'COME, ALL MY DEAR BRETHREN, AND HELP ME TO SING': DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION AS FOUNDATIONS FOR THE CHORAL PERFORMANCE OF SACRED HARP MUSIC

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Abstract

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Mounting interest in folk and world music has led to increased choral performance of Sacred Harp, or shape note, repertoire. Sacred Harp is a communal musical practice that originated in the singing schools of colonial New England and is active today, with hundreds of singing chapters across the United States and several burgeoning international chapters. Participants do not rehearse or perform, and there is no conductor. Community and collective musicmaking are the sole purposes of Sacred Harp singing.

Lack of awareness in the choral community regarding Sacred Harp and its widespread accessibility for participatory learning has perpetuated a theoretical, distanced choral approach to Sacred Harp. Most choral conductors interpret this music abstractly, even when authentic performances are desired. Choral scholarship on Sacred Harp music is sparse, and largely emphasizes the reproduction of Sacred Harp musical style rather than culturally sensitive

representation of a living community. The absence of meaningful discussion in the choral community regarding the ritual and cultural aspects of Sacred Harp leads to performances that oftentimes merely imitate or entertain, failing to draw public attention to the active Sacred Harp community.

This study presents a new perspective for the choral performance of Sacred Harp that places participation at the foreground and advocates for greater dialogue between the choral and Sacred Harp communities as a basis for all choral interpretations. The current state, collective identity and values of the Sacred Harp community are examined, with respect for its rich ongoing legacy highlighted. The privileges and responsibilities placed upon choral conductors in their selection of repertoire are discussed and parallels drawn to other frequently-performed participatory choral music. Finally, detailed recommendations for choral performance of Sacred Harp music are offered.

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Acknowledgements

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To my husband, Andrew, and my parents, Maggie and Ginny, I am eternally grateful. Thank you for cheering me on, for reading countless revisions, and for your steadfast offerings of love, humor, patience and perspective. You help me be my best.

I will always be thankful to the Pacific Northwest Sacred Harp Singers for receiving this novice Sacred Harp singer so warmly. You confirmed, through our interactions, all I had read in my research about how hospitable this community is, and how powerful the musicmaking can be. My contact with the Sacred Harp community deepened and complexified my research in ways I could not have anticipated, making the writing of this dissertation more personal, urgent and meaningful as I moved through the process. Thank you for welcoming me into your community.

Dedication

This paper is lovingly dedicated to my husband, Andrew,

and to my parents, Maggie and Ginny.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Shape note singing, also referred to as Sacred Harp,[1] is an active American communal singing tradition that originated in the singing schools of eighteenth-century British colonists. Singing schools began as church leaders' answer to musical illiteracy in colonial churches; early American singing school students learned the rudiments of singing in harmony and reading music using the shape note system. The practice of singing schools began in New England and traveled south with itinerant singing masters, where it took root. Singing schools became a pathway for students to gain prestigious positions in local church choirs. A vast shape note repertoire emerged for use both in singing schools and in church services, and these schools soon became central in communities – a place where the academic, musical, liturgical, and social aspects of colonial life intersected.

The lively communal practice of shape note singing was forever altered with the arrival of the Better Music Movement. Touting European standards of theory and harmony and a more polished, cosmopolitan approach to musicmaking, leaders in the Better Music Movement sought to elevate music education and performance. Its ideals infiltrated music education and worship music and superseded shape note singing as the norm. Yet resolute shape note singers were determined to keep the beloved practice going and adapted it as was necessary. As shape note singing transitioned out of its former, central position in public musical life, it became a more personalized social tradition, embedded in the legacies of particular families and locations. Shape

[1] The terms "Sacred Harp" and "shape note singing" have become synonymous today. The term "sacred harp" refers to the human singing voice. For the purposes of this paper, "Sacred Harp" denotes the shape note singing community as a whole, whereas italicized, *The Sacred Harp* refers to the specific tunebook by that title.

note singing, originally an educational implement, thus became a meaningful social practice anchored in community heritage and shared experience.

Now over two centuries old, this singing community is still active and has expanded far beyond its roots in the American South to include singing chapters across the United States and several abroad. Its participants do not rehearse or perform, and they have no singular leader; they gather for musicmaking and community alone. The current Sacred Harp community is constantly redefining itself musically and organizationally as it expands. Certain mediating organizations, including the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association and the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, have been established to define, document and disseminate the practice. Musical details and ritual elements are continually discussed in online forums, and Sacred Harp ritual procedures are absorbed by newcomers via experiential learning. Concepts of collective identity and values are passed down from generation to generation, and from established singing communities to burgeoning singing communities.

Growth of interest in folk music in general, and in American folk traditions in particular, has drawn attention to the practice of shape note singing. Admired for its novelty and unique singing style, Sacred Harp music is increasingly being programmed by choral conductors for performance in conventional concert settings. Its tunes are used both in their original form and in choral arrangements. The majority of choirs perform this music without direct involvement or consultation with the Sacred Harp community, and most choral interpretations of Sacred Harp singing treat the tradition as if it were essentially historical, aiming to construct authentic reproductions of Sacred Harp singing style.

Lack of awareness and mischaracterization of the Sacred Harp community, its music and associated practices have encouraged divisions between the Sacred Harp and choral

communities. The absence of dialogue here is concerning, given the mounting popularity of this repertoire for choral performance on the one hand, and the vitality of Sacred Harp singing, on the other. Unfortunately, the broader choral community's unawareness or casual dismissal of the active Sacred Harp community leads to choral performances which claim to seek cultural authenticity, yet yield meager imitation.

Need for the Study

The choral community's prevailing response to Sacred Harp music in recent years has been to dismiss it altogether, likely out of unfamiliarity or assumed inaccessibility or, alternately, to promote this music as an obscure, historical repertoire. Yet Sacred Harp singing is much more than a repertoire, and its accompanying rituals and communal values cannot be encompassed or fully understood by abstract interpretation of its printed scores. The fundamental ritual actions that accompany Sacred Harp singing – as well as the undeniable detail that Sacred Harp is a nonperformance music – mean that any choral performance of this music necessitates significant modification of the tradition from its associated cultural practices.

Choral scholars have addressed the choral performance of Sacred Harp through a musicological lens, offering detailed recommendations for creating convincing stylistic replications. Nevertheless, this literature has not sufficiently addressed a.) the cultural or social aspects of the practice, which are deeply interconnected with its musical aspects, nor b.) the presence of an active Sacred Harp community and the need for interaction as a basis for the study and performance of this music.

Purpose of the Study

This study will outline a way to preserve the essential elements of Sacred Harp singing in choral performance while demonstrating genuine respect for its rich ongoing legacy. It will encourage conductors to *interact with,* rather than merely *imitate,* this vibrant singing community, and will advocate for improved dialogue between the choral and Sacred Harp communities as a basis for all choral interpretations.

Chapter Two presents a detailed survey of extant literature on this topic, organized into the broad categories of *historical surveys, racial considerations, ethnographies, primary sources* and finally, *choral perspectives.* This literature review illustrates the need for the study at hand.

Chapter Three is thorough discussion of the history, musical and cultural components, and current state of Sacred Harp singing. It offers a comprehensive survey of the development of the practice, its associated tunebooks, musical style, customs and evolution into a modern community grounded in the shared values of *hospitality* and *tradition.* The procedures of modern singings[2] are described, and issues of authenticity, tradition-mediation and Southern authority are explored. Finally, Chapter Three delves into the current state of Sacred Harp singing, explaining the influence of folk revivalism upon the tradition's expansion and highlighting recent milestones in the community, including its inclusion in the 2003 film *Cold Mountain,* the 2003 initiation of Camp Fasola, the 2006 documentary *Awake My Soul,* and many newly-developed international chapters.

Chapter Four situates the existence of an ongoing Sacred Harp community as foundational to choral performances of this music. Reasons for repertoire selection are explored,

[2] "Singing," used as a noun, denotes a musical gathering in which shape note singing, with its associated rituals, occurs.

and an appeal is made for conductors to recognize their profound privileges and responsibilities as cultural advocates and music educators. Participatory music is defined in comparison to performance music, and the complexities of performing participatory music are analyzed, with the concert performance of liturgical music and of African-American spirituals offered as case studies.

Chapter Five extends the previous chapter's discussion of participatory music, placing Sacred Harp squarely in this category. This chapter introduces Rasmussen's distinctions between ethnomusicological and musicological approaches as foundational to choral interpretation of Sacred Harp.[3] It also examines Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody's 'person-focused' approach as another constructive framework.[4] Above all, this chapter promotes participation as the ideal means for learning Sacred Harp musical and cultural indicators.

Chapter Six presents practical recommendations for the choral performance of Sacred Harp. Though they are out of the ordinary, accounts of several recent performances by Sacred Harp singers are given; it is suggested that conductors use recent performances by Sacred Harp singers as models for their own decisions. A wide array of performance considerations are discussed and recommendations are offered. Matters discussed include but are not limited to: the use of choral arrangements versus original tunebooks; the assignment of (often fluctuating) vocal parts; audience participation; singer configuration; and song leading versus conducting.

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[3] Anne K. Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism," *American Music* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 296-309.

[4] Andreas Lehmann, John Sloboda, and Robert Woody, *Psychology for Musicians: Understanding and Acquiring the Skills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Chapter Seven summarizes and condenses previous discussion and suggests several intriguing avenues for further research in the rich area of Sacred Harp singing.

Scope and Limitations

This study will examine the choral performance of Sacred Harp music through a new lens, promoting interaction and dialogue between the choral and Sacred Harp communities as a means of building greater understanding of this concurrent repertoire and ritual.

It is not the aim of this paper to advocate wholly against the programming of nonperformance music such as Sacred Harp; it is acknowledged that this commonplace in the choral community, and the practice is not disputed. The section entitled "Using Existing Models" in Chapter Four purposely explores the use of nonperformance – or participatory – music in choral performance.[5] Though research regarding the relationships between shape note singing and the development of the African-American spiritual is needed, thorough discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper. Finally, analysis of the complexities of Sacred Harp vocal style and their implications for vocal pedagogy are needed, yet are outside the realm of this study.

This dissertation will address the diverse challenges of programming Sacred Harp music for performance given its unique ritual and cultural components, and will argue for its treatment as a continuous community, rich with meaning and custom, rather than as a solely historical repertoire. The following discussion attempts to illustrate a thoughtful framework for future choral interpretations of Sacred Harp, grounded in greater engagement with both Sacred Harp music and culture.

[5] See page 79.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A wide variety of resources are available to those wishing to learn about Sacred Harp singing, authored both by those within and without the community. Several writers address the origins of the practice, detailing its development in British colonial singing schools. Scholars have examined the creation and proliferation of shape note tunebooks, their many editions, their lyricists and composers. Ethnographers have spent years traveling and singing, conceivably *becoming* Sacred Harp singers, in order to describe the abundant and layered cultural aspects of Sacred Harp. The Sacred Harp community has also produced its own written record that can be drawn upon. Finally, choral scholars have attempted to describe and codify performance practices. Current literature falls into the broad categories of *historical surveys, racial considerations, ethnography, primary sources,* and *choral interpretations.*

Historical Surveys

Authors have outlined the background, musical elements and development of the Sacred Harp singing community. Buell Cobb explores the rich history of the tunebook, illustrated with forty-one songs from the publication.[6] His book is a key resource, analyzing musical elements and offering up portraits of practicing singers. John Bealle[7] orients his discussion of Sacred Harp singing alongside key events in American musical history, from colonial times through the post-

[6] Buell E. Cobb, *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978).

[7] John Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1997).

World War II folksong revival. He points to the endurance of the Sacred Harp tradition in parallel to other historic musical movements.

Campbell details the internal debate amongst the shape note community between 1880 and 1920, which paralleled cultural shifts in the New South at that time. He argues that the "transition from an antebellum repertoire…to a repertoire heavily influenced by 19th-century urban revivals and parlor music, did not occur quietly or seamlessly."[8]

Additionally, Duncan Vinson[9] discusses the religious rooting of the earliest *Sacred Harp* tunebook, which found success partly because of its connection to Southern Protestant religious revival and community conventions. He notes changes between the 1911 *Original Sacred Harp* and the 1936 Denson Revision, which removed much of the original, religiously fervent material. This practice of excluding overt religious dictates from tunebooks has continued with more recent editions; Vinson argues that this trend has allowed the Sacred Harp community to more effectively welcome members from a variety of backgrounds.

Norton describes the decline of Northeastern singing schools, which happened as colonial spaces became urbanized and Europe's more polished sacred music came into popularity.[10] At this time, Sacred Harp music traveled South. Norton blends her research on Mercer's *1810 Cluster of Spiritual Songs* and her study of the oral and written folk tradition to examine in depth the Southern transit of American folk hymnody via shape note singing.

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[8] Gavin James Campbell, "'Old Can Be Used Instead of New': Shape-Note Singing and the Crisis of Modernity in the New South, 1880-1920," *Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 436 (Spring 1997), 184.

[9] Duncan Vinson, "'As Far from Secular, Operatic, Rag-Time and Jig Melodies as is Possible': Religion and the Resurgence of Interest in the Sacred Harp, 1895-1911." *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 474 (Autumn 2006).

[10] Kay Norton, "Who Lost the South?" *American Music* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2003).

Looking at the link between the church and singing schools, Blair Martin explores the use of the shape note system within the Church of God, claiming that the decline of singing schools had a negative effect particularly upon the musical skills of those congregations.[11] Martin explains that from within the Church of God, many members recognize the decline in musical skills as connected the loss of singing schools, and wish for a revival of music instruction accessible to all age levels.

Some have connected Sacred Harp singing to other Southern singing practices, likening it to the folk music of Appalachia. Ostendorf[12] discusses the rich history of orally-transmitted 'mountain' music and those who first created written record of it. With special attention given to 'song catchers' such as Cecil Sharp and Emma Bell Miles, she notes that racial and ethnic biases undoubtedly played a part in early writers' decisions about what music to include. Ostendorf asserts that the earliest written records of Appalachian folk tunes lent vital legitimacy and cultural pride to American musical heritage as a whole.

Recent scholarship has provided valuable resources that begin to connect Sacred Harp history with its current practice. The 2007 documentary *Awake My Soul*[13] details the rich history of Sacred Harp singing and highlights several notable Southern Sacred Harp singers, including Hugh McGraw, the former head of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company. The documentary

[11] Blair L. Martin, "The Influence and Function of Shape Notes and Singing Schools in the Twentieth Century: An Historical Study of the Church of God," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 21, no.1 (October 1999).

[12] Ann Ostendorf, "Song Catchers, Ballad Makers, and New Social Historians: The Historiography of Appalachian Music." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2004).

[13] Hugh McGraw and Raymond Hamrick, *Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp,* DVD, directed by Matt Hinton and Erica Hinton (Atlanta, Georgia: Awake Productions, 2007).

features performances, interviews with singers, and historical information. *Awake* was strongly endorsed by the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*.[14]

Richard Hulan and David Steel's 2010 book[15] *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* is one of the most current, comprehensive volumes on Sacred Harp history. It focuses on the regional culture that birthed the Sacred Harp tradition, offering detailed sketches of selected poets and composers and outlining the sources of all Sacred Harp tunes and texts from 1844 to 1991. Hulan and Steel also discuss textual influences on the music.

Contemporary scholars coming from the perspective of music theory and education have maintained curiosity in this tradition's performance practices and use of shape notes as an instructional tool. Daniel Taddie[16] compares Sacred Harp with chant theory and practice, noting parallel inconsistencies between written musical records and practice. Taddie's work discusses the theoretical elements of Sacred Harp music, referencing the use of orally-transmitted ornamentation and of modal, pentatonic and hexatonic scales. He includes several tables listing Mixolydian and Dorian tunes in selected tunebooks. Respectively, Davenport examines shape note singing as an educational method, comparing it with selected instructional sight-singing tools from the late twentieth century.[17]

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[14] Craig Resta, "Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp." *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 32, no. 1 (October 2010).

[15] David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[16] Daniel Taddie, "Solmization, Scale, and Key in Nineteenth-Century Four-Shape Tunebooks: Theory and Practice." *American Music* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1996).

[17] Linda G. Davenport, "American Instruction in Sight-Singing: Then and Now." *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 13, no. 2 (July 1992).

Racial Considerations

Sacred Harp originated in racially-segregated colonies where slavery was still the norm[18], and consequently took on the society's mores. It began as a practice solely among whites, yet post-abolition African Americans adopted the shape note system and developed their own rituals around it, including a tunebook still partially in use today – Judge Jackson's 1934 *Colored Sacred Harp*.[19] Whereas delving deeply into the links between African-American spirituals, gospel music and Sacred Harp is beyond the scope of this paper, only a few key resources require mentioning.

Willett's *In the Spirit*[20] includes several essays on shape note singing, bluegrass gospel music, and *a capella* gospel quartets. Essays discuss key figures and locations in African-American shape note singing. Smith[21] reviews three recordings of largely African-American Sacred Harp singings, pointing to the exclusion of white singers' names in the albums' liner notes. He claims that this omission inaccurately suggests a clear-cut racial divide; rather, black singers used *The Colored Sacred Harp* alongside other editions. In addition, white singers increasingly have been part of African-American Sacred Harp singings, so that what originated as a parallel but distinct singing practice has become a more racially integrated tradition in recent years. According to Smith, the most recent known official *Colored Sacred Harp* singing was held in 2013.

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[18] Slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865.

[19] Judge Jackson, *The Colored Sacred Harp, 3rd Revised Edition,* ed. H.J. Jackson (Ozark, AL: H.J. Jackson, 1992).

[20] E. Henry Willett, *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions* (Montgomery, Al.: Black Belt Press for the Alabama Folklife Association,1995).

[21] Jonathon M. Smith, "The Colored Sacred Harp." *Ethnomusicology* 59, no. 3 (2015).

Ethnographies

Writings about the community and ritual elements of Sacred Harp unavoidably mention musical aspects as well, given that these facets of Sacred Harp are intricately connected. As an example, Kiri Miller's 2004 article in *American Music*[22] tackles the complex intersection of oral and written tradition in Sacred Harp singing. Though distinctive regional traits are established through tacit musical and social practices (supporting the argument that the tradition is an oral one), Miller argues that the significance of the tradition's written elements (including the recognition of composers, schisms based on publication rights and editorial choices, etc.) should not be callously dismissed.

Certain authors have investigated the divergent social identities that coexist in the contemporary Sacred Harp community. Clawson's *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*[23] offers depictions of several Sacred Harp groups and describes the ways in which they strive to maintain community despite members' often significant cultural, religious and political dissimilarities.

Both Miller and Clawson address the unanticipated concerns initiated by Sacred Harp's steady growth. In a book entitled *Traveling Home* (named after a popular nineteenth-century shape note songbook), Miller asserts that, amongst internet forums and the growing practice of sharing singer-produced recordings, the nature of cultural transmission is changing, and the conversation about what authenticity means for this art form is in flux. *Traveling Home*

[22] Kiri Miller, "'First Sing the Notes': Oral and Written Traditions in Sacred Harp Transmission." *American Music* 22, no.4 (Winter 2004).

[23] Laura Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!: Community, Spirituality, and Tradition Among Sacred Harp Singers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

represents a deepening of Miller's ethnographic research and fieldwork in the Sacred Harp community.[24]

Clawson also writes from her experiences doing fieldwork, which led her to visit singing chapters in Alabama, Georgia, Chicago, and Minneapolis, among others. She is the only extant author who describes firsthand the experience of Sacred Harp singers' participation in the 2003 Miramax film *Cold Mountain*[25] and subsequent performances. The research of Clawson and Miller is unique in that both authors address the contemporary challenges of the ongoing Sacred Harp tradition in light of technological advances.

In a similar vein, Heider and Warner examine the disparate social identities of Sacred Harp singers in an article for the journal *Sociology of Religion.* They apply Collins' *interaction ritual theory*, which claims that, "instead of merely expressing social solidarity, physically intense rituals create it." [26] The authors utilize recent ethnographic literature and notes from their own experience of participating to describe Sacred Harp ritual. Heider and Warner explain the theory that bodies 'in sync' naturally form deeper connections, bypassing divisive categories through shared physical experience – thus the use of gesture as a connective force in Sacred Harp singing is significant. They claim that the ritual "produces solidarity in the absence of, or prior to, ideological consensus" – a strong claim given the many cultural and social differences amongst contemporary Sacred Harp singers.

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[24] Kiri Miller, *Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[25] *Cold Mountain*, dir. Anthony Minghella (Miramax Films, 2003).

[26] Anne Heider and Stephen Warner, "Bodies in Sync: Interaction Ritual Theory Applied to Sacred Harp Singing," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no.1 (Spring 2010), 76.

An extraordinary personal perspective is offered in Webb's *Legacy of the Sacred Harp*, which traces the author's family history back to Civil War times.[27] The Dumas family line, made up of composers and singers of original Sacred Harp music, is illuminated through Webb's original research. This source offers a helpful look into one Southern family's interaction with Sacred Harp music and their cultural and historical location.

Primary Sources

Original documentation of Sacred Harp includes materials provided by the Sacred Harp community, which includes recent recordings, a feature film appearance, a documentary, and associated media interviews. The homepage of the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association[28] is a standard resource for learning about the tradition and locating local singings. Recordings, links to recent press and essays, and a guide for beginners are included. Since 2003, the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association has hosted Camp Fasola,[29] a five-day summer music camp for both children and adults; the camp has an active website with fascinating testimonials from singers from around the world.

