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Jeanne Bilger Gross: *Benjamin Rus-
sel Hanby, Ohio Composer-Educator,
1833-1867: His Contributions to Early
Music Education*

PhD, The Ohio State University, 1987
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Abstract*

The study documented Hanby as an unrecognized pioneer educator, a multi-talented musician who helped spread music education to the masses.

During his brief life-span of only 33 years, Hanby wrote 79 songs, including "Darling Nelly Gray" and "Up on the Housetop." He became famous for his popular sociopolitical music and founded three singing schools. He wrote a music series, singing school books, and materials integrating academic work and music. He used original educational and teaching theories and innovative techniques. The music of Hanby helped to "educate the masses," a goal of early music education, as his songs and series spread throughout the United States.

The music of Hanby was influenced by: (a) his levels of maturity and training, (b) his immediate educational and teaching needs, and (c) his contemporary music scene. A chronology documents Hanby's life revealing his parallel, although unrecognized, involvement with teaching and music education. An annotated study was made of all known music of Hanby, and 79 songs were documented. Lists of Hanby's works were compiled, revealing four distinct groups of music traced from original publications: (a) 11 pieces of sheet music, (b) a song book series of six quarterlies, and (c) two song volumes, one with four editions and the other with three.

The final 2 years of Hanby's life were spent at a prestigious Chicago music publishing firm where his professional career culminated in a combination of teaching, composing, and editing children's works, in addition to serving as a traveling representative for the publishing firm.

*Author's Abstract Adapted

Review

Benjamin Russel Hanby (1833-1867) was a composer, school teacher, singing school master, editor, fundraiser, and salesman who lived most of his life in Ohio. The son of a bishop of the United Brethren Church who assisted with the runaway slave "Underground Railroad," Hanby grew up in a time of great political, moral, and economic change. As a youth, Hanby attended singing schools, and at age 16, he entered Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio. He attended college for the next several years, during which time he began to write songs for his students and for publication, founded and directed a singing school, and studied the piano.

After graduating from Otterbein in 1858 at age 24, he married and worked as an "endowment agent" for the university. Subsequently, he served as principal of a private academy, worked for the John Church Publishing Company in Cincinnati, and served as minister for several

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churches. During this period, he founded two more singing schools and continued to compose songs.

In 1865, at age 31, Hanby became Children's Music Editor for the well known Chicago publishing firm of Root & Cady. From then until his death at age 33, he served in several capacities at Root & Cady and continued to compose popular songs.

Hanby was and remains best known for his songs, two of the most popular of which are "Darling Nelly Gray" and "Up on the Housetop." Jeanne Bilger Gross's dissertation attributes 79 songs to Hanby, 11 more than had been attributed to him by previous scholars.

This dissertation chronicles selected accomplishments of an interesting 19th-century composer and music educator. The author attempted to evaluate Benjamin Hanby's musical and pedagogical contributions in the context of the political, economic, social, and religious environment in which he lived, and for the most part, she succeeded. Gross's insights about Hanby's pragmatic approach toward composition and other matters show her concern for the period in which Hanby lived. For example, she addressed the issue of musical quality in a straightforward manner, concluding that Hanby's "popular songs were of the calibre of his day. . ." (p. 117). Her discussions on the "latitude and liberties taken by compilers and editors of song books in that day" (p. 110) are revealing as well, and again show the author's concern for historical context. In addition, Gross provided a useful analysis of the effects of the great Chicago fire on the subsequent distribution of Hanby's music.

The author also attempted to relate Hanby's musical activities to certain occurrences and people in the music education profession of his day, such as singing schools, musical conventions, certain school music textbook series, and the work of Lowell Mason, Luther Whiting Mason, and others. Unfortunately, the author was less successful here. Some of her conclusions betray an incomplete understanding of the events and persons involved in music education. For example, she defined 19th-century normal schools as "college level classes and seminars" and a music convention as a "large gathering of teachers or leaders who participated in learning new techniques and music, especially applicable in higher education" (p. xi). Similarly, she provided a simplistic description of "Pestalozzian techniques" as "learning by experiencing" (p. 68). Furthermore, she stated that Hanby "used the new shaped [*sic*] notes" (p. 145), which were not new at all during his lifetime. On the other hand, Gross made some sound speculations about the relationship between Hanby and George F. Root based on facts known about the lives of both men.

