. (1820-1895), and Albert Drake (1822-18??).¹⁷ Given the inequitable training and experience of the members of this faculty, the bulk of the teaching was done by Mason, A. N. Johnson, and Root.

By 1841, Johnson was well known in the New England area as a private music teacher, church musician, and music educator. Furthermore, he had acquired considerable professional status because he was the former

president and first conductor of the Musical Education Society (1837-1839) and, currently, was Mason’s accompanist for the Associate Choirs of Boston and the conductor of the Juvenile Choir sponsored by the Boston Academy of Music (January of 1840 to early 1842). But Johnson’s growing fame did not deter him from annually attending the Teachers’ Class of the Boston Academy of Music, where he now undoubtedly assisted as an accompanist. Furthermore, Johnson regularly attended the yearly Musical Convention, an outgrowth of the Teachers’ Class which met at the Odeon through the invitation of the Boston Academy of Music.

Background of the 1843 American Music Convention

The first formal Musical Convention—a program dedicated to lectures and discussion on matters pertaining to music education, church music, and musical performance (pri-

marily vocal)—was held in 1838. Under the direction of elected officers, its session began a day or so after the class convened and then met daily during the class break time.¹⁸ Some of the registrants viewed the convention as independent of the Boston Academy of Music, but not so for Mason and his most devoted followers.

Initially, Mason controlled both the Teachers' Class and the Musical Convention. Some people, however, resented Mason's requirement that the convention could be attended only after registering for the class; they wanted a complete separation of these two programs. Known as Independents, this group also believed that the musical quality of the convention would be improved if freed from Mason's influence, and so advocated their cause. Their dissension laid the groundwork for the sudden dissolution of the 436-member Musical Convention of 1841. Immediately thereafter, about 200 Masonites reorganized under the new name of American Musical Convention, and the nearly equal number of Independents organized under the old name of National Musical Convention.

Johnson was among those who remained loyal to Mason, even serving on several committees for the American Musical Convention.¹⁹ The following year, however, when only the pro-Mason convention reconvened, Johnson was not in attendance. He was living in Frankfurt am Main, where he studied harmony under the eminent Swiss composer and theorist, Xaver Schnyder von Wartensee. This was an exceptional experience for an American-born musician, as were his close contacts there with such famous musicians as Felix Mendelssohn and Franz Liszt. No wonder the lecture committee for the 1843 American Musical Convention invited him to be a guest speaker.

The 1843 American Musical Convention

In 1843, the American Music Convention was again marked by overt dissension between the Masonites and Independents. This year, however, Johnson understandably sided with the Independents, for he had returned from abroad with a more cosmopolitan musical outlook because of his foreign training.²⁰

Mason, whose dominant interest was American church music, must have been greatly upset over Johnson's defection, but this did not stop him from eventually resuming their cooperative work in church and public school music.

Mason may well have excused Johnson's new loyalty as the unwanted outcome of his own political maneuvering, for Mason had made an ultimately unsuccessful bid to control the convention's presidential election. Mason tried to keep from office a leading Independent, George Washington Lucas (1800-187?) of Troy, New York. Thus, in 1843, these two men personified the differences between the Masonites and the Independents.

Since 1828, Lucas had considered himself a friend of Mason. That year, he had been made an honorary member of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society, of which Mason was then president. Lucas was highly regarded as a singing-school teacher and also well respected as a former pupil of Thomas Hastings (1784-1872), the famous music educator and hymn-tune composer (e.g., *Toplady*/with "Rock of Ages"). In the years to follow, Lucas would enjoy continued success in his field and eventually attend the musical conventions held each August in Boston. At these gatherings, he was sometimes elected one of its co-secretaries and often served on committees, activities which contributed to his admitted expectation in 1843 that he would be nominated for the presidency. When he was not, this surprise induced him to seek a reason.