The website of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company is another useful resource. Its biannual online newsletter[30] contains pertinent interviews, historical portraits, articles and information about upcoming singing conventions. This organization additionally maintains the

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[27] Chloe Webb, *The Legacy of the Sacred Harp* (Fort Worth, Texas: TCU Press, 2010).

[28] "Welcome," Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association Welcome Page, last modified -- (copyright 1995-2015), accessed November 13, 2016, http://fasola.org/.

[29] "Camp Fasola," Camp Fasola, accessed March 10, 2017, http://campfasola.org/.

[30] "Introducing Vol. 5, no. 1 of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter," Sacred Harp Publishing Company, accessed November 12, 2016, http://originalsacredharp.com/newsletter/.

Sacred Harp Museum in Carrollton, Georgia, built on land donated by the Denneys, an important family in the Georgia Sacred Harp community. The online extension of the museum[31] offers recordings, images, and documents telling the story of the June 1980 first National Sacred Harp Singing Convention, held in Birmingham, Alabama. Interviews with prominent Southern singers, scans of periodical clippings, back-issues of the National Sacred Harp Newsletter, and digitized, searchable editions of tunebooks are included.

Choral Perspectives

Interest in folk music and early American music has grown in recent years, with choral arrangements being made and discussions of performance practice gaining footing at the national level.[32] Sacred Harp has followed this trend, with writings, recordings and arrangements increasing in number.

Though passing awareness of Sacred Harp music is widespread in the choral community, choral writers have largely avoided it as a topic. The theses and dissertations of graduate choral scholars comprise the largest body of recent literature on Sacred Harp choral performance; no books have yet been published on the topic of choral performance of Sacred Harp. Most writers from the choral community who have ventured into this uncharted territory have done so by *describing* the music, endeavoring to create guides for performance practice that would enable choirs to replicate the aural experience of Sacred Harp singing. Several advocate for this music

[31] "Sacred Harp Museum," Sacred Harp Publishing Company, accessed November 13, 2016, http://originalsacredharp.com/museum/.

[32] Amy Kotsonis, "Appalachian Folk Songs: High Lonesome Mountain Voice" (presentation at American Choral Directors Association National Conference, Minneapolis, MN, March 8-11, 2017).

be programmed as a valuable repertoire, rich with educational tools, including sight-reading and development of leadership skills and vocal confidence. The analysis that follows will address choral writings about Sacred Harp chronologically.

The earliest written attempt to mediate choral performance of Sacred Harp music is found in Richard Stanislaw's 1976 doctoral dissertation[33] and 1978[34] *Choral Journal* articles on the topic. The former, "Choral Performance Practice in the Four-Shape Literature of American Singing Schools," is an introduction to the history and fundamentals of shape note music. Stanislaw encourages the use of shape note music in choral settings, and offers a rapid survey of suggestions pertaining to part assignments, tone, tempo, transposition, and ornamentation. There is no mention here of the living singing community, which was indeed intact in the Southern United States at the time. Rather, the author speaks of this music as historic, calling it "charming, authentic folk music…the rough expression of rural folk of the period."[35] Stanislaw's successive 1978 article, "The Part Assignments in Nineteenth Century Four Shape Tune Books," again does not mention the singing community, but is a detailed discussion of how to assign singers to vocal sections in shape note music.

Baker's 2003 master's thesis examines the choral performance of Sacred Harp, asking "what performance practices can the trained choir apply to approximate a traditional Sacred Harp

[33] Richard Stanislaw, "Choral Performance Practice in the Four-Shape Literature of American Frontier Singing Schools" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1976).

[34] Richard Stanislaw, "Part Assignments in Nineteenth Century Four Shape Tune Books," *Choral Journal* 18, no. 6 (February 1978).

[35] Stanislaw, "Choral Performance Practice," iii.

sound?"[36] She offers a detailed history tracing Sacred Harp singing from early colonial churches. To her credit, Baker does mention that attending a singing would be helpful; nonetheless, this is not a major point in her argument.

Westerbeck's 2005 doctoral dissertation also discusses and, arguably advocates for, the choral performance of Sacred Harp. She claims that programming this music can help singers develop leadership skills (by taking turns leading from within the hollow square) and vocal confidence (due to the boisterous, assertive singing style needed). Like Baker, Westerbeck concedes that Sacred Harp is a non-performance, participatory music, briefly mentioning that the most effective means for choral conductors to gain understanding into authentic style is to attend a singing; yet she contradicts herself by stating that participation in Sacred Harp "does not require regular attendance at singings."[37]

Most concerning is Westerbeck's discussion of the choral interpretation of Sacred Harp, in which her stance is difficult to pin down. She alternates between justifying choral interpretations, and promoting interaction with Sacred Harp singers:

> It can be argued that one of music's greatest characteristics is that the printed page can be interpreted in various ways and each of them has the potential to be valid and enjoyable. The question may be whether musicians should concern themselves with any attempt at a historical, authentic, performance practice approach. In fact, it may not be absolutely necessary to demand an accurate recreation of this music in order to produce a rewarding performance. There are some very good recordings of groups performing this music in a 'clean,' 'polished,' 'choral' manner. However, the Sacred Harp sound and tradition is so unlike other group singing traditions…Therefore, it is worthwhile to take advantage of the continuing living tradition of Sacred Harp singing...[38]

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[36] Teresa Baker, "The Sacred Harp in a Choral Setting" (Master's thesis, San Jose State University, 2003), 2.

[37] Jenelle Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice: A Bridge to Choral Performance" (DMA diss., University of Southern California, 2005), 59.

[38] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 119.

Unfortunately, by taking such a vague position, Westerbeck does not make clear whether she approves of choral interpretations of Sacred Harp.

Next, two 2006 articles in *The Choral Journal* encourage the programming of this music for choral performance. First, Lawrence Burnett's article, "Ethnic & Multicultural Choirs Homegrown: Programming Ideas and Study Resources for Ethnic and Cultural Music Traditions of the United States,"[39] briefly addresses three different American music traditions, placing Sacred Harp singing alongside indigenous American music and African-American spirituals. He calls for choral conductors to "consider programming a work…albeit contrary to the tradition of participation versus performance."[40] Unfortunately, this brief remark is as far as Burnett goes in discussing the participatory nature of Sacred Harp. He specifically recommends one of Alice Parker's arrangements, "And Sing Eternally: New England Hymnody."

Nagoski and Gregoryk, authors of the *Choral Journal* article "Mode and Method: A Choral Conductors' Guide to Concert Performance Practices of Sacred Harp," provide the most accurate and complete representation of Sacred Harp existing in choral literature. They note that at the time of publication, only three previous attempts had been made by choral scholars to directly address this issue[41] and acknowledge that "all the features that make shape-note singing so attractive also make it difficult to reproduce in performance."[42] In their research, Nagoski and

[39] Lawrence Burnett, "Ethnic & Multicultural Choirs: Homegrown: Programming Ideas and Study Resources for Ethnic and Cultural Music Traditions of the United States; Part One: The Music of Native Americans, the Shape-note Tradition, and African-American Spirituals," *Choral Journal* 46, no.10 (April 2006).

[40] Burnett, "Ethnic & Multicultural Choirs," 54.

[41] Amelia Nagoski and Joan Gregoryk, "Mode and Method: A Choral Conductors' Guide to Concert Performance Practices of Sacred Harp," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 4 (October 2006), 42.

[42] Nagoski and Gregoryk, "Mode and Method," 38.

Gregoryk engaged in email exchanges with established Southern Sacred Harp singers. Though no longer up-to-date given the recent growth and increased accessibility of singing chapters, this article does a better job than others of balancing the concerns of choral conductors with the complexities of Sacred Harp.

In summary, few choral writers recommend direct interaction with the living Sacred Harp community as a means of learning musical style, and none offer thorough examination of how to link sound, community and ritual in choral performance of Sacred Harp in a way that honors its vibrant community of singers. Missing from recent choral writing is a depth of recognition of Sacred Harp as a ritual and a community, rather than a mere repertoire. Such writings perpetuate misinformed cultural practices. They encourage conductors and choirs to *imitate* rather than *interact with* this community. The above literature review makes evident what was described in the Purpose and Need for the Study in Chapter 1, and points the way for the writing that follows.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF SACRED HARP SINGING

The Origins of Sacred Harp Singing

The Advent of the Shape Note System

The shape note system was developed as a tool for music education, which came about due to complaints of a lack of musical proficiency in nineteenth-century British colonies. Ministers in colonial churches, dissatisfied with the quality of congregational singing, endeavored to equip every member of the community with the rudimentary musical tools necessary to read music, lead music, and sing in four-part harmony. Shape notes became their answer to this problem.

Early singing instructors added to the existing musical scale the visual aid of shaped note heads. Each shape corresponded to one of four solmization syllables - *fa*, *sol*, *la* and *mi*. The resulting system, appropriately coined *fasola*, is still in use today. In shape note singing, the major scale is read as two linked tetrachords, shown below:

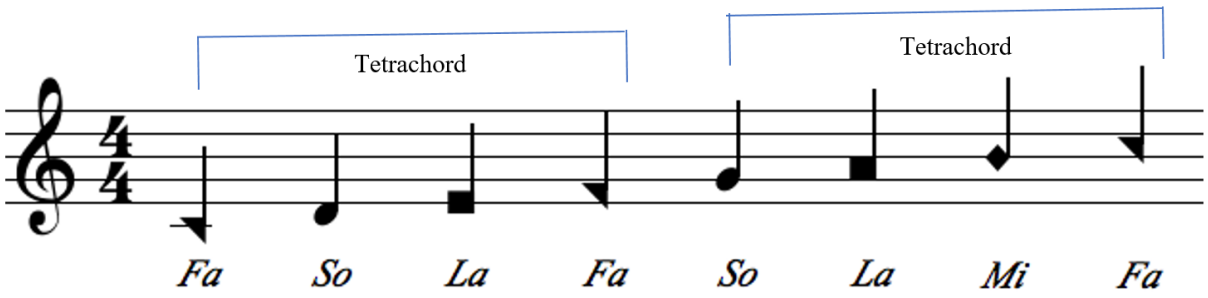

Figure 1. Shape Note Scale with Tetrachords Identified.

The desire to make music comprehensible to everyday folk without prior musical training propelled the ongoing growth of the shape note musical system and its resulting repertoire.

Shape Note Tunebooks

William Little and William Smith codified and enhanced the *fasola* method in the first known shape note tunebook, *The Easy Instructor* (1801).[43] The *Easy Instructor* was followed by a breadth of shape note songbooks by other composers. Among these initial tunebooks was the first edition of *The Sacred Harp,*[44] published in 1844.

This singular book, with its many subsequent editions, has outlived most others. Tunes by William Billings and his New England contemporaries constitute a large part of *The Sacred Harp,* though the body of the document has changed with each successive revision. Each edition of *The Sacred Harp* has removed lesser-used hymns and replaced them with new ones, so that the most current version is a patchwork of sorts, representing both the historical roots of the tradition as well as current tastes.

Today, the 1991 'Denson book' revision of *The Sacred Harp,* generated by a committee headed by the renowned Georgia singing school instructor Hugh McGraw, is the most widely used shape note tunebook.[45] In it, the works of living composers (including Mr. McGraw himself) are printed alongside those of Billings and other historic writers. The name of this most

[43] William Smith and William Little, *The Easy Instructor.* Trenton, NJ: William Smith & Co., 1801.

[44] B.F. White and E.J. King, *The Sacred Harp.* Philadelphia: T.K. & P.G. Collins, 1844.

[45] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 9.

popular tunebook has become synonymous with this kind of singing, so that this practice is now referred to interchangeably as *shape note* and *Sacred Harp* singing.

Shape note tunebooks of this period are collections of works by numerous composers. Scholars have pointed to Amos Pilsbury's 1799 *United States' Sacred Harmony* as one of the primary influences on early shape note composition.[46] This collection is the earliest extant (non-shape note) tunebook published by a Southern American.

Singing Schools

Shape note tunebooks were first utilized in the singing schools of colonial New England, which were led by itinerant singing masters who eventually carried the practice south. Schools were often sponsored by a local church or town, sometimes requiring tuition. Involvement in singing schools was "not mandatory, but voluntary… a kind of extracurricular activity"[47] for children and adults alike. These singing schools generally represented participants' first introduction to reading printed music, where groups of singers, called *classes*[48], were trained in the essentials of music-reading using the shape note system. Student first studied the basic musical scale, then learned letter names corresponding to lines and spaces of the staves, and finally, trained in 'calling out' the notes utilizing the four-syllable solmization system.

The Sacred Harp and comparable tunebooks were used not only in singing schools, but also in worship services. For early American singers, learning to read shape notes and sing in

[46] David W. Music, "Seven 'New' Tunes in Amos Pilsbury's *United States' Sacred Harmony* (1799) and Their Use in Four-Shape Shape-Note Tunebooks of the Southern United States before 1860." *American Music* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1995).

[47] Davenport, "American Instruction in Sight-Singing," 97.

[48] The term "class" is still used today to refer to the participants in a singing.

harmony carried an additional social benefit. Graduates of singing schools could use their newly-obtained skills to earn the status of church choir members. These were "somewhat prestigious positions since only those with some knowledge of music reading could join. They would have the honor of sitting in special 'singers' seats,' usually located in the gallery…This provided some motivation to attain sight-singing skills."[49]

Sound, Style and Harmony

Early shape note singing maintained the musical style traits of country parish music from early-eighteenth-century England, including both 'fuguing tunes' and anthems, the melody being in the tenor voice, and a prevalence of modal melodies. Parallel fifths and octaves were plentiful and counterpoint was abundant. Harmonic writing was unconventional rather than rule-bound. (William Billings, whose compositions appear frequently in shape note tunebooks, said, "I don't think myself confined to any rules of composition laid down by any who went before me."[50]) Take, for example, Amos Pilsbury's "Morning," shown in Figure 2 below, which disobeys the rules of functional harmony and focuses on the single sonority of the tonic E minor throughout, avoiding the dominant key. Striking dissonances, indicated with arrows, occur on the second quarter of measure three, the fourth quarter of measure twelve, and the second half of measure fourteen:

[49] Davenport, "American Instruction in Sight-Singing," 97.

[50] B.F. White and E. J. King, *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*, ed. Hugh McGraw (Bremen, GA: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1991), 21.

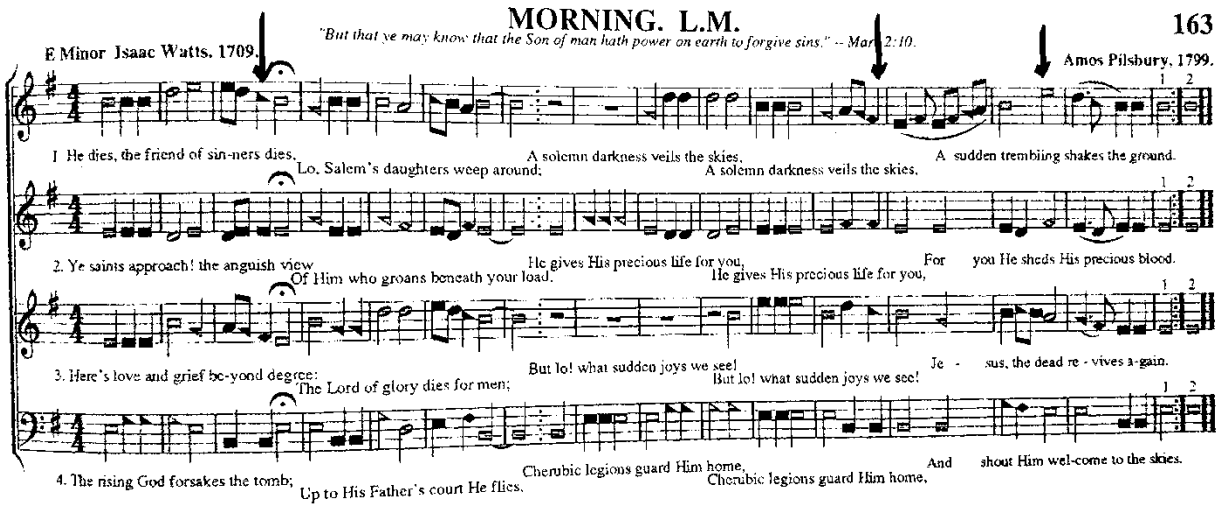

Figure 2. Amos Pilsbury's "Morning," from *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition.*[51]

Traditionally, both women and men sang the soprano and tenor lines in their own octaves, resulting in a thick doubling effect and a rich six-part harmonic structure.

Aspects of shape note singing were also impacted by the practice's connection with worship. Singing schools mirrored the musical practices of churches at that time, most of which did not permit the use of musical instruments; consequently, shape note singing came about as a strictly *a cappella* singing tradition. Though Sacred Harp shares some characteristics with, and some may liken it to, Appalachian bluegrass music and other folk music of the early American South, it is distinct. One of the many features that sets Sacred Harp singing apart from other early American folk music is the fact that it is made exclusively by voices and never joined by instruments.

The unaccompanied nature of Sacred Harp also encouraged participants to learn to sing powerfully to compensate for the absence of musical instruments. This vigorous approach to singing has, over time, become a trademark of the Sacred Harp singing style. For most Sacred

[51] White and King, *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*, 163.

Harp singers, the visceral power and beauty of this kind of singing is unparalleled, while outside observers have reported mixed reactions. The distinctive sound of Sacred Harp singing has been written about at length both by seasoned Sacred Harp singers and by those outside the tradition. While some are fascinated and intrigued by the sound, others are put off by its striking volume and apparent coarseness in comparison to other Western choral singing:

> The sound of Sacred Harp singing can be difficult for the first-time listener to penetrate….the overall effect can seem cacophonous. Sacred Harp is *loud* too, sung in…'full voice.' This full voice is straightforward, without vibrato, more like an extension of the singer's speaking voice than like classical singing. Dynamics are rare, with almost all songs sung in this full voice, a firm and aggressive sound well suited to the highly developed rhythm of Sacred Harp, which when done at the level desired by many southern singers has a shuffling feel that approaches syncopation.[52]

Without a doubt, the singing most admired by Sacred Harpers is characterized by volume and vigor. Still, the chesty approach and emphasis on forceful loudness that Sacred Harp promotes is often of concern to vocal pedagogues and choral conductors. This divergence has contributed to an ongoing rift, or at the least, reticence, between the American choral and Sacred Harp singing communities. This divide and its resultant concerns are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Relative Pitch and Keying

Singing *a cappella* also meant that colonial singing school students were not exposed to instrumental standards of pitch.[53] Though they worked from a written tunebook and valued the aural experience of singing in harmony, pitch was relative rather than absolute. In other words, the singing key might not exactly mirror the key in which the tune was written. An experienced singer, referred to alternately as the *pitcher* or *keyer,* would intone starting pitches using the

[52] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 12.

[53] Davenport, "American Instruction in Sight-Singing," 108- 109.

solmization syllables before the group joined in.[54] Singers were offered starting pitches deemed feasible for the assembled group and selected tune. One gets the sense that tonally, this music is meant to be malleable to the people singing it, rather than the other way around.

The Better Music Movement and Decline of Singing Schools

This stylistic looseness around pitch, dynamics and vocal production soon fell out of fashion, and in its place arose the opposing Better Music Movement, led by music educator Lowell Mason (1792- 1872). The Better Music Movement signified a budding wave of enthusiasm for more refined musicmaking, and the style and practice of Sacred Harp singing was at odds with its ideals. Crusaders for music reform "heaped ridicule on shape-notation and promoted a musical idiom and pedagogy based on contemporary Western European models instead."[55] They contended that *fasola* shape notation and its associated dissonances and "backwoods" style be replaced with modern European standards of theory and harmony,[56] including the seven-syllable solmization system (*do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do)* most commonly in use today.

The theoretical ideals of the Better Music Movement gained footing and eventually became the norm for American music education. Four-part congregational singing languished in churches and was replaced with sophisticated organ music and more formal choirs. The seven-syllable solmization system prevailed in music education, and the four-syllable system became less common. This system, which had been a mainstay in music education and church music,

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[54] Further discussion of keying can be found on page 30.

[55] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 7.

[56] Steel and Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp,* 39.

was pushed aside. Thus, those who wished to continue the practice developed it outside of academic and worship settings, and it became a communal social activity.

Devoted Sacred Harp singers in the rural South rejected the interference of these supposed advancements, and persevered in preserving their tradition. Independent Baptist sects, which continued to reject the use of musical instruments, became a bastion of shape note hymn singing. In some communities, the *fasola* system and its tunebooks were maintained as "a gesture of loyalty to antebellum rural Southern culture."[57]

As mainstream sacred music adopted the standards and practices of the Better Music Movement, Sacred Harp singers extended their singing outside of worship services, holding musical gatherings in town halls, homes, and (after-hours) church sanctuaries. Eventually, traditional singing schools disappeared altogether, leaving in their place a stalwart group of practitioners keen on keeping shape note singing alive. In lieu of customary singing schools, singers increasingly gathered socially at singings and all-day conventions whose sole purpose was to make music.[58] Hence, shape note singing grew beyond its original educational purpose and became an inherently social, community practice.

One could conceivably argue that the arrival of the Better Music Movement was actually advantageous to the historical arc of Sacred Harp singing, providing impetus for the systematization of the practice and thereby inadvertently strengthening the community. The decline of Sacred Harp's popularity necessitated a development of a collective identity that had

[57] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 8.