Gross's research on Hanby's songs represents her best efforts. Her search for documentary evidence about those songs was thorough, and the reasoning upon which her decisions were based is sound. In many cases, she verified previously published information about the music and, in a few

cases, was able to correct of the songs themselves. series by Hanby entitled (of some of his other wor research on Hanby's mus

Unfortunately, othe Some of the author's ge supporting documentatic "The music of Hanby wa educational, sociological, more, the author provide secondary sources, for su been written earlier tha occasions, Gross charact into music, teaching, an search for causation, not . . . by his expert use of th first to do this.)" (p. 24 Foster and other early m Again, sources should ha

The dissertation suf technique. Most informa ces, and the author ten sources, resulting in que For example, a speech gi of the main sources of i cases, sources of informa: sources were neither 1 source(s) of information other than vague referen: the author mentioned wh State University and Ha use it, and she apparently on music publishing in Gross did cite some inte: Blendon Township (Ohi for information on Han confirmed data via indej sources, both necessary mary music sources whe

The most serious fla editing. Problems includ nouns, mixed tenses wit sentence construction, ty

cases, was able to correct earlier mistakes. She also found errors in some of the songs themselves. Perhaps most importantly, she discovered a song series by Hanby entitled *Our Song Birds Series*, as well as multiple editions of some of his other works: *Chapel Gems* and *The Forest Choir*. Gross's research on Hanby's music constitutes the heart of her dissertation.

Unfortunately, other aspects of the dissertation are less positive. Some of the author's generalizations were presented without adequate supporting documentation. There are unsupported statements, such as, "The music of Hanby was found to have been strongly influenced by the educational, sociological, and political climate of his era" (p. 18). Furthermore, the author provided no evidence, other than previously published secondary sources, for such statements as "The song was known to have been written earlier than its use in *The Robin*" (p. 76). On numerous occasions, Gross characterized Hanby as having been "propelled by fate" into music, teaching, and other activities, whereas historians generally search for causation, not fate. She also stated that "Hanby gained his fame . . . by his expert use of the Negro dialect in his compositions. (He was the first to do this.)" (p. 249). This statement ignores the fact that Steven Foster and other early minstrel composers used the dialect much earlier. Again, sources should have been cited or arguments explained more fully.

The dissertation suffers in other ways from substandard scholarly technique. Most information presented was drawn from secondary sources, and the author tended to take an uncritical stance toward those sources, resulting in questionable internal criticism for the dissertation. For example, a speech given to a Chicago civic club in 1967 served as one of the main sources of information for the study. In addition, in many cases, sources of information were not cited, and discrepancies between sources were neither pointed out nor explained. For example, the source(s) of information on Hanby's college experiences were not cited, other than vague references to the "college's records" (p. 36). Curiously, the author mentioned what is apparently relevant material from The Ohio State University and Harvard University libraries, but did not choose to use it, and she apparently failed to draw upon a valuable secondary source on music publishing in Chicago (Thorson, 1961). On the other hand, Gross did cite some interesting and valuable primary sources, such as the Blendon Township (Ohio) Treasurer's Record, dated September 13, 1856, for information on Hanby's teaching salary. In other cases, the author confirmed data via independent sources and discussed the credibility of sources, both necessary techniques of historiography, and she used primary music sources when they were readily available.

The most serious flaws in this dissertation resulted from inadequate editing. Problems include tortured grammar, unclear antecedents of pronouns, mixed tenses within paragraphs, run-on and otherwise awkward sentence construction, typographical errors, use of parentheses instead of