Lucas learned that the nominating committee had been misinformed about his presidential aspirations. Through Masons contrivance, one of the committee members, George F. Root, had served as the conduit for presenting the false information.²¹ Knowledge of the Mason-Root conspiracy led to the resignation of the convention's newly elected president, Darius E. Jones, and to the holding of a second election for this office. In preparation, "the chairman," as reported by the convention's co-secretaries, H. W. Day and Geo. F. B. Leighton, appointed a new nominating committee.²² The unidentified "chairman" could have been the convention's

newly elected First Vice-President, A. N. Johnson, if its constitutional line of succession were followed.²³ In any case, Lucas was duly nominated and subsequently “unanimously chosen” as the convention’s second and final president.²⁴

Whether Johnson had been voted into the office of First Vice-President as a Masonite or Independent is unclear, but circumstantial evidence points to the latter. For example, even though Johnson had served on the convention’s original nominating committee,²⁵ Lucas never implicated him when writing about the political maneuvering carried on by Johnson’s closest associates—his partner Root and his former employer Mason. Moreover, Lucas would have had no doubts about the validity of Johnson’s new political stance. He had seen proof of it on the convention’s second day when a committee composed of Col. Asa Barr (a former president of the convention), A. N. Johnson, and George J. Webb unanimously recommended that the convention’s program include scheduled time for free discussion and the use of a more sophisticated musical repertoire. These recommendations had already been unsuccessfully advocated by the Independents.

While Lucas was president, Johnson served on four more committees, two pertaining to the 1843 convention (resolutions and organization) and two with responsibility for that of 1844 (arrangements and lectures). In regard to the latter set, Lucas boasted that he had taken care to select the right men; he expected the “Committee on Arrangements” to insure a separate convention and the “Committee on Lectures” to “secure the presence of Mr. [Thomas] Hastings” of New York City as a guest speaker.²⁷

The lecture committee was composed of A. N. Johnson, E. R. Johnston of Philadelphia, and H. W. Day, men drawn from the five-member arrangements committee.²⁸ As supporters of Lucas, these men had certainly been informed by him that, in years past, he had often recommended to Mason (then serving on the lecture committee) that an invitation be extended to Thomas Hastings. Hastings had never been invited, but in 1843 President Lucas knew that his hand-picked lecture committee would remedy this slight-

ing of Mason’s closest competitor.

Johnson apparently voted in the affirmative, because he believed that the presence of Hastings would significantly improve the quality of the next American Musical Convention. This was a courageous step, for Johnson also knew that it was against the wishes of the man who would again be responsible for a large portion of his income; for by October, Johnson and Mason would have completely returned to their cooperative work in the fields of church and public school music. Thus, Mason seems to have taken his loss of the control of the convention without notable argument. This was a wise decision, given that Lucas had been unanimously chosen as president, and Johnson enjoyed the prestige of being one of the few American musicians who had studied music abroad.

Post-1843 Johnson-Mason Relationship

Even though Johnson was accepted by the Independents in 1843, he still managed to maintain a viable professional relationship with Mason. By the end of the decade, however, these two men would be antagonists because of Johnson’s outspoken views on musical and educational matters, sometimes from positions which justifiably differed from those held by Mason.²⁹ Because of this rift, Johnson was ignored by Mason, later by Mason’s loyal followers, and eventually by the Mason-influenced musical press. The latter situation resulted in nearly a century of historical obscurity for Johnson.

Among Mason’s devoted coterie were his four sons, Daniel Gregory, Lowell Jr., Henry, and William, each of whom became prominent in some aspect of the music field as well as forceful advocates for their father’s career and, after his death, perpetuators of his untarnished public memory. A pertinent twentieth-century example of family concern for maintaining Mason’s positive image is the unfinished biography of Lowell Mason written by his grandson, Henry Lowell Mason.³⁰

In regard to Johnson, Henry Lowell Mason adhered to the pattern set in earlier biographical writings about his grandfather: Johnson’s existence is acknowledged only

when absolutely necessary. For example, Henry dismisses Johnson's role as Mason's chief music teacher for the Boston Public Schools by treating Johnson as though he had merely worked under Mason like any other of the music teachers. Henry slights Johnson's efforts as Mason's prime assistant in church music, as he does Johnson's role from 1844 to 1848 as lecturer (and later professor) in thorough-bass and harmony for the Boston Academy of Music's annual convention (later, institute). Moreover, Henry ignores Johnson's fame apart from Mason, as by failing to recognize Johnson as the nation's first professional, native-born theorist, or as a co-founder and editor (with brother James, Jr.³¹) of *The (Boston) Musical Gazette*³² (1846-1850), or as a successful convention leader and innovative music educator.³³ Conversely, Henry builds upon the century-long tradition of deifying his grandfather.