[58] Begun several decades after the initiation of shape note singing schools, the practice of singing conventions closely parallels the printing of the first *Sacred Harp* tunebook in 1844. The first Sacred Harp singing was held in 1845 as the Southern Musical Convention in Upson County, Georgia.

not existed prior, so that the community began a long journey of resistance to outward influence that continued into the twentieth century. As Sacred Harp transitioned from a practice centered in singing schools and worship into a more purely social tradition, the *singing* became the central activity of the community. Early shape note singers were determined to maintain their unique style and repertoire, and they did so both through written sources – continually-edited tunebooks and records of proceedings at singings – and through oral transmission of style.

Through the efforts of singers alone, shape note singing resisted assimilation, rejecting the Better Music Movement and its analogous concepts of musical beauty and propriety. Despite outside attempts to suppress and modify it, Sacred Harp persisted as a practice and community distinct from other Western choral singing – one that has developed and maintained its own distinctive repertoire, rituals, and style into the present.

What Does a Modern Singing Look Like?

Modern all-day Sacred Harp singings and conventions generally run from morning through midafternoon and are abundant with tradition-specific customs that are, for the most part, consistent across the community. These rituals range from the singing of shapes, to the observance of a musical style traits, to the sharing of a communal meal; all are discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow. This consistency of practice – what Clawson calls *routinization* – "enhances visiting between singing communities, as a singer from Chicago can expect to walk into a singing in California or Georgia confident that he will not violate local etiquette in any significant way."[59] The result is lively communal singing tradition distinct from

[59] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, x.

choral music. The following sections will outline the essential components and rituals of Sacred Harp singing.

Tunebooks Today

As previously stated, the most common tunebook in use today is the 1991 'Denson revision' of *The Sacred Harp,* also referred to as the 'red book.' In addition, it is not unusual for Sacred Harp singers to deviate from this tunebook, turning to the 'Cooper book'[60] and others. Some modern chapters also occasionally hold special singings in which some of the slightly later, seven-shape, tunebooks are used.[61]

Defining the Group, Welcoming Newcomers

In the Sacred Harp community, beginners are whole-heartedly welcomed at all times, regardless of musical background, and are offered loaner books to sing from if they do not own a copy. There is no discrete ensemble or official record of membership. Another notable aspect, unusual in other Western group singing, is the lack of an individual identified leader.

Notable throughout Sacred Harp singing is a lack of evaluation – a potent absence for those who come to Sacred Harp from musical academe. The typical rehearsal-and-refinement process so indispensable for choral performance is eschewed by Sacred Harp singers. As a rule, Sacred Harp singers do not perform for one another or for audiences, and appraisal of the singing, singers and song leaders is never conducted aloud. No applause is given between songs.

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[60] B. F. White and E. J. King, *The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition,* ed. W. M. Cooper (Samson, AL: The Sacred Harp Book Company, 2012).

[61] See Bibliography: "Selected Tunebooks," page 127.

Heider and Warner note that "no one's singing is ever directly criticized or publicly corrected during a singing, no matter how many wrong notes or false entrances she may commit. As long as a singer is making a whole-hearted attempt, focusing attention with the group and observing ritual decorum, her singing is beyond reproach."[62] The shared intent of the singers matters more than the quality of their singing. If a song is not sung well, the group simply, casually, moves on to the next.

Oral Transmission of Style

Sacred Harp singing, though foundationally connected with printed tunebooks and the shape note system, also shares important characteristics with purely oral musical traditions. Orally-transmitted aspects in Sacred Harp include the use of Southern-influenced pronunciation, 'scooping' (the sliding up to a pitch from below), and heavy articulation. In the South, unnotated, complex ornaments are sometimes heard from experienced singers. Miller observes, "one need not stay long at a Sacred Harp convention to realize that not everyone is singing what's written...Knowing when to deviate from the tunebook has its own prestige…Regional styles abound, reflected in complex ornaments, tempo, pronunciation, timbre, and changes to the printed notation."[63]

Contemporary Keying and 'Calling Out' of Shapes

Another original aspect that lingers in today's Sacred Harp practice is the convention of having tunes 'keyed' by an experienced singer. Modern keyers are individuals who "have a

[62] Heider and Warner, "Bodies in Sync," 83.

[63] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 86.

particular ability to place music within the range of a singing class. They do not, as some think, have perfect pitch and they do not pitch to the indicated letter."[64] In general, tunes tend to be pitched lower than written, "in a key that will be comfortable for the current 'class.'"[65] Once a tune is selected, the keyer – often someone from the front row of tenors – sings the starting pitches using solmization syllables. The class then responds with a throaty sounding of their own starting notes before launching in.

The singing school custom of 'calling out' the notes is also still in practice today, with Sacred Harp singers routinely singing a tune first using the shapes and their corresponding syllables, before moving on to the text. See Figure 3 below, in which the shapes are shown above the noteheads:

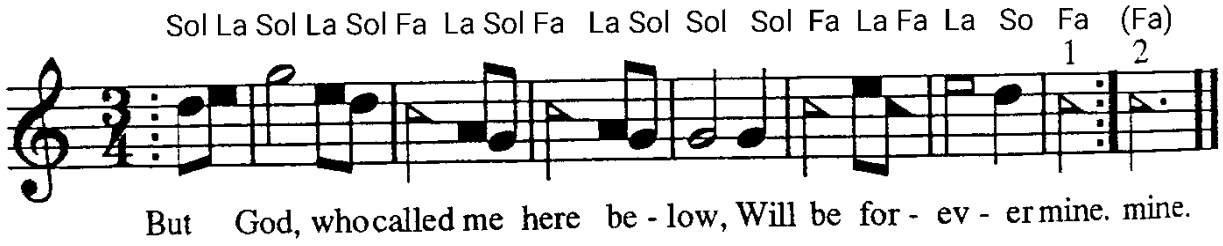

Figure 3. Shape Note Syllables.

Voice Parts and Doubling

Voice parts are self-selected by singers. Usual choral classifications are not particularly helpful here; given the use of octave doubling in both the soprano (i.e., treble) line and tenor (i.e., lead/melody) line, someone who usually sings soprano in a choir could conceivably end up

[64] Ian Quinn and Raymond Hamrick, "The Pitcher's Role in Sacred Harp Music," Original Sacred Harp, accessed March 7, 2017, http://originalsacredharp.com/2013/07/29/the-pitchers-role-in-sacred-harp-music.

[65] Miller, "'First Sing the Notes,'" 486.

in either the soprano, alto or tenor sections and be quite comfortable, depending on their particular range and preferences. For newcomers to the practice, the selection of a vocal part seems to be more a matter of trial and error than an issue of careful calculation.

Configuration and Singing Spaces

As has been the tradition for its entire existence, Sacred Harp singers sit in a hollow square facing the center, where singers can easily communicate both through conversation and facial expression:

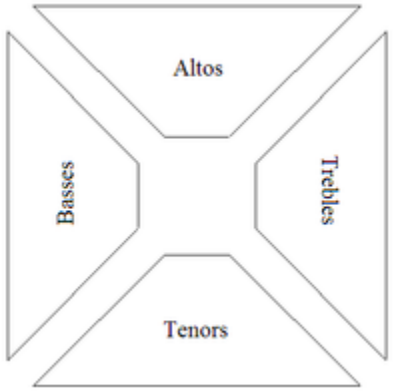

Figure 4. The Hollow Square.

This layout also noticeably defies the usually prescriptive performer/audience dichotomy by purposely setting aside "no formal role for an audience."[66]

Seating during singing is one subtle way in which questions of authority are sometimes played out. To sit in the front row of the hollow square is not only to have the best seat in the house, aurally – it is also to claim capability and responsibility in helping to lead the singing. In

[66] Miller, "'First Sing the Notes,'" 484.

general, new singers do not sit in the front row unless invited. In addition, front row singers will often rotate out in the course of an all-day singing, giving other singers a turn to be closest to the sought-after richness of sound at the center of the square. In the South, legacy singers – descendants of singing families – tend to get first priority for front row seats. However, in the North, front row seating, "becomes a question of who is willing to assert their fitness for that status."[67] In other words, Northern singers who choose front row seats are generally those who feel proficient enough to lead.

The purpose of the traditional hollow square seating is to promote facial communication and enthusiasm among singers, and to heighten the acoustic experience. Clawson observes that, "while there are hierarchies involved in where a singer sits...these are not formalized or rigid, so there is a sense of equality and togetherness produced by this physical structure."[68]

Song Leading and Collective Gesture

In a truly democratic fashion, all singers, including first-time visitors, are encouraged to take a turn leading a song from the center of the hollow square. To lead a song is somewhat analogous to conducting, yet distinct keying. Every singer gets an opportunity to lead if he or she chooses, and everyone is entitled to lead. Veteran singers often invite visitors to join them in leading a tune, so that they too can stand in the center and experience the much-coveted sound heard there.[69] This too evokes the historically educational role of the tradition: newcomers are welcomed as equals and learn the customs by participating in them.

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[67] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 111.

[68] Ibid., 140.

[69] I experienced this personally when I attended the Pacific Northwest Sacred Harp Convention in Seattle in February 2017. During the noontime meal, I spoke with a woman from Denver who

Song leaders get only one turn to lead during a given singing. This allows both for a variety of tunes to be sung – selected by the successive song leaders – and for every person who wants an opportunity to stand in the center and soak up the sound, to have their chance. Each successive leader enters the center of the hollow square, calls out the number of his or her chosen song from the tunebook, and faces the tenors. The front row tenors play a special role, helping to lead the group both by singing enthusiastically and by mimicking the leader's hand motions; novice song leaders are often helped along by the encouragement and guidance of these front-row tenors.

The song leader directs the class with a simple hand motion, moving downward during the first half of the measure and upward during the second half. Singers mimic the leader's hand motions; this communal gesture functions as a part of the participatory practice. When the song is complete, the leader returns to their seat and resumes singing as part of the class while another member of the group moves to the center of the square. As is consistent with social norms, song leaders do not give or receive feedback. Lastly, it is an unspoken rule that no song may be sung twice on the same day – with occasional exceptions made for children or the very elderly.

Fellowship: Dinner on the Grounds, Memorial Lessons

A vital piece of the Sacred Harp experience is the famously hearty, free-of-cost communal meal that customarily accompanies all-day singings. Provided by local singers, this shared meal is a fundamental part of the Sacred Harp ritual and is referred to within the tradition

had been singing for a decade, and in the afternoon session that followed was invited to join her in leading a tune.

as "dinner on the grounds."[70] Food is typically served in a potluck style either on long tables outdoors (when weather permits), or in church social halls. Gathering around at midday to visit and refresh themselves, singers fill up their plates to heaping. Afternoon singing at Sacred Harp conventions is legendarily boisterous and loud, as singers return to the music well-fed and energized by the abundant spread.

All-day singings usually include a "memorial lesson" at midday as well, which functions to honor singers who have died and those unable to attend due to illness. Names are read aloud and occasionally, song dedications made. Though public speaking is, by and large, minimized at singings, this special rite is an exception that serves an important purpose, to build and draw attention to the greater singing community.

Attire

Traditionally, participants dress for a singing as if they were attending church, especially in the South. Customarily women are expected to wear dresses, while men wear button-down shirts and slacks. However, this particular standard is not strictly observed outside the South and is interpreted differently in different regions, so that formal or even semi-formal dress is not a given at modern Sacred Harp singings. Today, regional tastes and interpretations of propriety are the best indicators of the appropriate attire for a singing.

[70] See Kathryn Eastburn, *A Sacred Feast: Reflections on Sacred Harp Singing and Dinner on the Ground* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

Leadership and Organization

The operation is entirely run by volunteers, with no dues paid to maintain the chapter and no admission fees. Modern chapters sometimes will, however, collect a goodwill offering, with proceeds used to cover the cost of renting the singing space. The truly egalitarian nature of Sacred Harp singing is demonstrated in its equal distribution of organizational leadership:

> There are complex status relationships in play at Sacred Harp conventions, where authority is claimed or ascribed according to singers' apparent competence as tradition-bearers. Status is a delicate matter, given the egalitarian ideology that underpins [it]...[71]

Lacking a central leadership base, Sacred Harp communities tend to intentionally disperse power. The few official leadership roles available, such as those of convention officer or chair, rotate annually, "so that as many singers as possible can have an experience of responsibility and leadership and do so in a way that garners some public recognition."[72] Public speaking even by those in leadership roles is kept to a minimum. Overall, "authority as a guiding concept is rarely mentioned by Sacred Harp singers, who focus much more on the democracy of allowing every voice to be heard and every singer to lead a song."[73]

Sacred Harp encourages artistic creativity through a living oral tradition, new editions of the printed music, and internally-led promotion, while at the same time boldly asserting its own idiosyncratic values of simplicity, fellowship, social parity, and earnest, if imperfect, music-making. The next section will examine the underlying identity and values of the Sacred Harp community.

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[71] Miller, *Traveling Home*,79.

[72] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 108.

[73] Ibid., 111.

Sacred Harp Identity and Values

Two interconnected values reign supreme in Sacred Harp and are interwoven throughout the practice: *hospitality* and *tradition.* Participants embody these ideals in countless explicit and implicit ways. *Hospitality,* displayed in the welcoming of newcomers, is an important aspect of Sacred Harp *tradition.* In turn, certain Sacred Harp *traditions* – dinner on the grounds, rotation of songleaders, lack of appraisal, egalitarian division of leadership – enact Sacred Harp *hospitality.* Each informs the other, so that these two foundational principles are mutually inseparable.

Hospitality

Commitment to sincere welcome is demonstrated in the charitable attitude that underpins the act of singing together and in surrounding rituals. Practice such as dinner on the grounds, rotating songleading, and the like create fellowship and display this generosity. Singing unites individuals from wide-ranging backgrounds, achieving both profound community and openness to difference. The *hospitality* or inclusiveness at the heart of Sacred Harp identity encourages diversity in its membership, diminishing the "visibility and salience of ideological differences" among singers.[74] Clawson claims that "this community is deep enough that a Northern singer living in New York would be buried in a rural Alabama cemetery and open enough that the singer's gay father and his partner would be welcome in an Alabama Baptist church."[75]

The fact that the musicmaking is regarded as most enjoyable when sung in large groups provides extra incentive for singers to welcome new members: the more singers, the better.

[74] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 10.

[75] Ibid., ix.

Accordingly, the Sacred Harp community becomes the living embodiment of its own guiding principle of hospitality and sees the welcome of newcomers as in its own best interest.

Hospitality is also revealed through travel – an ongoing responsibility and privilege for any modern Sacred Harper.[76] Attendance at distant singings begets invitations to more singings and allows for promotion of one's own local chapter and convention. Visitors will often exert a friendly pressure upon their hosts, encouraging a mutual effort to travel and attend out-of-town singings. Singers are constantly invited to attend far-flung singings, and are drawn into the fold in this way. The effort is in turn returned by experienced singers, who often make long journeys to bolster numbers at faraway conventions and encourage the growth of developing chapters. Reciprocity in travel is a collectively-held ethic. As Clawson puts it, "the debt is spoken of as between locations."[77] In this manner, balance is maintained and no one chapter singularly bears the financial or personal burden of traveling or hosting.

Interestingly, the modern norm is for local singers to host visitors in their homes during conventions. This special custom makes travel to distant areas more affordable and brings an additional layer of intimacy to cross-country Sacred Harp relationships

Deeply embedded in Sacred Harp code is an emphasis on singing the traditional music unreservedly, rather than perfectly. The ritual of singing and the sense of unity within the group is dominant and surpasses any efforts at venerating a performance orientation. Stephen Warner highlighted this aspect in his 2007 Presidential Address to the Society of the Scientific Study of Religion:

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[76] Further discussion of the significance of travel in the Sacred Harp community can be found on page 47.

[77] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 117.

> Sacred harp is done by and for the singers, not for an audience…a large number of dedicated sacred harp singers…cheerfully repeat the old saw, 'I will cross the country to sing this music, but I wouldn't cross the street to listen to it.' So if those in [an] audience [are] not moved by our earnest but flawed attempt…they [are] not missing the point. The point is that making this music together, not listening to it, creates solidarity.[78]

Warner asserts that Sacred Harp singing creates solidarity "among people from widely scattered social and cultural locations."[79] This is due in significant measure to singers' commitment to hospitality. Emotional engagement in the shared experience is more highly valued than musical finesse, and critique has no place.

In this safe space, where music is the utmost priority, relationships are built gradually. It is understood – though not spoken outright – that singers will avoid discussing divisive issues till a foundation of trust and shared experience is established. Clawson calls this approach *strategic silence*:[80] Under the code of strategic silence, singers do not speak publicly about anything of potential controversy, "even aspects of Sacred Harp itself."[81] She observes:

> A Jewish Democrat from Chicago whose main associations with the South are the civil rights movement and white southern racism may come to see a more complicated picture and to care deeply about the Republican Baptist singing next to her. A Primitive Baptist from rural Alabama who has preconceived notions when he first views a man wearing an earring and several bracelets may come to value that man's strong singing voice and then his friendship.[82]

[78] Stephen R. Warner, "2007 Presidential Address: Singing and Solidarity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (June 2008), 180.

[79] Warner, "2007 Presidential Address," 180.

[80] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 9.

[81] Ibid., 168- 169.

[82] Ibid., 167.

Although discussion of controversial topics is avoided, relationships between dissimilar Sacred Harp singers are not experienced as being superficial, because they are unified by a shared commitment to the music.

One of the few behaviors that will actually attract outright reprimand from Sacred Harp singers is a violation of this code of hospitality. This taboo is illustrated by the story of some western Massachusetts singers who attended a Young People's Singing in Liberty, Alabama and were publicly derided by a local pastor for their inappropriate clothing. [83] Specifically, their attire was non-gender-conforming, and not perceived to be suitable church dress. The pastor of the church in which the singing was held was invited to offer a public prayer prior to dinner on the grounds. Under the guise of a well-meaning appeal, the pastor took it upon himself to pray for the offending individuals and voice his hope that they might "see the error of their ways."

Although some of the hosting singers may have agreed with his ideal of propriety, their deeply-held belief in inclusivity and hospitality was their clear priority. By expressing divisive views publicly, and in a manner that felt exclusive rather than inclusive, the pastor had unmistakably violated *strategic silence.* In a word, he was inhospitable.

The pastor, though not a member of the singing community, was a local leader who presumably spoke on behalf of the hosting community. This meant that for local Sacred Harpers to demonstrate hospitality toward their visitors, they had to make clear that this man did not represent their views. They publicly distanced themselves from the hateful speechmaker in both word and deed and determined that until another pastor was appointed at the church, singings would be held elsewhere. Locals were quick to clarify that the opinions expressed by this man,

[83] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*,133.

and especially the manner in which he expressed them, did not reflect the generous character and attitude of the hosting community.

Tradition

If *hospitality* refers to the attitude of Sacred Harp singers toward one another – 'how' singing is conducted – then tradition can be described as the corresponding development and transmission of the components of singing itself – the 'what' of singing. The presence of certain key elements authenticates the experience: singing shapes, alternating song leaders, sitting in the hollow square. These procedures of tradition are essential.

Tradition is transmitted both directly, through written and recorded materials that explain and codify custom and style, and indirectly, through interaction and participation. In direct transmission, practices are examined outright through discussion and instruction; in indirect transmission, methods are not named but instead are demonstrated and learned through immersion.

Written record has also functioned to enlighten a public seemingly unaware of the very existence of Sacred Harp, providing evidence of their numbers and success. Writing in 1997, John Bealle remarked:

> In recent decades, possibly anticipating the spread of Sacred Harp far outside its traditional domain of influence…singers have produced an annual compilation of 'all' singings, presuming a universal 'association' of singers without geographical limit or doctrinal affiliation…Sacred Harp singers have…condensed the minutes into their own authoritative document…they have secured control over what counts as a Sacred Harp signing. This has been a fundamental means by which new singers, many of whom come to the tradition through ethnography, are inscribed into the tradition through a more authoritative native discourse.[84]

[84] Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith,*175.

Through their own documentation, Sacred Harp singers have authenticated and given purpose to their traditions. Records of their activities serve as a kind of evidence of and testimony to their shared experience.

Inclusion, Not Evangelism

Training of new singers in Sacred Harp tradition, whether executed directly or indirectly, is only done when initiated by newcomers themselves. In other words, Sacred Harp singing is not evangelized or broadcast. Instead, those who visit and show interest are welcomed in a spirit of inclusion and hospitality.

This spirit of inclusion extends to the rather recent development of online forums and Facebook groups, in which a steady stream of tradition-mediation is acted out through posted recordings, resources, questions and replies. A quick glance at these online discussions shows that they range from practical elements of singing (questions of how to key tunes, requests for scans of obscure hymns, and debates over pronunciation) to personal, community-based concerns (notices of upcoming singings, updates on the health and sometimes funerals of well-known singers, and requests from vacationing singers for information about chapters to visit during their travels). In these forums, tradition is in a constant state of construction and transmission. Authority is self-asserted and resources are circulated broadly. Yet even in this unregulated space, information is offered only in response to requests, rather than as public directive.[85]

[85] "Sacred Harp Friends," Facebook, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/groups/288062357886428/.

The fact that Sacred Harp is a noncommercial practice that does not advertise means that, for the most part, it is well-known only to its participants. Observing scholars have sometimes misunderstood Sacred Harpers' unassertive public image, assuming their silence signifies consent to outsider interpretation. Take, for instance, the following statement from a choral scholar justifying performance interpretations of Sacred Harp: "[Sacred Harp] reactions to choral and concert presentations of Sacred Harp music have been somewhat difficult to ascertain from written sources, which leads to the assumption that it has not been a source of controversy.....there is no great outcry of criticism."[86] Yet public unfamiliarity with the Sacred Harp perspective does not indicate that its interpretation is simply open to personal interpretation. On the contrary, Sacred Harp singers who have become aware of newcomers misinterpreting or misrepresenting their tradition have merely responded with their characteristic hospitality.

Though modern Sacred Harp singers value demonstrative hospitality, their concurrent commitment to maintaining the distinct markers of their tradition raises questions of authority, ownership and representation. Newcomers, though not sought out, are welcomed and must learn the customs. Sacred Harp authenticity, then, has been and continues to be negotiated through complex, dynamic relationships of identity, geography and history, with the intersecting values of *hospitality* and *tradition* being acted out again and again. The section that follows presents examples of this identity negotiation in practice.

[86] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 108-114.

Growing Northern Chapters and Intervention from Southerners

An important example of this dynamic is found in the intervention of Southerners in fledgling Northern chapters. Early in the evolution of a national Sacred Harp scene, Southerners played an active, integral role in the founding of Northern conventions, including the Illinois State, Midwest, and New England chapters.[87] Efforts by Southern Sacred Harp singers to encourage and facilitate the spread of Sacred Harp could accurately be referred to as a form of activism. Though inclusion, not evangelism, is the standard, it *was* indeed a "source of controversy" for Northerners unfamiliar with Sacred Harp to appropriate and misrepresent it. However, instead of responding with an "outcry of criticism," Southerners responded by traveling to interact with, instruct, and include new singers in the legacy traditions of singing.

> It was not the northern folk revivalists who reached out to a closed-in South, seeking its authenticity and validation, but singers from the South who insisted that if those in the North were to sing Sacred Harp, they could not appropriate it piecemeal. Rather northerners needed to be taught, and to follow, the entire tradition: singing the shapes as well as the words and participating not just in the music but also in the communal meal, a democratic and egalitarian practice of leading songs, and the use of a memorial lesson to honor the dead. Above all, they resisted the performer/audience divide that characterizes most Western music and insisted that Sacred Harp could not become a performed music.[88]

The adoption of Sacred Harp tradition was embraced by Northern singers, who "fell into wanting to go South as much as [they] could, wanting to do things the way they do.'"[89]

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[87] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 123.

[88] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, xii.

[89] Ibid., 121.

A favorite story amongst Sacred Harp singers is retold by numerous authors.[90] In the 1980s, an eminent folk-revival group in Chicago made up of seasoned folk singers, professional musicians and several expat Southerners assembled to sing shape note music directly from the tunebook. Lacking an experienced Sacred Harper among them, the group gathered to sing the music devoid of its characteristic style and without singing the shape notes themselves. Eventually – and just how remains unclear – word of these gatherings reached the Southern Sacred Harp community, and the Chicagoans were invited to visit traditional singings in order to learn time-honored traditions.[91] They returned in agreement that "nothing essential to the tradition, especially the texts, should be changed for the sake of spreading it to new disciples."[92]

Early conventions in Chicago often appeared comical to Southern singers: "Someone brought a music stand into the hollow square at the first Illinois State Convention – something that would appear about as odd in the Sacred Harp context as seeing the conductor of a symphony orchestra use a golf club for a baton."[93] The use of a music alludes to there being a singular, powerful leader, a concept contradictory to the communal ideals of Sacred Harp. Yet despite copious *faux pas*, the Chicagoans' commitment to learning the musical style and ritual, and their allegiance to maintaining the principles of the practice resulted in their becoming one of the largest and most cherished chapters of today's Sacred Harp.

The Chicago group is legendary in today's community despite, or perhaps in part because of, their initial naïveté. They quickly acknowledged that "the Sacred Harp songs may be

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[90] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 32, 77-79, 111-114.

[91] Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith,* 200- 216.

[92] Heider and Warner, "Bodies in Sync," 91-92.

[93] Miller, "'First Sing the Notes,'" 477.

transplanted, but the tradition itself cannot be. It is not…the body of printed songs in the book that constitutes the Sacred Harp, but rather the whole ritualized tradition."[94] An important lesson to take from the Chicago example is that the Sacred Harp community's objective is not to keep newcomers from joining, but to promote and preserve the integrity of the tradition itself.

Southern Authority and Issues of Authenticity

Those with close ties to the American South do indeed carry a certain assumed authenticity. Ownership is ascribed, in this case, because of both ancestry and proximity to the geographic origins of the practice. Authenticity is credited to individuals "on the basis of their identity (born in the South to a singing family). Northerners find it far more difficult to make claims of authenticity based on their ascribed characteristics…"[95] It is suggested by both singers and scholars that these 'birthright' or 'traditional' singers "naturally sing a certain way because they grew up in an encompassing soundscape that is inaccessible to new adult singers."[96]

Authenticity becomes a question not only of where one was born, but of how soon in life they were introduced to singing. Hierarchically, a Southern singer who grew up singing would be ascribed the elevated status of 'most traditional,' while a Southerner who came to the practice as an adult could never quite catch up. Similarly, Northerners simply cannot make claims of authenticity, regardless of how committed they are or how many years they have sung.

An article in a 1990s issue of the *Chicago Sacred Harp Newsletter* by esteemed singer Ted Mercer spoke to this issue. Mercer attempted to answer the article's title question, "Should

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[94] Cobb, *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*, 154- 155.

[95] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, xii.

[96] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 79.

Northerners Learn to Sing Sacred Harp?" He alleged that they should indeed learn, but cautioned readers that, "'without wanting to get into questions like, 'How diluted by other musical influences can Sacred Harp be and still retain that ancient power?' I believe that the old-time *fasola* sound…has to be regarded as seriously endangered.'"[97] Mercer's article raises two fears shared by many Sacred Harp singers; namely, that the authenticity of traditional Sacred Harp singing is both threatened, and inherently unattainable. A more accurate, and certainly, more hopeful, conclusion is that as Sacred Harp grows, it is changing from its original form – as are conceptions of Sacred Harp authenticity.[98] These concerns certainly contribute to singers' shared belief that to go to the heart of Sacred Harp – to get as close to authenticity as possible – one must learn from Southerners.

The Necessity of Travel South

Experiential learning in Sacred Harp is accomplished by singing together, and is enhanced by the shared commitment to travel. Committed Northern singers travel south to learn, and in turn, Southerners travel north to sing. Though Northerners' travel south still functions within the mutual understanding of obligatory reciprocity, their travel is often framed somewhat differently, as evidence of their seriousness about singing and desire to learn. The South is considered by most as the "root and source"[99] of Sacred Harp knowledge, and travel south validates one's seriousness as a singer. "Among Northern singers, having traveled south extensively or being friendly with lifelong Southern singers often stands as an authenticator, a

[97] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 25.

[98] See also "The Search for Authenticity in Performances of Multicultural Music," page 77.

[99] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 120.

sign that their claims to knowledge are not merely from books but from experience with a genuine tradition."[100]

By deferring to Southerners in questions of musical and cultural tradition, Northern singers "[associate] themselves with this authenticity while recognizing that they cannot claim to embody it in any straightforward fashion."[101] Those who have traveled and become acquainted with Southern singers often attempt to display their knowledge by adopting both musical and cultural practices they have learned. Clawson describes this dynamic vividly:

> [They] enact [cultural authenticity], to provide visible evidence that they have immersed themselves in authentic Sacred Harp culture. This often includes buying clothes similar to southern singers, which are usually understood as church clothes; preparing common southern foods, such as deviled eggs, barbecue, or coconut cake - foods that in the daily lives of most northern singers would be considered appallingly unhealthful - for nonsouthern conventions; or adopting song-leading styles of specific, respected southern singers. Such actions are delicate and must be performed carefully lest they appear to be mimicry rather than developed knowledge.[102]

Northerners who travel south gain a depth of understanding about Sacred Harp style and tradition via personal relationships and participation, rather than through superficial academic learning.

How Can Newcomers Become Sacred Harp Singers?

Since belief in Southern authority is so deeply held in Sacred Harp, it follows to ask whether one born outside its heritage can truly 'become' a singer. Scholars have argued that the unwritten rules and customs of the tradition in fact protect against the "superficial acquisition of Sacred Harp practice even as the ready availability of the tunebook encourages its

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[100] Ibid., 120.

[101] Ibid., 94.

[102] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 99- 100.

dissemination... [so that a newcomer] cannot learn certain markers of traditional practice without going to singings."[103]

The historically-based ornamentation and style that characterize Sacred Harp singings vary regionally and are not recorded in the songbook, so that one unconnected to the community would be unable to sing the music as it is intended. This may be a conscious attempt from within to maintain the requirement of participation in singings and evade appropriation of the music from outsiders. Because Sacred Harp is both a written and oral tradition, one cannot truly call oneself a Sacred Harp singer without dedicated attendance at singings. To be a singer, one must sing.

Furthermore, the shape note system can take time to learn, even for previously-trained musicians. Accordingly, as new singers learn the shapes, time is lent to the transmission not only of musical markers of tradition but of cultural and ritual markers as well. Thus shape notes, which may initially appear to some as an obstacle to participation, functions instead as an invitation to slow down and absorb the entire experience. Miller notes, "new singers with strong voices and excellent reading skills could influence Sacred Harp regional styles very rapidly if they were not held back by the shapes. Those who stay long enough to become competent shape-readers often deliberately hold themselves back in other ways, opening their eyes and ears to the subtleties of local practice."[104]

As has been mentioned, Sacred Harp authority has historically been located in Southern singing families. Still some "would say that 'traditional singing' is more a state of mind and

[103] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 106.

[104] Miller, "'First Sing the Notes,'" 488- 489.

spirit than a birthright."[105] Given the changing face of Sacred Harp and its recent growth, questions regarding who might now have the authority to define and articulate Sacred Harp authenticity will need to be answered.

It is widely agreed that in order to join the Sacred Harp community, one must regularly attend singings, be willing to assimilate to cultural practices, and learn to sing shape notes. A committed Sacred Harper, in modern interpretation, is one who brings a curiosity and willingness to learn to the practice, and ideally, travels to out-of-town singings. Still, the community's growth suggests that the boundaries outlining it, geographically and socially, are in flux.

Efforts to Define and Document a Growing Community

The cultivation of an emergent international Sacred Harp scene has resulted in difficulty for writers both inside and outside the Sacred Harp community to assess its rapid expansion. Scholarship simply cannot keep up. Even the most recent personal and ethnographic accounts of Sacred Harp in large part predate its recent international growth. Thus, the existing written literature is not entirely representative of its current membership, given that the practice is continuously developing.

Whereas the purity of any ritual, musical or otherwise, is always a problematic notion, it takes on even greater complexity when paired with the international expansion of Sacred Harp and the considerable impact of online forums on group identity negotiation. Stories of exchanges between Southern and Northern Sacred Harp singers abound, but perceptibly lacking in the current literature is scholarly discussion of recently initiated international Sacred Harp chapters.

[105] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 4.

Sacred Harp members today navigate a complex, negotiated social and musical space where the historic bumps up against the modern. The practice is "saturated with layers of meaning drawn from personal experience and received history, meaning that is ever-present, ever-emergent, and continually transformed by and transforming of individual experience within the tradition."[106] While external markers are maintained and intentionally preserved, singers' particular experiences of singing vary, so that even those within the tradition do not describe it uniformly.

A rural Southern singer coming to Sacred Harp because of family and church connections will, without a doubt, experience singing differently than an urban Northerner originally encountering it as a folk enthusiast. For some, Sacred Harp singing is an intensely religious or spiritual experience; for others, the religious content of the texts is more incidental than fundamental.[107] Regardless, all seem to agree that at its pinnacle moments, singing Sacred Harp is a transcendent experience.

Whereas the previous section outlined the traditions and pillars of the cultural practice of Sacred Harp, the next will outline the current state of Sacred Harp, and will look more closely at the ways in which present-day singers are navigating issues of authenticity while maintaining the core Sacred Harp values of hospitality and tradition.

[106] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 18.

[107] See John Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997).

The Current State of Sacred Harp Singing

The Influence of Folk Revival

Despite repeated forecasts of the death of Sacred Harp singing, the tradition has persisted and even grown into a thriving modern community. John Bealle shares a humorous story that accurately represents Sacred Harp reactions to outsiders' predictions of its imminent extinction as early as the 1950s:

> A nostalgic account of 'Alabama's Disappearing Singers' appeared in the *Birmingham News Monthly Magazine* (10 January 1954). On the following February 10, the editor published a reply by singer J.W. Bassett of Troy, Alabama, attaching a title, 'Voice of the People.' Bassett's letter objected to [the article's] claim that 'it has been predicted that this type of singing will disappear entirely within the next decade, a victim of the failure to keep abreast with modern musical tastes.' In response, Bassett wrote, 'I have minutes on hand now listing 237 annual singings and conventions during 1954 in Alabama and Tennessee alone, and I have no record at present of singings which will be held in Georgia, Florida, Mississippi and other states.'[108]

Internal resistance to culture writers'[109] mischaracterization of Sacred Harp singing can be felt strongly in this and similar accounts. Ironically, such exchanges have contributed to a shared feeling of reminiscence even among new Sacred Harp singers, "invoking nostalgia for what modernity has destroyed."[110] In addition to the musical and social experience, many experience singing as a kind of relic of their imagined American heritage.

Most new chapters outside of the American South have evolved from the labor of folk music revivalists and early music adherents who share in this nostalgia.[111] Though its dates are approximate, the American folk revival – "meaning that traditional practices thought to be in

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[108] Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith,* 170-171.

[109] Bealle uses the term "culture writers" to describe outside authors' take on Sacred Harp.

[110] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 25.

[111] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 7.

decline where being 'revived' as quasi-recreational activities"[112] – peaked in the early 1960s. The movement was characterized by the production of variety concerts or festivals, in which an assortment of diverse musical practices were brought together in a single venue. The accompanying ideology of folk revivalism, particularly its fascination with the pastoral customs of (especially foreign or rural) 'folk', has over time been "assimilated into the pluralist atmosphere of contemporary mainstream culture."[113]

Sacred Harp was one of the many musical traditions celebrated in folk revivalism, and its inclusion in the movement ultimately assisted in its resurgence. Most new Sacred Harp singers in recent decades had their initial encounter with Sacred Harp as "revived folksong."[114] The mainstream understanding of folk music as a genre has its roots in this twentieth-century folk revival, and it has both fueled interest and fostered growth in the Sacred Harp community, as the reverberations of folk revival are still felt today.

In addition to publicity from folk revival, Sacred Harp has experienced steady growth due to the coinciding efforts of singers. Their direct action and promotion of Sacred Harp has had an undeniable impact on its current state. For example, certain veteran Southern singers acknowledge that a decline in participation was felt strongly in the 1970s; the community responded proactively. Traditional Southern singers connected with groups of Northerners who had demonstrated interest in the tunebook. These Southern Sacred Harpers traveled north by the busload to join in singings, "not only to lend their strong voices to the event but to teach the

[112] Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith,* 188.

[113] Ibid., 188.

[114] Ibid., 188-190.

ritual tradition they deemed essential to it."[115] Internally-motivated efforts like these, whose objects are to welcome new singers and cultivate the practice while imparting its weighty cultural heritage, caused a surge of new regional and statewide singing conventions across the United States.

Certain recent activities in the Sacred Harp community have drawn media attention as well, most particularly, an appearance in the feature Miramax film *Cold Mountain* in 2003.

Cold Mountain **(2003)**

When professional singer – and Sacred Harper – Tim Eriksen was hired to sing on the film *Cold Mountain*[116], his ensuing actions had a major impact on the Sacred Harp community. Rather than endorsing the hiring of a professional choir to imitate Sacred Harp singing, Eriksen advocated for the use of actual Sacred Harp singers in the movie. He "happened to be invested in the tradition and willing to speak up,"[117] and this made all the difference.

Cold Mountain was director Anthony Minghella's film adaptation of Charles Frazier's National Book Award-winning novel. An award-winning work of historical fiction, Frazier's book centered on the American Civil War. Interest in maintaining historical accuracy partially led to the film producers' willing inclusion of Sacred Harp singers. Eriksen used this to the advantage of the Sacred Harp community:

> The framing was of *Cold Mountain* not simply as entertainment but as highbrow culture….with the research underlying its depictions of the Civil War era standing as one of the movie's claims to authority, Sacred Harp singing was a small but crucial validator; the fact that an authentic presentation of it gave added value to the film's ambitions

[115] Heider and Warner, "Bodies in Sync," 80.

[116] *Cold Mountain,* dir. Anthony Minghella.

[117] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 158- 159.

> undoubtedly served as a bargaining resource for Tim Eriksen and others who wanted to promote it without sacrificing the integrity of the tradition as they understood it.[118]

Because of his shared identities as a professional singer and a Sacred Harper, and his role on the film's soundtrack, Eriksen was able to mediate between *Cold Mountain* producers and Sacred Harp singers.

Recordings of Sacred Harp singing were accomplished on Southern singers' home turf, as part of a regular singing, rather than in a recording studio. Minghella and music producer T Bone Burnett merely attended and filmed a Southern singing; footage and audio from the singing was then used in the film.

Unprecedented questions of how Sacred Harpers might perform for an audience arose immediately following the release of *Cold Mountain;* this matter is discussed in great detail by Clawson.[119] Again, those in charge had initially planned to hire professional singers to fulfill musical demands, but Eriksen's advocacy for the Sacred Harp community changed the course of events. Instead of hiring professionals to perform Sacred Harp music, actual Sacred Harp singers were again brought in, this time for a variety of highly-publicized performances. Film producers decided to put on a recorded concert, which later became a special on the Arts & Entertainment television channel. During a performance at the Academy Awards, Sacred Harpers sang backup on a non-Sacred Harp song for country singer Alison Krauss. And finally, singers were included on a national concert tour of musicians from the films *Cold Mountain* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*.[120]

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[118] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,*160.

[119] Clawson, "Going Hollywood," in *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 141-165.

[120] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 7.

Laura Clawson describes Sacred Harp participation in *Cold Mountain* most thoroughly; she was, at the time, conducting fieldwork in Southern Sacred Harp communities and was close to the action. She observes:

> For many years, Sacred Harp flew almost entirely beneath the media radar. Since it is a participatory rather than a performance music, it was known primarily to participants... [The inclusion of Sacred Harp in the film and related performances] …might be seen as a one-way appropriation of folk culture [but] instead emerges as a multidirectional exchange. Sacred Harp's character, the fact that it was not a performance music and not remotely commercial, served the producers as an authenticator of the film's historical accuracy and high-culture ambitions. Singers, for their part, self-consciously mobilized to use this moment of mass media attention to garner press coverage and acquire a different kind of validation, that of contemporary popular culture and mass media.[121]

Clawson marvels at the relative lack of discord created by this experience in the Sacred Harp community, saying, "...the encounter with commercial culture did not produce any serious ruptures and may indeed have added to its cultural capital and enhanced its recruiting efforts, especially among young people."[122] The timing of *Cold Mountain* and its associated publicity coincided with another important development in the community – the development of an educational summer camp.

Camp Fasola

Originating in the same year as the release of *Cold Mountain* was Camp Fasola: an effort from the Sacred Harp community to identify and guide the next generation of singers. Immediately and consistently successful, Camp Fasola capitalized upon the visibility of Sacred Harp singing in *Cold Mountain.* "One of the great challenges of keeping young people [who come] from singing families in the tradition is the perception that Sacred Harp is old-fashioned.

[121] Ibid., xiii.

[122] Ibid., 7.

Inclusion in a widely-released movie...served to combat this sense. At the first two sessions of Camp Fasola, almost all of the young people were from singing families…"[123]

It commenced in Alabama in 2003, and two sessions have been held each summer since 2008. Popular demand led to the addition of Camp Fasola Europe beginning in 2012 near Warsaw, Poland. Camp Fasola Europe has been held every other year since, and plans are underway for the upcoming 2018 session.[124] Funded by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Sacred Harp and Musical Heritage Publishing Companies, the camp is thriving.

One of the most straightforward ways to gain understanding of how contemporary Sacred Harpers are authoring their own tradition is found in the development of Camp Fasola. Its self-proclaimed aim is to educate and build community among the upcoming cohort of singers, presenting "an immersive experience for learning of Sacred Harp shaped note singing, history, and traditions. Multiple daily sessions are devoted to teaching Sacred Harp singing as well as times for singing, fellowship, and recreation."[125]

In addition to musical training, camp is now helping to build up the next generation of shape note composers, offering 'composiums' for informal group practice. A recent camper describes this "'Team Tunesmith' exercise: after choosing a text to set, each participant wrote a tenor part, then passed it on to the next person, who wrote the bass, and so on again to the treble and alto parts, so that in the end we had four communally-composed songs." Campers also learn

[123] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 163.

[124] "Europe Camp Information," Camp Fasola, January 03, 2017, accessed February 10, 2017, http://campfasola.org/europe-camp/.

[125] "About Camp Fasola," Camp Fasola, accessed March 10, 2017, http://campfasola.org/.

the basics of chapter leadership and how to arrange singing conventions. Discussion of suitable food offerings for dinner on the grounds is included, occasionally with a supplementary cooking class.