Henry fails to discuss the dissension which marked the 1843 American Musical Convention, thereby conveniently overlooking the Mason-Root conspiracy and the fact that this was the only convention to have a change of president. His disregard of this political ferment is a critical omission because, at the ensuing convention, this disquietude contributed to a vote to relocate the 1845 convention to New York City. While Henry could not exclude recognition of this geographical change, he could, and did, minimize the reason for it, dismissing the move as the result of "the Machiavellian intriguing and noisy claims of certain ambitious office seekers militated now and then against the effectual concentration [of the convention's members]."³⁴

Henry could have employed this biased and murky explanation—one designed to protect Lowell Mason's pristine image—to mask the political scene at the 1843 American Musical Convention. Those in attendance not only witnessed Mason's loss of control to the Independents, of whom his most visible opponent was A. N. Johnson, but also Johnson's first public step toward earning his reputation as one who stood by his musical beliefs even when they might not be to his political advantage.³⁵

Johnson's many later contributions to Ameri-

can music would receive virtually no recognition from the Mason-influenced establishment, especially those who controlled the major musical press of the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, today, with America's maturing musical society marked by a desire to learn more about its past, A. N. Johnson is increasingly becoming recognized as an important part of the nation's musical history.³⁶

This article is based on material that will appear in the writer's forthcoming book, More Than a Footnote: The Life and Musical Career of Artemas Nixon Johnson (1817-1892).

Endnotes

1. Artemas is the correct spelling, as for the name of the messenger who served Paul (Titus 3:12, KJV); not Artemus, as for Artemus Ward, a nineteenth century humorist; nor Artemis, the appellation of a Greek goddess.
2. Originally named Musical Convention, it was subsequently renamed National Musical Convention, then American Musical Convention.
3. "Musical Records for 1843," *Boston Musical Visitor* 3 (Oct. 24, 1843), p. 179-182. This article is the official report of this convention's co-secretaries, Geo. F. B. Leighton and H. W. Day.
4. [A. N. Johnson] "Boston Choirs #1: Bowdoin Street Church—Orthodox Congregational," *Boston Musical Journal* 1 (Apr. 1, 1854), p. 109.
5. This conclusion is based on James C. Johnson's reminiscences as found in his handwritten memoir, "Pictures—From the Life of Dr. Lowell Mason," prepared for the 1892 centennial celebration of Mason's birth and now located in the files of the Medfield Historical Society, Medfield, MA. Although James writes of only his own membership in the Juvenile Choir, he was undoubtedly accompanied by his older brother, Artemas.
6. *Catalogue of the Scholars and Teachers of the English High School* (Boston: n.p., [1890]), p. 9.
7. [James C. Johnson and Frank A. Johnson], "A. N. Johnson, *The Musical Messenger* 2 (Feb. 1892), p. 8.
8. [A. N. Johnson], "The Teachers' Convention," *The (Boston) Musical Gazette* 1 (Aug. 17, 1846), p. 116.
9. Because Johnson only claimed attendance at the initial Teachers' Class (1834), his name does not appear as one of the 12 persons historically listed as registrants. See Robert W. John, "Origins of the First Music Educators Convention," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 8 (Winter 1965), p. 208.
10. [A. N. Johnson], "Boston Choirs #1...", p. 109.
11. [James C. Johnson and Frank A. Johnson], p. 8.