Camp Fasola is yet another example of the intersection of the Sacred Harp values of hospitality and tradition; understanding of and enthusiasm for this perspective are indicated in the following testimonial from a young British singer who attended Europe Camp in 2012:

> This is the closest thing today to the singing schools which kept the Sacred Harp singing tradition alive…Camp is not intended just for new and young singers, and this was really evident in Poland. A few of us had been singing for a matter of weeks, others for twenty years; some for about three years, and others since childhood. Campers embraced the wide range of ages and backgrounds that are a key part of what defines the Sacred Harp community.[126]

As an arbiter of tradition and practice, Camp Fasola is an ongoing source of Sacred Harp identity- and practice- construction. Since the tradition is an old one, it is not possible to learn it directly from its originators; still, lifelong singers, descendants of Southern singing families and leaders in the modern Sacred Harp community come to Camp Fasola to share its rituals.

Since Sacred Harp's unflagging emphasis on hospitality necessitates a certain polite quietness about customs, Camp is one of the few places where expectations for singers are communicated straightforwardly. In the setting of Camp, where singers come with the deliberate purpose of learning the conventions of the practice, the 'elders' of Sacred Harp can instruct newcomers without pretense: "Singing schools such as Camp Fasola...provide their established and respected teachers with an opportunity to speak more directly than usual….If similar remarks were made at a regular singing, they would almost certainly be interpreted as intending

[126] "A Testimonial from Fynn Titford-Mock," Camp Fasola, January 03, 2017, accessed March 15, 2017, http://campfasola.org/testimonials/.

to berate or single out a particular singer or group of singers."[127] This fact reinforces the inclusive, rather than evangelistic, nature of Sacred Harp instruction.

Here, important but generally-unacknowledged customs – such as the reading of shape notes and how to lead a song from the center of the hollow square – are taught outright. The availability of this educational setting for newcomers counters the possible characterization of Sacred Harp as exotic and mysterious. "Oral transmission is a familiar aspect of folk music mythology, often connected with assumptions about the isolation, purity, and antimodernism of folk traditions."[128] Though many of the skills and idiosyncrasies of Sacred Harp singing can only be acquired through participation, Camp Fasola functions as both a mediator of tradition and a signal to the public that the Sacred Harp community as a whole both welcomes, and expects, newcomers. Knowledge is acquired via both direct, spoken instruction and indirect, participatory learning.

Awake My Soul **(2006)**

Awake My Soul,[129] to date the only full-length documentary focusing on Sacred Harp singing, was released in 2006. Its producers, Matt and Erica Hinton, had begun filming long before *Cold Mountain* was in production; their funding and publicity were in no way connected to the feature film. The Hintons "did not move up their production schedule to take advantage of [media attention related to] *Cold Mountain*…[I]n the end...they found that publicity they had

[127] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 131.

[128] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 79.

[129] McGraw and Hamrick, *Awake, My Soul,* directed by Matt Hinton and Erica Hinton.

worked hard to get for their documentary [unfortunately] ended up featuring *Cold Mountain.*"[130] Still, *Awake* flourished, ultimately airing on more than 150 PBS (Public Broadcasting) stations, being featured in several film festivals and drawing mentions in *Time* magazine and others.[131] It is still the most authoritative, up-to-date media representation of Sacred Harp in existence, and is widely recommended by Sacred Harp singers to newcomers.

Recent Press

All these ventures – *Cold Mountain,* Camp Fasola and *Awake My Soul* – share a common theme. They, signify "exactly the kind of effort that had gotten the role of Sacred Harp in *Cold Mountain*...dedicated singers pushing open doors that had not even appeared to exist...."[132] Ultimately, such efforts have served to advance the values and practice of Sacred Harp singing and draw new singers into the community. As a result, public awareness and media attention focused on Sacred Harp has grown in recent years.

For instance, just prior to the release of *Cold Mountain* in 2003, the popular National Public Radio show *All Things Considered* aired a thirteen-minute segment focusing on the Iveys, a well-known Southern Sacred Harp singing family.[133] The show's host, Melissa Block, attended and recorded portions of the Alabama State Convention for use in the segment. The *New York Times* sent reporters to the same convention that year and printed a feature story on Sacred

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[130] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 164.

[131] David Van Biema, "Give Me That Old-Time Singing." *Time* 171, no. 4 (2008): 106.

[132] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 163.

[133] Melissa Block, writer, "Preserving the Sacred Harp Singing Tradition: Tunebooks, Shaped Notes and Full-Body Harmonies in Alabama," in *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, December 5, 2003.

Harp.[134] Regional journalism has addressed Sacred Harp, too; of note is a short video produced in March 2017 by the municipal television network of the City of Seattle, which features a local singer in a segment entitled "Art Zone: Kevin Barrans Explains Sacred Harp Singing" and includes footage from the February 2017 Pacific Northwest Convention.[135]

While the abovementioned reports involved direct interaction, other outside groups have 'sampled' Sacred Harp music *without* communicating with the Sacred Harp community. Jazz musicians Dave Douglas and Uri Caine included several Sacred Harp tunes on their 2014 album *Present Joys* and were subsequently interviewed by National Public Radio host Terry Gross for the popular show *Fresh Air.*[136] This story did not directly involve the Sacred Harp community. Though Sacred Harpers generally do not advertise or promote their practice, the confluence of aforementioned media attention has served it well, increasing its public familiarity and name recognition.

International Expansion and Diversity

Not only has Sacred Harp survived the test of time in the United States, but it is a remarkably expanding international phenomenon today with numerous chapters emerging, including a booming twenty-year-old community in England, and newer chapters in Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, France, Poland, Australia,

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[134] Randy Kennedy, "For A Timeless Song Style, A Chance At The Big Time," *The New York Times,* December 23, 2003.

[135] "Kevin Barrans," in *Art Zone,* Seattle Channel, March 10, 2017, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos?videoid=x71102.

[136] "Douglas and Caine Find 'Present Joys' In the Sacred Harp Songbook," National Public Radio *Fresh Air* Music Interviews, aired August 7, 2014, accessed November 17, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/08/07/338621619/douglas- and-caine-find-present-joys-in-the-sacred-harp-songbook.

Canada, and even Japan.[137] It is difficult to ascertain how closely the ritual elements of singing are observed in these burgeoning international chapters; as previously noted, scholarship simply has not kept up with the rapid growth. What information there is must be gleaned from online forums and Facebook group discussions.[138]

From these discussions, one can ascertain that American singers, both Northern and Southern, *are* traveling to international singing conventions – and are presumably working as tradition-bearers in these settings. American singers' travel abroad can be seen as a kind of cooperative enactment of the Sacred Harp value of hospitality, where international singers demonstrate hospitality by housing and feeding visitors, and visiting American singers demonstrate hospitality by integrating new singing chapters into the tradition.

The increased availability and facility of travel means that the Sacred Harp community is fluid and interconnected like never before. Miller notes that it is now "impossible to draw precise boundaries around Sacred Harp practice on a national scale…a small convention in rural Georgia might draw singers from California and be described in detail on one of the fasola.org listservs the next day." [139] Growth and ease of accessibility complexify musical traditions like Sacred Harp, which are suddenly finding themselves more open to outside observation, scrutiny and interpretation.

Changes initiated by technological growth have not, however, been wholly hostile to musical and social traditions like Sacred Harp. Rather, the internet has the power to support

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[137] See Appendix A: International Singing Chapters, page 116.

[138] "Sacred Harp Friends," Facebook, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/groups/288062357886428/.

[139] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 24.

originally regional folk traditions by facilitating communication and promotion. Miller calls the far-flung membership of contemporary singers the *Sacred Harp diaspora*;[140] she acknowledges that "the widened world created by new technologies engenders both the threat of extinction and the means of continuation - but continuation by a different community."[141] Indeed, while technology can foster communication within the community, it at the same time broadens and blurs the membership base.

This is certainly true in the case of a staunchly 'networked' tradition like Sacred Harp - one with a central location of origin, but with increasingly indefinite geographical boundaries and eager new singers joining all the time. Eimear O'Donovan, a Sacred Harp singer from Cork, Ireland, sums up the attitude of new international singers succinctly:

> I believe we are at a hugely exciting time in Sacred Harp history. We are right in the middle of an explosion of participation in places where, historically speaking, there have been no ties to Sacred Harp or shape note singing. Alabama, Georgia and the southern states of the US have the obvious advantage, with Sacred Harp singings there that have been going for over a century and families that have sung for generations. New England has countless connections with composers of shaped note music. Many of these tunes came from old English, Irish and Scottish folk tunes. But Poland? France? Germany? Australia?? We need to recognise the significance of what is happening, and what can happen next. [142]

It is difficult to determine the specific identity of a modern Sacred Harper given that membership is so varied. Today's Sacred Harp community is living, changing, and expanding, and therefore also conspicuously *diverse* in religious, political, social and geographic background.[143] Quite

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[140] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 87.

[141] Ibid., 25.

[142] "A Testimonial from Eimear O'Donovan," Camp Fasola, January 03, 2017, accessed February 4, 2017, http://campfasola.org/testimonials/.

[143] Broad social diversity among Sacred Harp singers is discussed in depth in Heider and Warner, "Bodies in Sync," 76.

remarkable, however, is that Sacred Harp singers rarely emphasize their own diversity, with the possible exception of exclamations of delight at the assortment of geographic regions represented at a given singing.

> [Modern Sacred Harp singers are] young children born into rural Southern 'singing families,; the Southern urbanites in search of regional cultural heritage; American folk music fans from college-age to graying; Christian and Jewish singers who have grown dissatisfied with their institutional religious experience; early-music lovers who think the open harmonies and straight-tone singing have a medieval sound; and young punk musicians who appreciate the volume, 'rawness,' and do-it-yourself anticommercial ethos of Sacred Harp. Generational, religious, political, and geographical differences would ordinarily prevent these people from crossing paths at all, let alone forming a tight-knit community. Their ideas of just what 'the tradition' is are as diverse as the singers themselves.[144]

The rapid national and international growth of Sacred Harp and media attention of late have been paralleled by increased curiosity toward this music from the choral world. This interest has emerged in a number of ways, with a string of Sacred Harp choral arrangements published and several recordings produced.[145]

[144] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 4.

[145] See Bibliography: "Selected Recordings of Shape Note Music by Choral Ensembles," page 127.

CHAPTER 4

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR

Earlier chapters have illustrated that choral culture has taken an oversimplified approach toward Sacred Harp performance. It follows to question *why* this is so. What exactly is the purpose of this detached stance? This chapter will examine this question, will serve as a foundation for further discussion of how Sacred Harp music might be ethically programmed, and will explore factors contributing to repertoire selection as well as the roles and associated responsibilities occupied by conductors.

Objectives in Programming

With regard to programming music for rehearsal and performance, three ideals must be taken into account: preservation of historic music, promotion of new music, and practical/educational matters. These pillars apply to the programming of any music, and certainly to Sacred Harp. [146]

The ideal of preservation has much to do with societal perceptions of the vitality of classical music performance. Opinions vary broadly as to whether or not classical music is in

[146] A brief survey of resources related to choral programming yields abundant results. See especially Thomas Lerew, "Programming for Success: A Study of Repertoire Selection Practices By Undergraduate-Focused, Religiously-Affiliated, Collegiate Choral Programs Nationally Recognized for Performance Excellence" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2016).; John Tumbleson, Jr., "Choral Music Repertoire Performed By Selected Colleges and Universities" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1965).; Tracy Caldwell Hunsaker. "Processes and Criteria of Nationally Recognized High School Choral Directors in the Selection of Performance Literature" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2007).; and Brandon Dean, "A Repertoire Selection Rubric for Preservice and Beginning Choral Conductors Based on Criteria of Aesthetic and Pedagogical Merit" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2011).

decline; a recent clash in the media illustrates this dispute. A provocative article was published in early 2014 by the news outlet *Slate* entitled "Requiem: Classical Music in America is Dead."[147] Within a matter of days, several heated rebuttals had been published contesting this claim. Vehement responses came from both hobby and professional writers, most conspicuously an article in *The New Yorker* written by a professor of music at the University of Maryland[148] and an article by the chief classical music critic of *The Washington Post*[149]. This fervent public discourse points to a larger issue and possible sore spot in classical music circles: that of historical preservation. The ethos of preservation does in fact inform much music selection, with an emphasis upon performing historical music seen particularly in higher education and professional settings. Historical music is repeatedly programmed to pay tribute to, sustain interest in, or 'keep alive' this repertoire.

The philosophy of preservation and its emphasis on history also applies to the repeated use of certain repertoire to mark significant events and/or create a sense of collective identity. A prime example is found in the renowned St. Olaf College Choir's designation of F. Melius Christiansen's *Beautiful Savior* as their "signature piece," performing it at the conclusion of nearly every performance. St. Olaf College claims that this signature piece, "forms a timeless link between four conductors and many generations of choir members, alumni, and audience

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[147] Mark Vanhoenacker, "Requiem: Classical Music in America is Dead," *Slate*, January 21, 2014, accessed March 29, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2014/01/classicalmusicsalesdeclineisclassicalondeath_s_door.html.

[148]William Robin, "Classical Music Isn't Dead," *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2014, accessed March 29, 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-fat-lady-is-still-singing.

[149] Anne Midgette, "Classical Music: Dead or Alive?," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2014, accessed March 29, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2014/01/30/classical-music-dead-or-alive/.

members." [150] In this instance and others like it, music is deliberately used to create a collective impression of legacy, history, and communal identity. Both in this and in the programming of historically noteworthy music, the conductor places value on tradition and preservation, acting as keeper or steward of history. Sacred Harp, when viewed through a historical lens, is sometimes programmed under this ideal.

A second factor impacting repertoire selection is advocacy for new or little-known music. This applies both to the promotion of living composers – where music is commissioned in an effort to encourage new work – and to the programming of foreign and multicultural music.[151] Programming diverse music has evolved from a fashionable trend to a standard practice in choral music, with a breadth of literature supporting its inclusion as a (musical and cultural) educational tool.[152] The ethic of advocacy is so significant to some that certain community and professional choral ensembles base their entire organizational mission around this pursuit. A recent example of choral conductors using the performance platform to advocate for neglected perspectives is found in a recent project of the Seattle-based choir Chorosynthesis which seeks to "bring voice to the silenced, the under-represented members of society, the oppressed, and the stigmatized."[153]

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[150] "St. Olaf College Choir: Frequently Asked Questions," accessed March 29, 2017, http://wp.stolaf.edu/stolaf-choir/frequently-asked-questions/#beautifulsavior.

[151] Rasmussen's discussion of multicultural music in America is pertinent. She claims that the issue of defining 'multicultural' music in the first place is complexified by the hybrid nature of the American musical idiom. The programming of multicultural music is discussed in greater detail in chapters eight and nine of this dissertation. Anne K. Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism." *American Music* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2004).

[152] William M. Anderson and Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2010).

[153] "Empowering Silenced Voices," Chorosynthesis, accessed March 29, 2017, http://chorosynthesis.org/esv2/.

Choral conductors sometimes apply the ethic of advocacy to Sacred Harp when they view it as endangered or rare.

Third, conductors sometimes – and perhaps most often – select repertoire on the basis of myriad practical considerations[154], including but not limited to: educational utility (how effectively repertoire applies to national standards and to class goals for the given academic year); artistic appeal (the ways in which musical components achieve programmatic variety and spark both singer and audience interest); thematic material (whether the chosen repertoire will fit the artistic vision of the chosen concert); and ensemble constraints (capabilities of the given ensemble and performance space in terms of size, divisi, and difficulty of repertoire).

Lerew observes, "repertoire selection must center on student needs to facilitate growth. Determining the repertoire best suited to meet students' needs while meeting the aesthetic requirements of continued performances at the highest level is a constant balancing act."[155] Practical and educational considerations are numerous and often become the primary basis of repertoire selection for overburdened music educators eager to supply students and audiences with music that balances immediate demands for both educational sufficiency and artistic fulfillment. Conductors who program Sacred Harp music alternately as a sight-singing tool or as a means for teaching American music history apply this third ideal of practicality.

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[154] See Hilary Apfelstadt, "First Things First: Selecting Repertoire," *Music Educators Journal* 87, no. 1 (2000): 19-22, 46.

[155] Thomas Lerew, "Programming for Success: A Study of Repertoire Selection Practices By Undergraduate-Focused, Religiously-Affiliated, Collegiate Choral Programs Nationally Recognized for Performance Excellence" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2016), 106.

The Conductor as Educator and Advocate

Understandably, repertoire selected for study and performance receives attention, while overlooked music does not. Thus selection of music for performance becomes not only a matter of the abovementioned factors, but also of advocacy and representation. Conductors have the authority to determine what perspectives are represented on the choral stage. It follows that reflection is needed from the choral community to determine trends in programming choices and the reasons behind them. Are the voices included predominantly those of historic or contemporary composers, male or female composers, Caucasian composers or people of color? When foreign or minority voices *are* included, how can one go about presenting them with integrity? Lack of clarity about our inclinations and purposes in programming can contribute to a sense of detachedness from the music we select, ultimately increasing the odds that of misinterpretation and cultural appropriation.

Choral conductors wear many proverbial 'hats,' as music educators, historians, artists and cultural ambassadors. As curators of the choral art and guardians of tradition, conductors do not merely entertain singers and audiences, but also educate them. This truth applies regardless of one's level of teaching. Elementary music teachers, for instance, are knowingly responsible for most children's first interaction with unfamiliar repertoires and cultures, and so consciously shoulder the burden of teaching their students not only about music, but about cultural sensitivity and the shaping of social stereotypes. While these conductors undoubtedly think of themselves as educators, leaders of more advanced ensembles may not always identify strongly in this way.

Yet conductors at *every* level operate as educators, whether they recognize it or not. Even conductors of professional ensembles, who do not directly teach their singers about chosen repertoire, still are responsible for educating audiences. The demand for this kind of instruction

is evidenced in the prevalence of pre-concert lectures and detailed program notes offered to audiences of professional ensembles.

Conductors must accept that to be in the privileged role at the front of the room, literally and figuratively, places upon them considerable responsibility. The selection of repertoire is a potent means by which conductors wittingly or unwittingly assume the inescapable role of educator, and this duty must be taken seriously.

Repertoire Selection and Related Responsibilities

Regardless of our thoughtfulness regarding this matter, our singers and audiences follow our lead and attitude with regard to cultural sensitivity. Thus, it is our job to select only music we can pledge integrity toward, using the resources and knowledge available. When programming unfamiliar repertoire, it is incumbent upon conductor-educators to model for singers and audiences both *care for our craft* and *care for other cultures*. Regrettably, conductors who dismiss this task overlook an important aspect of our roles as choral conductors.

> If the first danger of mainstreaming is simplification, a second is that it tempts homogenization. When we, as teachers, introduce dissonant musics and communities as neighborly, likable, familiar, or funny we can hook students' curiosity…But by rendering these musics nonthreatening and by presenting communities as people 'just like you and me' we can also ignore difference: the difference that we don't completely understand, the difference that might make us uncomfortable.[156]

The first step is a greater recognition of and conviction about our shared roles of educator and advocate. Additionally, one must be willing to purposely discard any hint of entitlement and instead adopt at attitude of openness and curiosity toward the unfamiliar.

[156] Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism," 305.

As previously discussed, Sacred Harp is both a written and oral tradition, with a printed tunebook that is widely obtainable and thus seemingly available for performance and interpretation. It retains the use of rarely-seen shape notes, which may seem to the uninitiated to suggest that it is indeed obsolete or historical, rather than contemporary and lived-out. Choral scholars have taken hold of this perception, treating Sacred Harp as a purely historical music.

The argument of unattainability is found lacking in the area of Sacred Harp research, where local singings, lively online discussion, and both recent and historic recordings are entirely within reach. When engaging with historic or truly foreign music, conductors and scholars must rely on secondhand accounts in their pursuit of authentic reproduction. Yet in the case of Sacred Harp, primary sources are abundant and convenient. Sacred Harp is an ongoing historical practice, that is, it is a living, breathing, growing tradition. Scholars and musicians who engage with only its historical or stylistic aspects meaningfully ignore the social, community and ritual aspects of this musical practice.

Conductors are uniquely positioned to demonstrate and normalize cultural sensitivity, rather than reductionism, in their communities. We must acknowledge the privileges and substantial responsibilities afforded us by our position, programming with increased cultural awareness and commitment to interacting with unfamiliar repertoire with greater depth and integrity.

Performing Participatory Music

Modern concert performance, although accepted as the prevailing tradition, is a "relatively modern phenomenon that has accompanied the rise to power of the Western industrial

middle classes and articulates their values."[157] These performance values include technical prowess, elevated status of performer, and physical separation of performer and listener. Though we interpret these precepts as the norm in Western art music, indeed they are not.

Crawford beautifully conveys the distinctions in our contemporary music scene by defining "'the classical sphere,' which 'strives for *transcendence*,' 'the popular sphere,' which 'pursues *accessibility*,' and 'folk music,' which 'seeks *continuity.* "'[158] His classifications are not rigid, but convergent; Sacred Harp, which seeks transcendence, accessibility, *and* continuity, could be said to unite all three. Two discrete kinds of music-making can be delineated: firstly, *performance music*, which implies a performer-listener binary; and secondly, *participatory music*: music not intended for performance, but rather for collective participation.

Defining Performance Music

Contemporary classical performance has evolved into a kind of unidirectional interaction in which the audience is to remain visibly uninvolved with the performer.

> A flowchart of communication…might show arrows pointing from composer to performers and a multitude of arrows pointing from performers to as many listeners as are present; but what it will not show is any arrow pointing in the reverse direction, indicating feedback from listener to performers and certainly not to composer (who in any case is probably dead and so cannot possibly receive any feedback). Nor would it show any that ran from listener to listener; no interaction is assumed there.[159]

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[157] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 133.

[158] Richard Crawford, "Introduction," in *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2005), ix.

[159] Small, *Musicking,* 6.

A suspension of overt interaction between the musicians and audience is routine in classical performance. There is "a clear and rigid distinction between musical participants (the performers, sound engineers, presenters) and the essentially non-participatory musical spectators (the listener or the audience)."[160] However, other popular genres often encourage a more energetic response, so that within the category of *performance music* there exists a spectrum of variation regarding the level of interaction encouraged between performer and listener. Imagine, for instance, a rock concert given in a park or a combo performing in a jazz club. In less-prescribed, more socially flexible environments, "the formality of the classical conventions is not found… the people on stage are not as psychologically separated from those in the audience."[161] Furthermore, musical scores are often secondary or absent, and performer improvisation and interaction with the audience are valued as part of the experience.

Then again, consider a musicmaking environment where *every* person in the room is a performer. This leads us to a definition and examination of participatory music.

Defining Participatory Music

In participatory music, all persons present are part of the musicmaking process. The borderlines between performer and audience are "blurred, even to the point of becoming nonexistent…In some settings (e.g., gospel worship, traditional or tribal rituals), everyone present fulfills the role of performer."[162] Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody succinctly summarize the distinction between performance versus participatory music:

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[160] Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody, *Psychology for Musicians*, 228- 229.

[161] Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody, *Psychology for Musicians,*167.

[162] Ibid., 236.

> What [traditional music, including lullabies, games, work music, dance music, ceremonial and festival music, battle music, etc.] …have in common is that they are participatory and social in nature, and they bind people together in joint activity. In many situations, music is owned by whoever is present in the situation…Even where some members of a group may be given status as specialized musicians, everyone present can join in the music, leaving virtually no bystanders…Participatory cultures are, in fact, the norm in the world's history. Even the Western classical tradition was probably more participatory 150 years ago than it is now, partly because the music performed was music of the time.[163]

Many individuals do not engage in participatory musicmaking on a regular basis, meaning that their everyday experiences are with *performance* rather than *participatory music.* This leads to a shared supposition that music is meant for performance, a notion that likely colors interpretations of nonperformance music. An examination of the assumptions and expectations brought to musicmaking in general must follow.

Here this paper will narrow its focus from *performance music* in general to choral music in particular, looking at the ways in which performance-oriented choral singing and Sacred Harp singing are alike and unalike. Choral singing shares certain identifiable parallels with and differences from Sacred Harp, as identified in Figure 5 below:

Identified Custom or Value	Usual Representation in Choral Singing	Usual Representation in Sacred Harp
Configuration	Singers are arranged in rows, with the piano and conductor at the front of the room and the audience to the conductor's back.	Singers arrange themselves in a hollow square. Song leaders take turns in the center of the hollow square; no space is set aside for an audience.
Singers' stance	Singers and the conductor generally stand; pianist and audience members are seated.	Singers remain seated to sing. Only the song leader stands.
Preparation for singing	Most choirs 'warm up' with vocal exercises and physical stretches.	Sacred Harp singers prepare to sing only by greeting one another.

[163] Ibid., 228- 229.

Use of musical scores	Singers generally use music in rehearsal and may either use music or memorize to perform. In performance, the use of black folders is common.	Singers use music (their own or loaner books) during singing. Some sing from memory but still hold their scores.
Song Leading	A consistent leader, separate from the group of singers, is identified as the conductor. This person is responsible not only for leading singing in rehearsal and performance, but directing the pace of rehearsals and polishing the group's performance.	In a democratic fashion, song leaders rotate from within the group, then rejoin the singing. No critique of the group's singing is offered.
Participants	In most choirs, the roster of participants is consistent for the given artistic season or academic year.	Participants are generally based on the geographic region of a singing and can vary widely from singing to singing. Visitors are always welcomed so that the roster of singers is always in flux.
Repertoire	The conductor is responsible for selecting repertoire. Music is usually set aside after the culminating performance or end of the educational term.	Each song leader selects the tune they wish to lead from the book. It is generally agreed that a song will not be repeated in a given singing.
Vocal parts	Vocal parts are generally assigned by the conductor based on singers' audition or self-identification.	Singers select the part they wish to sing. While most remain in their chosen section, one's selection can change from singing to singing.

Figure 5. Practical Distinctions Between Choral and Sacred Harp Singing.

The quality of choral performance is assessed on the basis of a wide range of factors by its singers, conductors and audience members. (Choral competition judging forms often struggle to illustrate the ideals of the choral craft and the many considerations therein.) These categories are comprehensive and can include both musical factors -such as rhythmic accuracy, intonation, and

vocal tone – and nonmusical factors – such as expressivity and professional presentation. Style preferences vary widely within the choral community.

Despite varying preferences around style, it is widely agreed upon that a successful choral performance depends upon the singers' ability to reliably implement what was practiced in rehearsal. Presentation for an audience is a primary orientation. In general, choir rehearsals carry the express goal of refining group singing in preparation for a culminating performance. To this end, an emphasis is placed upon learning the score's text, notes and rhythms and performing them accurately. Correspondingly, the classical music community appraises performance on the consistent execution of technical and aesthetic excellence. These elements of choral performance practice and assessment are equally foundational to choral singing as Sacred Harp's procedural customs and social values.

The performance-orientation of most choral singing – the fact of its being a *performance music* – is in direct opposition to the essentially egalitarian attitude of Sacred Harp singing – a deliberately *participatory music.* These disparities raise important issues for those attempting to transplant Sacred Harp into concert settings. Careful consideration of participatory music guides one to question the *purpose* of musicmaking itself. How can representations of participatory music be evaluated if the foundational concepts motivating musicmaking are not in agreement? In the discussion of participatory music, conventional methods for gauging quality do not suffice.

Christopher Small argues that music performances should not be evaluated on technical or aesthetic aspects but rather, on their *ability to articulate group identity*. Music "has always functioned so powerfully as a means of social definition and self-definition...musical performance articulates the values of a specific social group…and no kind of performance is any

more universal or absolute than any other. All are to be judged, if judged at all, on their efficacy in articulating those values."[164] Conductors must consider the complexities of social values and context when programming music from participatory music traditions. To perform Sacred Harp and other participatory music without careful consideration of their ritual elements is inadequate.

The Search for Authenticity in Performances of Multicultural Music

Even as academic circles have expanded to include the study and performance of multicultural music, oversimplification of diverse cultures and practices has persisted, creating division rather than integration. Rasmussen calls this phenomenon the "institutionalization of exclusion."[165] She describes the paradox thoughtfully:

> At the college level...while we have adapted our curricula to incorporate the global…we are ready to admit that such 'other' phenomena can be found right here in America but our academic structures - both curricula and texts - assure that it is 'visiting', 'imported,' 'exotic,' 'different,' 'immigrant,' certainly not mainstream.... As a scholar and a teacher I have wondered: How long until a music, a religion, a food, gets its green card? Fifty years? Seventy-five years? One hundred fifty years? What will our American music curriculum look like a century from now?[166]

In utilizing diverse repertoires, many issues arise, including those of accuracy and authenticity. This issue is compounded when conductors relocate participatory music into performance settings and attempt to achieve authenticity through the use of performance practice guides created by outsiders to the tradition being represented. A prime example is found in the choral community's approach to Sacred Harp singing.

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[164] Small, *Musicking,* 133.

[165] Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism," 298- 299.

[166] Ibid., 297.

The Issue of Performance Practice Guides Written by Outsiders

In addition to choral scholars' widespread lack of familiarity with the living Sacred Harp community, certain barriers exist that tend to discourage dialogue between the two groups. These center around issues of style and vocal technique. The choral community has had two apparently paradoxical reactions to Sacred Harp music: 1.) folk-fascination drawing interest in Sacred Harp as a quaint historical artefact and 2.) uncertainty about the raucous vocal style used, and how to reconcile it with current vocal pedagogy. Westerbeck exhibits the attitude of many choral conductors when she suggests that Sacred Harp can be used pedagogically as a demonstration of what *not* to do. "Much of the Sacred Harp singing style seems completely contrary to 'good' choral technique... Since contrast is an effective means of making a point, this kind of anti-technique can actually highlight the value of many of the traditional techniques normally encouraged by choral conductors."[167]

The unsatisfactory, but generally agreed upon solution to this issue among the choral community has been to mitigate pedagogical and stylistic uncertainty through oversimplified guides to performance practice. Desiring to utilize this obscure repertoire but lacking direct communication with its community, choral authors have settled for merely *describing* the Sacred Harp singing style, thereby diluting it not only musically, but also culturally. This has been done in order that Sacred Harp singing might be emulated for performance purposes – to approximate a replication of the novel sound. What is patently missing from recent scholarship is a meaningful attempt to grapple with the complexities of not just this music, but this community. Unfortunately, this approach has characterized recent scholarship on Sacred Harp from the choral community.

[167] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 73.

For those who do not identify as Sacred Harp singers to attempt to mediate the public's interaction with this music without involving Sacred Harp singers themselves is in blatant disregard to the community. Sacred Harp's recent growth means that this practice is accessible to most, regardless of locale, who take the time to look. Hence, to adopt the guise of authenticity in performance without actually attempting to learn from or interact with the welcoming, accessible nearby community is irresponsible and culturally-uninformed.

Numerous choral scholars suggest attending a Sacred Harp singing, yet seemingly contradict themselves by attempting to describe the practice simplistically, thereby implicitly endorsing the disengaged reproduction of it. This approach is inadequate: "If one could reconstruct the tradition from notation, one wouldn't need to travel, learn from lifelong singers, or otherwise participate in the national community."[168] When performance practice guides are created by those outside the community (and particularly without the collaboration of the community), the insinuation is that readers need not consult the living tradition. Authors promoting *imitation* rather than *interaction* unwittingly perpetuate an abundant history of fascination with the folk-exotic, and coincidentally sanction the blind simulation of what is truthfully a living, local tradition.

Using Existing Models

It is acknowledged that the performance of participatory music is commonplace in choral music, and this dissertation does not categorically advocate against this practice. As groundwork for the discussion of performing Sacred Harp, the next section explores the choral community's

[168] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 106.

approach to other frequently-performed participatory musics, including liturgical music and African-American spirituals.

Liturgical Music as Participatory Music

A discussion of participatory music would be incomplete without mention of liturgical music. This classification applies widely to all music originally written for the purpose of participatory communal worship. To use this repertoire out of its ritual context is so common as to be unexceptional; it is done without great concern. The performance of liturgical music is so normalized as to be a nonissue for most. In addition, originally-liturgical music unquestionably constitutes a large body of the choral repertoire, so that to prohibit it from performance would be a great blow.

Liturgical music ranges from historic repertoire originally performed in worship settings – such as the cantatas of J.S. Bach – to contemporary religious music meant to be programmed interchangeably in sacred and secular venues. In the case of historic liturgical music, the choral community most often takes an academic approach; because it is historic, most do not think of this music as participatory.

Boundaries delineating liturgical ritual vary amongst religious sects, and it is widely agreed that recreation of worship rituals should not be attempted in performance. So, conductors focus upon the replication of musical rather than ritual aspects of the musicmaking. Authenticity is sought through the study of historic documents and the recreation of historic instruments and performance practices. One can easily locate performances whose objective is to most closely mirror the musical descriptions provided in historic written record. In the case of historically-informed performance, it is important to note that conductors deal exclusively with music created

by and originally performed by the deceased. Thus a necessary compromise is made when one elects to study historic documents to better understand and approximate authentic performance; living resources simply are not available.

African-American Spirituals as Participatory Music

African-American spirituals have also become a mainstay of choral performance. Though they are now an unsurprising appearance in concert settings, their performance still is not without complexity. Early editions of African-American spirituals often utilized dialects to guide pronunciation that essentialized the speaking style of black folk, and spirituals have frequently been trivialized as novelty items, programmed particularly at the end of concerts.[169] They are also unique in that modern arrangements of spirituals are simply a reimagining of what was originally a purely oral tradition. In his recent book *Way Over In Beulah Lan'*, prominent choral conductor André Thomas reflects on his early experiences singing spirituals in choir: "I must admit, I was not fond of these settings...As a young black man, I really didn't identify. This was not the black music that I knew…it made me feel as if performing this music gave white people a chance to make fun of black people...this music felt like a caricature."[170]

In addition to the cultural insensitivity that has characterized much choral treatment of the African-American spiritual, one must also consider that this music was participatory rather

[169] Thomas quotes an interview with Anton Armstrong in which Armstrong observes, "we often program this music at the end, and there is not a problem with it being at the end of the program as long as one understands that there are many other spots on the program that a spiritual could fill." In André J. Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007), 188.

[170] André J. Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007), xiii-xiv.

than performative.[171] Spirituals are just one type of music emerging from the larger genre of slave songs created from approximately 1619 to 1875. Slave songs consist not only of spirituals, but of field hollers, work songs, and a wide range of music associated with different purposes on the plantations.[172] Though often mistakenly interpreted by choral conductors in the same manner as gospel music, jazz music, and rhythm and blues, spirituals are distinct from these genres. The casual lumping together of these styles in an effort to create a 'black sound' "may be full of good intention; the result, however, is often an experience fraught with stylistic abuse, and ultimately, a mockery…"[173]

Greater accountability around performance practices of African-American spirituals has paralleled the advent of multicultural consciousness, with spirituals more often addressed as a legitimate subject of scholarly research and more outspoken discussion of appropriate treatment of pronunciation, movement, and vocal production. In other words, the discourse is improving. Still, respectful performance of spirituals remains an intriguing issue and topic of debate.[174] Thomas observes, "the body of concert spirituals…is a collection of music that simultaneously intrigues yet intimidates many choral conductors…often to the point of paralysis. Those who aren't paralyzed sometimes charge ahead without a clear vision of the piece, rendering a

[171] Anton Armstrong notes, "[spirituals] come out of folk music and they come from a people who were not performing." In Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan'*,193.

[172] Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan'*, 7-8.

[173] Ibid., 87-88.

[174] Joseph Gregorio et al., "Got A Mind to Do Right: Approaching, Discussing, and Performing Spirituals Respectfully" (presentation at American Choral Directors Association National Conference, Minneapolis, MN, March 8-11, 2017).

performance that fails to capture the intent…"[175] Thomas argues that conductors act as cultural "interpreters"[176] and urges his readers to recognize their responsibility to act with cultural sensitivity when performing this participatory music. "It is not enough to know simply the music. One must know the culture of that folk music as well as the history of its people, but most importantly, the music must be sung with a respect of that culture."[177]

Sacred Harp as Participatory Music

This dissertation does not wholly argue against the performance of participatory music – including the previously discussed liturgical music or African-American spiritual. Rather, this study advocates for more intentional performance of Sacred Harp music, rooted in dialogue with its community. In the case of historic liturgical music, living primary sources cannot be directly consulted, so written primary sources must suffice. Additionally, because African-American spirituals originated as an oral tradition, and recorded primary sources are not available, discussion with the living African-American community must serve.

Were Sacred Harp lacking an active community of singers, a similar ethic could understandably be applied. Sacred Harp singing, however, diverges from the abovementioned participatory music precisely because it is a living community with a self-authored written record. Chapter Five will detail the attitude and perspective needed when approaching the performance of Sacred Harp music.

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[175] Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan'*, 87.

[176] Ibid., 88.

[177] Ibid., xiv-xv.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDED PERSPECTIVES IN PROGRAMMING SACRED HARP MUSIC

This chapter will pose a foundational framework for using Sacred Harp music in choral performance; Chapter Six will offer practical and logistical recommendations. We have seen that previous writings from choral scholars have predominantly offered suggestions for effective reproduction of Sacred Harp singing style. This study differs from previous approaches, in that it emphasizes interaction with the existing Sacred Harp community as an essential element of the process, rather than as an aside. It does not suffice to simply modify diverse repertoires to our own interpretation without adequate effort to understand and communicate their particularities. Witzleben characterizes this outlook effectively, encouraging educators to adopt the attitude of both participant and servant to unfamiliar traditions.[178]

Entertainment versus Education

Entertainment is and always has been, unashamedly, one of the purposes of both participatory and performance musicmaking. To eliminate the aspect of entertainment from the performance of Sacred Harp should not be the goal; in fact, Sacred Harpers would likely argue that their own musicmaking is extremely entertaining! Still, it is possible to entertain audiences without romanticizing, oversimplifying or trivializing the cultures we seek to represent. This is to be accomplished by honing an orientation of respect.

[178] J. Lawrence Witzleben, "Performing in the Shadows: Learning and Making Music as Ethnomusicological Practice and Theory," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 42 (2010): 144.

A useful analogy can be drawn from historical fiction, in which two clear categories emerge: first, literature that seeks to entertain through imagination and imitation; and second, literature that seeks to entertain through extrapolation of thoroughly-researched actual events. The first category generally draws heavily on the author's own invention and cannot be relied upon for credited historic reference. Representation is based upon ingenuity, so that while this tactic may entertain, it cannot educate. An example here is found in the Charles Frazier's text – the book that inspired the film *Cold Mountain.* While evocative of the Civil War time period, Frazier's story is not backed by cited research nor based upon actual historical figures.[179]

The second approach customarily references authentic historical persons and includes bibliographic support for storylines; representation is based upon actual research. Because the basis of such writing is fact, it has the potential to spur readers' interest in factual historical events. An example of such an approach in media is found in the film representation of *Cold Mountain*, which was heavily researched to provide a realistic representation of Civil War battles and included details specific to the time period, such as shape note singing.[180]

An Ethnomusicological Approach

Rasmussen's comparison of ethnomusicology and musicology is meaningful to the study of Sacred Harp. She contrasts musicology and its "focus on repertoires and biographies" with ethnomusicology and its opposing "emphasis on process and experience."**[181]** While musicology trends toward the study of history, ethnomusicology is inclined toward experiential learning.

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[179] Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997).

[180] *Cold Mountain*, dir. Anthony Minghella.

[181] Rasmussen, "Mainstreaming American Musical Multiculturalism," 298- 299.

This mode of knowledge acquisition is especially useful for the study of all participatory music, particularly for music originating from oral traditions, where the notated score came second. Clawson touches on the uniqueness of Sacred Harp as an aggregate of oral and written tradition, noting that this combination demands learning through participation:

> Lifelong southern singers…rarely draw connections between Sacred Harp and other kinds of music and often explicitly disclaim knowledge about music or music theory...This strategy could function to define Sacred Harp as a classic folk music, in which knowledge is supposedly instinctual rather than learned. However, the emphasis within Sacred Harp on the written tradition of the songbook and the singing school tradition separates Sacred Harp from other musics, establishing it as a distinct body of knowledge, such that - especially in the context of the singing school - an expert on other forms of music should not assume him or herself to be an automatic expert on Sacred Harp and may even have to 'unlearn' previous musical training.[182]

Particularly in the case of an accessible living tradition like Sacred Harp, the dismissal of direct practice in favor of abstract study is disrespectful and detrimental to building understanding. In these contexts, learning is best accomplished via interaction. An ethnomusicological perspective and its corresponding regard for experiential learning must be applied to the study and performance of participatory music. Clawson condenses Small's ideas, noting that "music is never just a stable object, but the product of relentlessly social doings."[183] If this holds true, it follows that to truly understand unfamiliar music, one must participate directly in its "social doings." Outsiders interested in the music of an active community must be willing to take an ethnomusicological, rather than a musicological, approach – one based in an ethic of dialogue and participation rather than detached theory.

[182] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*, 95- 96.

[183] Ibid., x.

A Person-Focused Approach

Writing in *Psychology for Musicians,* Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody use an alternate angle and terminology to illuminate similar issues as Rasmussen. They remark that a "work-focused" approach, which prioritizes analysis, description and engagement with physical, notated musical scores (as distinct from their performed versions), has been "very dominant in the music education world during most of the twentieth century and has influenced the way people think about music in quite profound ways."[184]

They posit another means of thinking about music – a "person-focused" approach, which claims that, "every musical object or event is situated in a social context and involves human actors, their assumptions, backgrounds, and motivations. Musical objects and events thus have rich social meanings and purposes for all of the parties involved…No music happens unless it is fulfilling a purpose for someone, or is being used for something."[185]

The "person-focused" outlook is valuable in the performance of participatory music. It grounds performers and scholars in contextual understanding. To interpret participatory music through a "work-focused" approach, giving primary attention to written descriptions and notated scores, is inappropriate. It suggests an existence of the physical score separate from the music's ritual, when in fact the music and ritual are interconnected. Using Sacred Harp music stripped of its social and ritual context, without the input of its community, can be classified as a "work-focused approach." Whereas the study of historic music must employ archival documents to speculate about authentic performance practice, Sacred Harp music is not an arena for speculation, but is instead a living tradition.

[184] Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody, *Psychology for Musicians*, 225.

[185] Ibid., 225.