12. George F. Root, *The Story of a Musical Life* (Cincinnati: The John Church Co., 1891), p. 4.
13. Barbara Owen, *The Organ in New England; An Account of its Use and Manufacture to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Raleigh: The Sunbury Press, 1979), p. 80.
14. "Park Street Society, 1835-1886," bound records located in the Congregational Library of the American Congregational Association, Boston, MA, p. 81.
15. For more information on the Johnson-Root relationship, see Jacklin Bolton Stopp's "A. N. Johnson, Out of Oblivion," *American Music 3* (Summer 1985), pp. [152]-170.
16. Root, p. 26.
17. Apparently Drake was also employed in Boston as a messenger for a local bank. See Boston city directories over the period 1839-1845.
18. In 1841, the convention met from 11 AM to 1 PM, possibly likewise in 1843.
19. "American Musical Convention," *Musical Visitor 2* (Oct. 12, 1841), p. 3. In this "extra" edition, the constitution committee is named as A. N. Johnson, George Hood, G. W. Lucas, Lowell Mason, and T. J. Gurney.
20. That Johnson had returned from abroad with professional priorities and understandings justifiably different from those he had held earlier is evident from some of the musical and educational outlooks he expressed in his later publications, e.g., *Instructions in Thorough Base [sic]*, 1844, *The Musical Class Book*, 1845).
21. G. W. Lucas, *Remarks on the Musical Conventions in Boston, Etc.* (Northampton: Printed for the Author, 1844), p. 11. This work has been drawn upon primarily for facts about the conventions (e.g., numbers in attendance, dates) and for information about A. N. Johnson.
22. The new nominating committee consisted of [George J.] Webb, [H. W.] Day, [E. K.] Prouty, [?] Reed, and [Lowell] Mason.
23. "Musical Convention," *Musical Visitor 1* (Sept. 21, 1840), p. [65].
24. "Musical Records for 1843," p. 180.
25. Besides Root, the original nominating committee consisted of [George J.] Webb, [A. N.] Johnson, [?] Additon, and [T. J.] Gurney.
26. "Musical Records for 1843," p. 180.
27. Lucas, p. 12.
28. The others on the arrangements committee were George J. Webb and E. K. Prouty.
29. For more information about A. N. Johnson's career, see Jacklin Bolton Stopp's "Historical Introduction To *American Church Organ Voluntaries*," which begins the 1987 facsimile edition of H. S. Cutler and A. N. Johnson's *American Church Organ Voluntaries*. This edition (Richmond, VA: The Organ Historical Society) is a reproduction of one published ca. 1869 (New York: S. T. Gordon, n.d.), in turn reprinted from an 1856 edition

(Boston: Geo. P. Reed & Co.) which was copyrighted by the latter publisher. When this book first appeared in 1852, however, it was copyrighted and published by A. N. Johnson.

30. Henry Lowell Mason, "Lowell Mason, His Life and Work, 1792-1872," an unfinished typescript in the holdings of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 1957 (the year of Henry's death).


31. Then known professionally by his birth name of James Johnson, Jr. (1820-1847), he later used the name J. C. Johnson (1847-ca. 1870), and lastly James C. Johnson.

32. This periodical was copyrighted and introduced as *The Musical Gazette*. In later volumes, *The Boston Musical Gazette* was erratically used between the title and caption pages and the running title, sometimes for a full issue and sometimes in an issue which also employed the paper's original title. Bibliographers and historians have chosen to identify this paper as *The Boston Musical Gazette* (1846-1850). However, in writing about the Johnson brothers, use of this second title creates confusion because *Boston Musical Gazette* was also the name of a paper edited in 1838-1839 by Bartholomew Brown. Thus, to distinguish this earlier publication from that of the Johnson brothers, I have arbitrarily employed the composite title of *The (Boston) Musical Gazette*.

33. A major step in the restoration of Artemas Nixon Johnson as a major nineteenth-century musical figure is the entry prepared by this writer in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (1986).

34. Henry Lowell Mason, p. 385.

35. J. H. Rosecrans, "Recollections of A. N. Johnson," *The Musical Messenger 2* (Feb. 1892), p. 9.

36. For example, in Daniel Kingman's *American Music, A Panorama*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), a portion of Chapter 15, Laying the Foundation, is headed "Mason, Johnson, and Root: Three Pioneer Believers in the Place of Music in Education," pp. 415-17. 

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