The use of unfamiliar repertoire for educational and performance purposes is not essentially problematic. In fact, to study and perform unfamiliar – even participatory – music can be instructive and broaden one's worldview. Rather, it is disregard for the repertoire's origin community that is of concern. This disregard is demonstrated when choral conductors: a. are indifferent and neglect to consult the living Sacred Harp community in preparation for choral performance, and b. when conductors and arrangers apply the title of 'Sacred Harp' to their own interpretive work. This second situation can have wider consequences. Unfaithful performances claiming the title of Sacred Harp can be misunderstood by audiences as authentic representations, thereby perpetuating incorrect societal assumptions (i.e., that Sacred Harp singing is a fixed, historic thing to be studied and reenacted, not a dynamic living community; and that rural Southern singing should be imitated for entertainment). A person-focused, ethnomusicological approach ensures that study and performance of Sacred Harp music will be conducted in a respectful manner.

Participation

Interest in and availability of folk and multicultural choral repertoire has bolstered conversations around cultural sensitivity in the choral community. Yet because much of this repertoire has geographically-distant origins, conductors have largely maintained a work-focused approach, learning through study rather than immersive experience. This "foreign-culture perspective has provided a rich cultural setting, but it has also both distanced and made exotic musical practices that can be studied next door or across town."[186] While this "foreign-culture

[186] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Soundscapes: Exploring Music in a Changing World*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2001), xiv.

perspective" may be necessary or applicable for certain music, it is unsuitable when applied to Sacred Harp.

Though often treated by scholars and conductors as if it were a historic or foreign, inaccessible by direct contact, today's Sacred Harp actually *can* be studied "across town." Since Sacred Harp is a participatory music, direct participation is one's best teacher, and can yield a depth of understanding inaccessible through written document alone. Today, a locale without a singing community is rare, and even those without convenient nearby singings can now interact with a vibrant online community ready to share stories, written resources, perspectives, and recordings. Guides for this journey abound and are not merely historical. The physical and technological availability of Sacred Harp singers means that there are no legitimate excuses for an isolationist approach to this repertoire and community.

Larry Gordon and the Word of Mouth Chorus

A commendable example of a choral conductor taking a person-focused, ethnomusicological approach can be found in Larry Gordon and his Word of Mouth Chorus. Based in Vermont and founded in 1971, the Word of Mouth chorus specialized in singing early and folk music and can be understood as part of the folk revival movement happening at that time. When Gordon introduced Sacred Harp music to his choir, he took seriously the responsibility to faithfully represent its living community. Besides participating in singings himself, he took the Chorus in 1976 to participate in the Georgia State Singing Convention.

Gordon describes the hospitality and rich tradition he and his singers experienced there, saying they were ""profoundly impressed by this and several subsequent direct experiences with the ongoing Southern shape-note tradition…[T]he singing itself…permanently altered our

approach to Sacred Harp music. We like to regard Sacred Harp as a live tradition..."[187] This musical pilgrimage and collective experiential learning showed respect to the singing community and offered the chorus' subsequent performances a kind of cultural legitimacy.

Two years after their trip, the chorus recorded an album entitled *Rivers of Delight: American Folk Hymns from the Sacred Harp Tradition*[188] – a recording which Miller says is regarded by the Sacred Harp community with "affectionate condescension:"[189]

> Many singers now contextualize *Rivers of Delight* within the pre-history of the national diaspora: an often lovely-sounding example of 'foundering,' of harmless and naïve folkie efforts to join a tradition the chorus hadn't come close to understanding…[T]hey warned me that the singing was 'prettified,' 'much too clean,' or sounded like 'generic Balkan choir singing.' But these same qualities had made this recording compelling to folk-revival fans in the early 1980s, and several singers credited *Rivers of Delight* with inspiring them to find out more about Sacred Harp singing…*Rivers of Delight* 'is like a gateway drug,' someone once quipped to me; 'most people can't handle the hard stuff right away.'[190]

Though their performances were not 'authentic,' Gordon and the Word of Mouth Chorus did honor to the tradition, bringing it greater visibility and ultimately, more new singers. By traveling to learn from lifelong singers, they acknowledged that the Sacred Harp community, not they, were the cultural 'owners' of the music.

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[187] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 162-3.

[188] Larry Gordon and Word of Mouth Chorus, *Rivers of Delight: American Folk Hymns from the Sacred Harp Tradition,* New York: Elektra/Nonesuch, 1979.

[189] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 166.

[190] Ibid., 166.

A Way Forward

As shown in the example of the Word of Mouth Chorus, learning about Sacred Harp through participation need not bear the ultimate goal of becoming a singer or holding a singing. Instead, participation and dialogue can help choral musicians more accurately and respectfully represent this music and community through personal experience of Sacred Harp style and social convention. Performances resulting from this kind of intentional engagement can, in turn, benefit the Sacred Harp community by drawing positive attention to the practice.

The Seattle-based Tudor Choir, led by Doug Fullington, provides a final model of an interaction-based approach. The liner notes of their 2001 recording, *The Shapenote Album*, are co-authored by Karen Willard, founder of the Pacific Northwest Sacred Harp Chapter, and indicate that the project involved communication with local singers.[191]

Foundational to the values- and person-focused approaches advocated in this paper is an attitude of humility and a willingness to learn on the part of conductors. When programming participatory music with an accessible living community in our midst, participation and communication should not be discretionary, but mandatory. Those who wish to use this music but elect not to consult living singers ignore an abundance of primary sources at their disposal. In short, the vitality of Sacred Harp singing compels us to learn by participating.

[191] Doug Fullington and The Tudor Choir, *The Shapenote Album* (Seattle, WA: Loft Recordings, 2001).

CHAPTER 6

RESTYLING THE CONCERT HALL:

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PERFORMING SACRED HARP

Guiding Principles

The suggestions that follow are not offered as a substitute for participation, but as an introductory discussion of the complex aspects of performing Sacred Harp. The written record of Sacred Harp should not and cannot be used as a replacement for participation; instead, the written record has the potential to bolster one's experiential learning. "If one could reconstruct the tradition from notation, one wouldn't need to…learn from lifelong singers, or otherwise participate in the…community…."[192] As a rule, conductors should defer to living rather than written sources, giving utmost credence to documents authored by Sacred Harp singers, rather than outsiders to the tradition.[193]

Applying Small's directive that musical performances should be evaluated upon their *ability to relay a group's social values,*[194] the social and ritual context of Sacred Harp singing should be in the foreground of conductors' consideration. This approach is admittedly antithetical to the standard approach in classical music and academe, yet is strikingly applicable to participatory music. Earlier discussion in this document has demonstrated that Sacred Harp is formed around the defining values of *hospitality* and *tradition.* A logical unfolding of these foundational

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[192] Miller, *Traveling Home,*106.

[193] As a novice Sacred Harp singer, I do not claim ultimate authority in discussions of Sacred Harp authenticity. Still, my parallel experience as a choral conductor and scholar allow me a unique perspective as an intermediary, promoting dialogue and advocating for the continuation of the Sacred Harp tradition.

[194] Small, *Musicking,* 133.

principles reveals the ensuing value statements – a sort of improvised Sacred Harp mission statement:

- All are welcome to participate, regardless of musical background or skill.
- Every singer is equally significant. Nobody is the 'star.'
- Singing with passion is more important than impeccable vocal technique.
- Tradition matters, because it builds community and legacy.
- Learning to sing Sacred Harp is a communal, not independent, process.

The interpretation of traditional procedures – the hollow square, singing shape notes, use of tunebooks – is examined in detail below; still, these concerns should not overshadow one's effort to relay the core values of Sacred Harp. Conductors striving to use a person-focused lens in their programming of Sacred Harp can and should allow these principles to guide all determinations about performance practice.

Learning from Sacred Harpers' Own Performances

If choirs would attempt to reproduce this music outside of its traditional ritual, why not use as a guide similar situations in which Sacred Harpers have done just that? Recent performances by Sacred Harpers can be used as a touchstone – an illustration of how the singing community itself negotiates the modification of this participatory music into performance settings.

Sacred Harp performances have appeared in folk revivals for decades, and further opportunities have led to the adaptation of authentic Sacred Harp singing into unusual settings. Sacred Harpers' inclusion in the film *Cold Mountain* and its associated concert performances – appearances at the Academy Awards, a national concert tour, and a show at UCLA's Royce Hall

later televised on the cable network A&E[195] - can collectively offer valuable insight. Each of these events required that the ritual practice of Sacred Harp be modified for a performance environment. Documentation of these performances is unfortunately limited,[196] but what exists is valuable and is referenced in the discussion that follows. The ensuing sections present a detailed exploration of possible approaches to Sacred Harp choral performance, organized by category.

Shape Note Tunebooks versus Choral Arrangements

Whether to use shape note tunebooks or derivative choral arrangements is a compelling and complex question, addressed only briefly for the purposes of this paper. Either choice has associated benefits and concerns. The direct use of shape note tunebooks suggests a performance that attempts a close approximation of Sacred Harp singing, while choirs singing from arrangements of shape note tunes have a more comprehensible argument for greater departure from the Sacred Harp ritual.

Tunebooks

Several versions of *The Sacred Harp* exist, with the edition most widely in use today being the 1991 'Denson book.' Other shape note tunebooks and correlating editions abound and are too numerous to mention in their entirety.[197] As the most popular edition, the Denson book is the most obvious choice for conductors wishing to introduce their choirs to Sacred Harp. It also

[195] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!*,143.

[196] Clawson offers the most detailed descriptions of the *Cold Mountain* experience available in *I Belong to This Band.*

[197] See Bibliography: "Selected Tunebooks," page 127.

the advantage of ubiquity in the singing community, so that those who wish to involve their local chapter would be working from the same written document.

The Sacred Harp has evolved according to taste, use, and the development of new tunes with each subsequent publication. The editing process within the Sacred Harp community is both practical and personal:

> Choosing which tunes to remove is a touchy business, involving both the popularity of the tune in question and the feelings of the composer's living relatives, if any. It would be unthinkable to remove a song by a living composer. The 1991 revision process included statistical analysis of Sacred Harp convention minutes to determine which songs were led the least. Raymond Hamrick, a composer and member of the revision committee, told me that the near universal adoption and praise of the 1991 revision was a matter of both pride and relief for the committee members.[198]

Composers from the Sacred Harp community have learned to write in the trademark style. With each subsequent edition, new works are inserted amongst older ones, so that contemporary composers' names are listed alongside those of William Billings and his contemporaries. Preference is given to compositions that closely mirror the feel and design of older tunes. For contemporary composers of shape note tunes, "uniqueness is something to be avoided, with compositional authenticity derived from *similarity* to older songs that are already established as 'real' Sacred Harp and from the experiential authenticity singers report in singing the new songs."[199]

Choral Arrangements

Choral arrangements that boldly assert the title of 'Sacred Harp' or 'shape note,' yet diverge widely from the original songs, are prevalent. Also important to note is the complicating

[198] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 96.

[199] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 98.

issue that these tunes are often disguised in modern choral publications under the headings 'American folksong' or 'American traditional,' making it difficult to decipher their origins.[200] Many arrangements offer no background to the original material, and most who do refer only to shape note singing as a historical practice. The level of detail offered varies widely.

As an example, Alice Parker's famous *Hark I Hear the Harps Eternal*[201] is a choral arrangement of the shape note tune "Invitation New" from William Walker's *The Southern Harmony,* originally published in 1854.[202] The score of *Hark I Hear* calls the music "Traditional," with the only reference in the printed score to its shape note origin being the printing, "Tune: Invitation; Arranged by Alice Parker." This is unfortunately misleading, since "Invitation New" is distinct from the tune "Invitation," and uses a different text from Parker's:

[200] See Laurie Betts Hughes, "Choral Arrangements of American Folk Songs: An Annotated Inventory with Selected Recommendations" (DMA diss., University of Washington, 2011).

[201] Alice Parker, *Hark I Hear the Harps Eternal* (Los Angeles: Lawson-Gould Music Publishing, 1967).

[202] William Walker, *The Southern Harmony, and Musical Companion* (New York: Hastings House, 2010), 303.

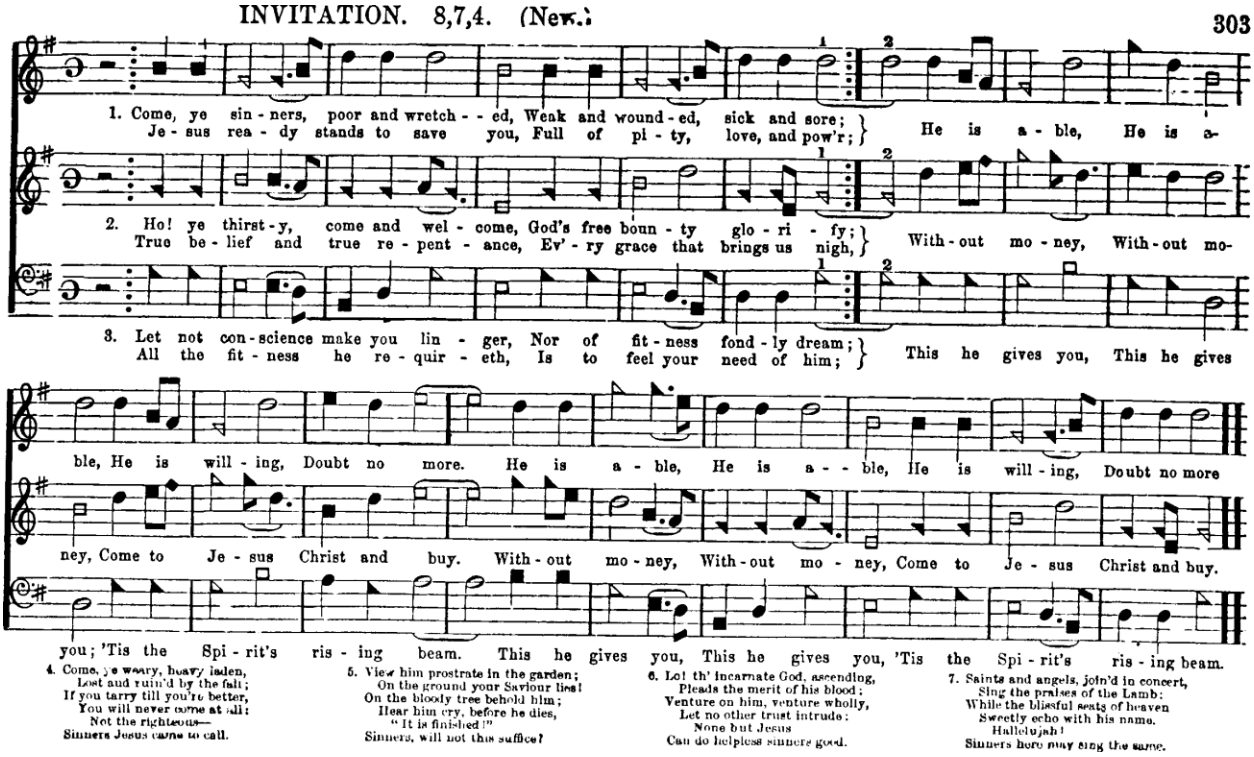

Figure 6. "Invitation New" from William Walker's *The Southern Harmony.*

A contrasting example is Rick Bjella's 2010 arrangement of *Idumea.* The inside cover of the score helpfully directs readers to the Sacred Harp tunebook and the tune's page number. Furthermore, the tune's use in *Cold Mountain* is referenced. Still, the information provided does not point to the modern existence of Sacred Harp singing:

> "Idumea" (1991 Sacred Harp, page 47b) is the Latin form of the biblical name Edom, which means "red". It is a hilly land south of the Dead Sea that is now in Jordan and includes the ancient city of Petra. When Moses wanted to enter the land of Canaan via Edom, the rulers of Edom wouldn't let him. The tune was used effectively at the beginning of *Cold Mountain*, the 2003 Civil War drama, accompanying pictures of the Battle of the Crater, one of the most horrible battles fought anywhere in the nineteenth century.[203]

[203] Rick Bjella, *Idumea* (Houston, TX: Alliance Music Publications, 2010).

At the time of this writing, no arrangements were found which offered direct reference or tribute to the living Sacred Harp community.

If one does elect to use a choral arrangement of a shape note tune, it is important to acknowledge that to do so is to take a further step away from the original practice. Such performances become a sort of hybrid of Sacred Harp with outside interpretation. Conductors must be discerning and selective in their choice of performing editions. Abril suggests, "the key is in determining how much can be lost before the music is no longer a reflection of the culture purportedly being represented. A tune that is significantly modified, homogenized, or popularized for educational, commercial, or creative purposes will yield varying results...educators must determine at what point the musical experience is no longer acceptable as representative of that culture."[204] In performances of arrangements, particularly those that draw heavily upon shape note tunes as source material, concert programs should supply audiences with basic information about Sacred Harp singing.[205]

As is true with any multicultural or historical music, choral arrangers and publishers have an opportunity to promote public awareness and cultural sensitivity. In the case of Sacred Harp, publishers can help draw attention to the living singing community. Something as simple as a direct reference to online Sacred Harp guides can direct conductors and choral singers toward reliable information and discourage superficial appropriation of the music.

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[204]Carlos R. Abril, "Music That Represents Culture: Selecting Music with Integrity," *Music Educators Journal* 93, no.1 (Sept. 2006): 40.

[205] See the section entitled "Printed Materials," page 110.

Orally-Transmitted Aspects

Orally-transmitted elements of Sacred Harp singing cannot be clearly communicated via written record, and include pronunciation, regionally-varying ornamentation, 'scooping,' and shifting approaches to accidentals (particularly in minor keys). Though some attempts have been made inside the Sacred Harp community to codify practice, they have yielded mixed results. Miller presents a representative anecdote regarding the issue of singing 'raised sixths':

> Many Sacred Harp singers - including some lifelong Southern singers…say that every tune printed in a minor key should be sung with a raised sixth degree, as in the well-known melody 'Wondrous Love.' Washington singer Karen Willard highlights this point by distributing an 'Anatomy of a Sacred Harp Tune' handout to new singers. The sample tune is printed with a bracketed accidental for every sixth, with the annotation 'traditional singers automatically and unconsciously raise the 6th note of the scale.' Willard also supplies a sheet of supporting evidence in the form of nineteenth-century writing on accidentals…With this sort of historical support, the raised sixth can be construed as a retention, an unconscious preservation of musical and cultural history in the voice of folk…Like the matter of *musica ficta* in early music circles, this issue is hotly contested. The crucial difference is that Sacred Harp singers have access to living 'traditional singers' - and to the argument that life-long singers who do *not* sing this way have been corrupted by exposure to mainstream music.[206]

She concedes that Willard's efforts have not succinctly resolved the issue; instead, the inconsistency is highlighted in practice:

> At most of the singings I have attended...there is enough diversity of opinion or experience that there is simply a semitone clash every time the sixth-scale-degree appears in a minor tune. This sound itself may be becoming 'traditional'; some newer singers now think of this clash as part of the signature sound of minor tunes…This is one of many circumstances in which the complex interaction between concepts of oral and written traditions is plainly audible in the singing room.[207]

Miller's example reinforces the idea that the oral aspects of tradition cannot be straightforwardly systemized. Because Sacred Harp is a dynamic composite of oral and written tradition,

[206] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 87-88.

[207] Miller, *Traveling Home,* 91.

interaction with the living community is vital and surpasses any knowledge that can be gained through study alone. Still, even veteran singers surely encounter a range of performance practice surrounding style and ornamentation, suggesting that this aspect of Sacred Harp is fluid and cannot be easily catalogued. Thus conductors can most closely approximate characteristic Sacred Harp stylistic traits through observation of and discussion with their local Sacred Harp chapter, and/or through reflection upon trends in recent recordings.[208]

Whether to Sing the Shapes

Learning the shape note system and developing fluency with it can take time – time that many choral conductors feel runs short in their rehearsals. In order to expedite the process, Westerbeck suggests, "it is possible to 'cheat' this part [shape notes]. Simply have the singers write the correct *fa-so-la* syllables underneath their notes and then 'read' them."[209] Westerbeck also advises the preliminary introduction of tunes using self-made editions that display round rather than shape notes.[210]

These recommendations are antithetical to the original purpose of the shape note system, which originated as an instructive method, and can be treated in this manner today. Early singing school masters saw shape notes as an indispensable piece of the sequential music-learning puzzle:

> [N]ineteenth-century tunebook compilers…advised students that the first step in learning to read music was to memorize all the rudimentary material [including the shape note system]. With that task completed, the beginner could sing various intervals while following musical notation...Next, the students could sing simple tunes without words 'by

[208] See Bibliography: "Selected Recordings of Sacred Harp Conventions," page 126.

[209] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 99.

[210] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 101.

> note' using fasola syllables. Once they performed the pitches and rhythms correctly, they could sing the tune with words.[211]

Ideally, choirs should learn the shape note system independently of the songs, so that they can eventually call out shapes with ease, as a Sacred Harp singer might. Simply copying the syllables into one's score will not do; this technique can, unhelpfully, prompt singers to dissociate the shape notes from the melodies and encourage them to learn the shapes only superficially. Conductors encouraging the superficial acquisition of these important Sacred Harp traditions also give a false impression to singers, implying that the customs are to be mimicked rather than learned.

The Irony of Rehearsing Sacred Harp

Rehearsal, though conspicuously missing from Sacred Harp singing, is inevitable for choral ensembles. Conductors can counteract the paradox of rehearsing an unrehearsed music by emphasizing Sacred Harp values mentioned earlier. This will mean minimizing one's own unilateral authority and creating a more democratic rehearsal environment where singers take turns leading and interaction between singers is heightened.[212] In accordance with Sacred Harp practice, overt evaluation of singing style and technique should be avoided, except to promote an energetic, vigorous approach. In place of critique, conductors can use repetition as a means for obtaining ease with singing shapes

[211] Davenport, "American Instruction in Sight-Singing," 102-103.

[212] For further information regarding involving singers in leadership, see "Song Leading versus Conducting," page 109.

Assigning Voice Parts

When first introducing this music to a choir, conductors should explain the fluidity of vocal assignments in Sacred Harp. This fluidity is based upon singers' self-identification of vocal part and is flexible if one's preferences change. Grayson's *Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing* is widely disseminated by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association and includes a humorously-worded, relevant section entitled, "Do you have a vocal identity crisis?"[213] Grayson explains, "for singers who come to Sacred Harp with experience singing in choirs…If you were an alto…maybe you figure you should sing alto in Sacred Harp…but you might actually be singing the wrong part for your voice and pleasure." She goes on to describe the special sound, range and idiosyncrasies of each section, concluding that "[t]he most important thing to remember is: Sacred Harp should be fun. If you're uncomfortable singing a part, or bored, or just curious, move around."

Regardless of the vocal parts they are usually assigned, choral singers should be emboldened to try other parts in Sacred Harp. Conductors must also be aware that both the tenor and soprano lines in Sacred Harp typically include both women and men singing in octaves. A brief description of each section, as follows, should be given to the choir, and singers offered an opportunity to choose.

Choral sopranos may be most comfortable either in the Sacred Harp soprano section, which boasts a relatively high tessitura, or the tenor section, which, transposed an octave up, approximates a mezzo soprano range. Choral altos could be equally comfortable singing Sacred

[213] Lisa Grayson, "A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing," Fasola Resources Page, 2012, accessed March 15, 2017, https://fasola.org/resources/Grayson_Beginners_Guide_2012.pdf.

Harp alto - which "rarely [goes] as high as most choral alto parts"[214] - as tenor. It must be mentioned that the famed Sacred Harp alto sound is significantly different from the usual choral alto tone. Grayson observes that the Sacred Harp alto is "grinding, wailing, ear-shattering low tones…characteristically piercing chest-voice alto (diplomatically called 'having an edge to it.'); if you sound sultry…honey, you are definitely doing something wrong."[215]

Choral tenors may find their home in the soprano section – transposing the written score down an octave – or in the tenor section. In general, higher-voiced tenors will find the soprano line easiest, while second tenors will likely prefer the Sacred Harp tenor section. Finally, Grayson points out that many choral basses mistakenly classify themselves as Sacred Harp basses when they actually should be singing tenor; choral baritones will be most at ease in the Sacred Harp tenor section. Furthermore, the custom of singing Sacred Harp tunes lower than they are printed on the page means that the Sacred Harp bass part can actually turn out to be quite low. For this reason, the Sacred Harp bass section should largely be occupied those who sing low bass in choirs.

As a starting point and streamlined summary of the above discussion, this paper recommends that initially, the following adjustments be made to choral section assignments:

Assigned Section in Choir	Section in Sacred Harp
Soprano 1	Soprano
Soprano 2	Tenor (transposed one octave up)
Alto 1	Tenor (transposed one octave up)
Alto 2	Alto
Tenor 1	Soprano (transposed on octave down)
Tenor 2	Tenor

[214] Grayson, "A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing."

[215] Ibid.

Bass 1	Tenor
Bass 2	Bass

Figure 7. Suggested Preliminary Voice Part Assignments

Once the conductor and singers become comfortable with the repertoire and are ready to experiment further, freedom in vocal parts can be approximated based upon the more detailed previous discussion.

Most importantly, the fluidity of singer choice and the stylistic distinctiveness of vocal parts in Sacred Harp should be communicated to the choir. Conductors may choose to intervene in the process of voice section assignment only to get singers started in finding their most comfortable range, and to make sure that the parts are somewhat equally represented for the sake of musical balance.

Keying

The 'keying' of songs is a delicate subject for choral performance, as it challenges widely-held beliefs about the importance of pitch accuracy and choral intonation. Yet, in order to sing Sacred Harp music as it is practiced by Sacred Harp singers, choirs should not take pitches from a piano or pitch pipe. Instead, starting pitches should be approximated either by the conductor or a trusted singer. This is not a matter of the keyer having perfect pitch; in fact, perfect pitch can be a detriment in Sacred Harp singing, since pitch is approximate. Instead, keying is a matter of sensing and relaying a feasible starting key for the given tune and the group of singers present. As in early music, absolute pitch in Sacred Harp is less important than is the key or mode. Hence, keying can be practiced in rehearsals to establish comfort. The keyer should sing starting pitches for each part, intoning the written shapes rather than a neutral syllable.

Audience Participation

As a participatory music, Sacred Harp singing is a communal practice in which every person present engages in singing. For conductors, this raises the question of whether audience members should be included in musicmaking. It must be noted that Sacred Harp performances associated with *Cold Mountain* did not involve audiences in singing. This fact is not necessarily a directive against audience involvement, but was likely reflective of the nature of the performances and their formalized environs.

To involve audience members in singing is to purposely upend their expectations of the concert routine; hence, a certain amount of apprehension is to be expected. To venture into such unfamiliar terrain also carries certain risks. In addition to the surprise of encountering the striking vocal style of Sacred Harp singing for the first time, audience members could be put off by being asked to sing. Done carelessly or prematurely, asking audience members to sing could have the negative impact of deterring them from Sacred Harp altogether. This must be managed with care.

It is vital for conductors to first build an awareness of their local audience. The question of audience involvement is a matter of knowing one's audience base and if their collective openness might permit them to participate. Not all audiences, in this regard, are created equal. Conductors should also consider the size of the audience, as both very small and large group may be challenging to coordinate. Audience participation should be optional, just as Sacred Harp singings do not coerce individuals to participate. All are welcome, but none are made to sing.

Westerbeck suggests that conductors "teach it to the audience, one part at a time."[216] While straightforward, this method is counter to the nature of Sacred Harp, in which new singers

[216] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 77.

learn experientially, through trial and error, surrounded by the immersive leadership of more experienced singers. In the case of choral performances wherein the audience is invited to join in singing, the choir will adopt the role of the more experienced singers, guiding the new singers (audience members) by example.

The shapes should be sung, followed by the text, in the ritual manner. Audience members unacquainted with the shape note system will falter just as newcomers to Sacred Harp singing do. To aid in the process and avoid confusion, a simple explanation of the shapes and their corresponding syllables should be printed in the program, along with brief mention of the custom of singing shapes prior to text.

A conductor who is uncertain about audience reception might consider first programming Sacred Harp music *without* audience involvement. Then, perhaps at a later performance, once the Sacred Harp sound is slightly more familiar, the audience could be invited to sing. Still another option would be to hold a Sacred Harp singing after the scheduled concert and invite interested audience members to remain. This final option should only be attempted if one consults and involves their local Sacred Harp chapter in facilitating the singing, so as to avoid misrepresentation or mimicry.

Configuration and Performance Space

Changing singer configuration is one of the most immediately palpable ways conductors can bring Sacred Harp egalitarianism into choral singing. The quintessential arrangement of choral singers in several rows facing a single conductor visually demonstrates the conductor's power and agency. When this arrangement is altered in any significant way, this hierarchical dynamic is disrupted. Varying singer configuration is a simple way in which choral

performances can move toward a more democratic tone – one consistent with the values of Sacred Harp singing.

Conductors' decisions about whether to involve their audiences in singing will substantially impact singer configuration. The written record of recent performances by Sacred Harp singers is instructive in this regard. Clawson explains that Sacred Harp singers performing in *Cold Mountain*-associated concerts originally wanted to sit onstage in a hollow square to perform, but the combination of space limitations and producers' preferences led to a different outcome: **"**Sacred Harp songs were sung by people standing in a rough horseshoe shape, not sitting in a square. The singing was therefore reconfigured for performance, but in each case the singers' amateur, nonchoir status was marked visually by their…occasionally ragged entrances and onstage blocking..."[217] Based on this account, conductors might elect to have singers stand in a loose horseshoe shape. While this arrangement omits the Sacred Harp hollow square, it permits singers to face one another more directly than the usual choral arrangement. If this option is used, singers should be encouraged to turn toward the center and interact facially with one another, rather than orienting toward the audience.

Another option for performances not involving audience singing is to position singers in a hollow square surrounding the audience. This configuration is advocated by Westerbeck.[218] It affords the audience the coveted position in the center of the square, where all the sound is directed and the aural experience is purported to be best. Conductors must be aware, though, that surrounding the audience may require displacement of singers at great distances, making interaction between singers a difficulty or impossibility. Directly facing the audience at center

[217] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 153.

[218] Westerbeck, "Sacred Harp Singing in Practice," 76-77.

may also have the unhelpful effect of encouraging singers to ‘perform’ rather than experience the singing more interactively.

Conductors must take thoughtful inventory of their chosen performance space and its spatial arrangement. What elements are fixed, and what are malleable? If the audience is to be seated physically lower than the singers, looking up at the stage, a hollow square might increase the sensation of separateness. In such a space, it might be preferable to arrange singers in the open horseshoe. If the room is set up like a stadium, so that the audience looks down onto the stage, the use of a hollow square is a more viable possibility.

Contrastingly, concerts in which the audience is invited to join in singing present different layout possibilities. If Sacred Harp singing will make up a large part of the concert program - such as the first half of a concert prior to an intermission - one might consider altering the audience seating arrangement to reflect this. Conductors might decide to pass out cards with each program indicating which vocal section audience members should sit in. Seats could be arranged in a hollow square, with singers interspersed or sitting in the front (traditionally leading) rows, audience members seated behind them. If interactive Sacred Harp singing made up, for instance, the first half of a concert program, the room could be rearranged during intermission into a more conventional concert setup. Some spaces, including church sanctuaries with fixed pews, simply will not allow for the reorganization of audience seating. If participation is desired in such fixed performance spaces, singers should either stand in a hollow square surrounding the audience or sit interspersed.

Each configuration option has associated benefits and shortcomings. Regardless, the participatory nature of Sacred Harp singing should be highlighted. A single directive that works

in all situations cannot be offered; rather, conductors must consider their own context along with the resources given.

Song Leading versus Conducting

The egalitarianism of Sacred Harp is especially on display in its absence of a conductor, and a discussion of choral performance of Sacred Harp would be incomplete without comment on this aspect. Trained choristers learn to follow a conductor - to comply with the conductor's musical selections, instructions, and gesture. While some ensembles have assistant conductors who occasionally step into the role of leader, choirs, for the most part, function with an individual at the artistic and organizational helm. Choristers do not take a turn at the podium.

These social conventions are turned on their head in Sacred Harp, where organizational leadership is shared and artistic authority rotates. To adopt the cultural aspects of Sacred Harp, even temporarily, conductors must be willing to step out of the role of singular leader. In guiding choirs through singing Sacred Harp, conductors must instead act as facilitators and educators. However, certain elements can be retained.

Conductors will likely predetermine which tunes will be sung in performance. If one is willing to be flexible, a list of Sacred Harp songs could be chosen and singers permitted to choose from the list in performance. This would closely echo the progression of an actual Sacred Harp singing. Conductors may find it helpful to designate in advance singers who are willing or eager to lead a tune. Alternately, singers can be assigned particular tunes to lead ahead of time. If one prefers to keep the order of the tunes spontaneous and allow singers to choose songs off the approved list, this might be printed in concert program simply as, "Songs from *The Sacred Harp*, to include: [tune names]."

Conductors should invite choristers to take turns leading the singing both in rehearsal and in performance. The traditional Sacred Harp hand motion can be used. Grayson's *Beginner's Guide* presents a detailed discussion of "beating time," including musical examples in various time signatures illustrated with arrows pointing up and down to indicate the direction of motion. She explains:

> The song leader has to set the pace and should beat time clearly while standing in the center of the square…when not leading, traditional Southern singers are more likely to beat time only when needed to follow the song or (especially front-bench tenors) to help the leader. Yankees tend to engage in recreational time-beating—nothing wrong with that…Leading or sitting, it's both traditional, and easier, to keep your movements simple…Whatever the time signature, think of the vertical measure bars as signposts at a series of hills to be scaled as you travel through the song. Your hand follows the motion of this travelling. And, as with hill travel, your hand will be at the highest point at the top of each measure.[219]

Today's choral singers are generally accustomed to the use of collective movement in rehearsal settings, so that to learn the simple up-and-down hand motion of Sacred Harpers will not be beyond reach. This is a straightforward way to maintain cultural legitimacy, and is also quickly taught. If attending a singing to see the gesture in action is not possible, confident conductors can demonstrate, or a video can be shown that depicts traditional singers using the hand motions.

Printed Materials

Printed materials – including concert programs, posters and flyers – can be a potent means of advertisement for Sacred Harp requiring minimal effort on the part of choral organizations. Since choral performance may be audience members' first introduction to this kind of singing, sufficient background information should not be casually omitted. This is a

[219] Grayson, "A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing."

crucial way in which conductors can acknowledge and give back to the origin community, making choral performance of Sacred Harp a champion of the singing tradition itself.

Clawson notes that during the *Cold Mountain* concert tour, "local singers were…given the opportunity to leave flyers advertising their singings at table in the tour venues. The concessions made to the performance medium were therefore lessened…with the local, nonprofessional aspects of the tradition…emphasized."[220] Conductors in contact with their local singing chapter should extend the opportunity for Sacred Harpers to promote their own singings in this same manner.

If conductors choose to involve the audience in singing, programs should include copies of the Sacred Harp tunes to be sung.[221] Concert programs should insert a short history of Sacred Harp singing and resources for finding more information. Even a brief reference to the fasola.org website (the homepage of the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association) will enable interested audience members to learn more about the Sacred Harp community from primary sources, and explore local singings if they so choose.

Final Thoughts

Modifications to the prevailing concert model when performing Sacred Harp must be weighed by the conductor, with consideration given to the particularity of one's choral ensemble, performing space, and audience. To disrupt the predictable, conventional format of performance in any significant way requires conductors to be willing to surrender some authority and accept

[220] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 153.

[221] Many Sacred Harp tunes are in the public domain, particularly those from older editions. However, if using a tune whose copyright is held by the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, conductors should first request permission to copy.

the initial discomfort of the unfamiliar. Still, to do so allows for a more accurate representation of Sacred Harp singing.

Alerting the audience to the presence of any unexpected interactive elements may be helpful. In fact, simply advertising one's event as an interactive shape note singing workshop could eliminate audience expectations around concert conventions and ensure that attendees came armed with curiosity and willingness to sing. Such an event should most certainly involve one's local singing chapter and might even allow for the inclusion of some of the Sacred Harp ritual elements, such as dinner on the grounds and a set-aside social time. Regardless of the chosen format, the reimagining of the external markers of performance should not dominate; rather, all procedural decisions should be made with the core values of Sacred Harp as their foundation and justification.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Sacred Harp singing is an ongoing, dynamic and living practice - both a body of repertoire, and a ritual; this study has presented the significance of these issues. Clawson contends that Sacred Harp singing has "importance and power not because of the individual genius from which it originated but because of its routine use, because of the set of traditions and understandings that have grown up around and through it."[222]

The programming of Sacred Harp for choral performance and conventional concert settings unavoidably alters it from its essential ritual form. Yet, as has been shown, the modification of a wide variety of participatory music has already been accomplished and is in common practice in the choral community. Thus, the ethos of recent literature that seeks respectful, culturally sensitive performances of such music can also be applied to Sacred Harp music.[223] Such writing discourages mere imitation and emphasizes dialogue between conductors and the music's origin community.

Though choral performances of Sacred Harp may vary in appearance and execution, the primary values of the community – *hospitality* and *tradition* should be articulated above all else. Using the recommendations and resources offered in this study alongside a personal engagement with one's local singing chapter will lead conductors toward culturally sensitive performances. This study has demonstrated that superficial imitation can be avoided through purposeful

[222] Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!,* 13.

[223] See especially André J. Thomas, *Way over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007).

communication with Sacred Harp singers and participation in singing as a means for learning style and culture. Conductors who recognize their own inherent authority and responsibility to honor the origin cultures of the music they program must commit to adopt a person-focused perspective – one that seeks understanding.

Fortunately, the radical hospitality and widespread accessibility of the Sacred Harp singing community, nationally and internationally, means that possibilities are rich for dialogue and, possibly, collaboration between the choral and Sacred Harp communities. This approach will ultimately allow choral performances of Sacred Harp music to be mutually beneficial to both groups, promoting public awareness of the living tradition of Sacred Harp singing while educating singers and audiences about this historical, yet enduring, repertoire and community.

Recommendations for Further Study

The area of Sacred Harp research is rich with further avenues of study not encompassed in the scope of this dissertation.

Further analysis is needed to examine the vocal production and style of Sacred Harp and to clearly translate the Sacred Harp vocalism to choral conductors using the language of vocal pedagogy and in a manner that surpasses cursory description.

Heider and Warner's application of ritual action theory to discuss the shared physical experience of singers[224] should be expanded upon, with possible links drawn between Sacred Harp communal gesture and other singing methods that utilize movement, including Dalcroze and Laban.

[224] Heider and Warner, "Bodies in Sync," 76-97.

Ethnographic fieldwork is needed at Camp Fasola, where an emergent educational arm of Sacred Harp is in development. Information gleaned from Camp could potentially offer choral conductor-educators valuable firsthand resources for how to introduce this music to their singers.

The history of segregation in the American South at the time that shape note singing was developed begs questions about the development of the *Colored Sacred Harp* and links to the negro spiritual.

Also, Clawson's story, referenced in Chapter Three,[225] suggests some controversy in the American South over the perceived gender variance of singers as expressed in their clothing. As gender comes further into the foreground of public discussion and Sacred Harp concurrently expands far from its geographic roots, research will be needed in coming years to explore how gender identity is constructed and mediated in the singing community alongside the public expression of inclusivity.

Finally, the relatively new international development of Sacred Harp is, to date, undocumented beyond the websites of singing chapters. This area is abundant with possibilities for study, from the translation of singing style and pronunciation to the transmission of cultural markers and practices. Additionally, the racial and cultural landscape of Sacred Harp is complexifying as it becomes a more international community, and this development deserves attention.

[225] See page 40.

APPENDIX A

INTERNATIONAL SINGING CHAPTERS

KEY: This is an alphabetical listing of international Sacred Harp singing chapters by country name. National websites, when available, are listed next to the country name, with local organization websites indented and listed alphabetically below the country. Each chapter's year of origin, if available, is shown in brackets after its citation.

For example:

Country [year of origin] (website)

1. *City* [year of origin] (website)

Australia (https://sacredharpaustralia.com/)

1. *Brisbane* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/BrisbaneShapenote/)
2. *Canberra* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/Canberrashapenote/)
3. *Melbourne* [2001] (https://www.facebook.com/groups/SacredHarpMelbourne/)
4. *Tasmania* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1672579549626119/)
5. *Sydney* [2011] (https://www.facebook.com/groups/surryhillsshapenotesingers/)

Canada

1. Montréal [2010] (https://www.facebook.com/groups/montrealsacredharpsingers/)
2. Toronto [2007] (http://torontoshapenote.org/wordpress/)

England [1998] (http://www.ukshapenote.org.uk/index.htm)

1. *London* (http://londonsacredharp.org/)

France

1. Auvergnes [2015] (https://www.facebook.com/sacredharpauvergne/;
   https://sacredharpauvergne.wordpress.com/)
2. Paris (https://parissacredharp.wordpress.com/)

Germany (http://www.sacredharpgermany.de/)

1. *Berlin* (http://www.sacredharpberlin.de/)
2. *Bremen* [2011] (http://www.sacredharpbremen.org/english)
3. *Cologne* [2015] (http://www.sacredharpcologne.com/)
4. *Frankfurt* (http://sacredharpfrankfurt.weebly.com/)
5. *Hamburg* [2013] (http://sacredharphamburg.weebly.com/)

Hungary[226] (http://www.ukshapenote.org.uk/Europe.htm)

Ireland

1. *Cork* [2009] (http://corksacredharp.com/)
2. *Dublin* [2012] (https://sacredharpdublin.wordpress.com/)

Japan

1. Tokyo (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595841193993047/;
   http://tokyosacredharp.blogspot.com/)

[226] The contact telephone and email address for Hungary's Sacred Harp chapter are provided on the UK Shape Note page "Singing in the EU." "Singing in the EU," UK Shape Note, accessed March 2, 2017, http://www.ukshapenote.org.uk/Europe.htm.

Netherlands[227] (http://www.ukshapenote.org.uk/Europe.htm)

Norway

1. Oslo (https://www.facebook.com/groups/oslosacredharp/; https://oslosacredharp.com/)

Poland [2008] (http://sacredharp86.org/)

Scotland (http://shapenotescotland.weebly.com/)

1. *Edinburgh* [2015]
2. *Glasgow* [2012]

Sweden

1. Uppsala [2015] (https://sacredharpuppsala.wordpress.com/)

[227] The contact telephone and email address for the Netherlands' Sacred Harp chapter are provided on the UK Shape Note page "Singing in the EU." "Singing in the EU," UK Shape Note, accessed March 2, 2017, http://www.ukshapenote.org.uk/Europe.htm.

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