Shape-note and Bluegrass Music in the Choral Curriculum: An Experiment in Implementation of Potential New Genres

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Abstract

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Bluegrass and shape-note music provide an important link to our musical past. When examining the diversity of choral music available for the classroom, shape-note singing and bluegrass folk genres are underrepresented. We should offer students a window into the origins and historical significance of this music and open the door for enhanced musical study and appreciation of the cultural importance of shape-note and bluegrass genres.

Bluegrass and shape-note music are both worth preservation and inclusion in the standard repertoire of any high school or collegiate choir. Both genres provide easily accessible material that can be tackled by beginning choral groups, but yet allow enough room for interpretation to challenge the more advanced ensemble. Inclusion of these genres provides the following benefits: improvisation, sight reading skills, technical flexibility, historical context, and collaboration.

The purpose of this study is to examine the history and performance practices of these genres, to develop a program for shape-note and bluegrass music in the choral classroom and to

evaluate the feasibility of this program by using it in a choral classroom. Choral directors will gain a better understanding of what benefits bringing these genres into the classroom might entail and what challenges they might face. By selecting performance practices and traditions best suited to classroom incorporation, it is possible to reap the benefits bluegrass and shape-note bring to performance and study. The nature of both genres produces a sense of American history while providing possible opportunities for cross curriculum collaboration. I found that the inclusion of these performance practices heightened the experience for both the audience and my students. Incorporation also yielded educational benefits. From the possibilities of shaped notes as a sight singing tool to collaborating with a diverse instrumental ensemble, my students increased abilities and skills.

Table of Contents

TABLE OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

A red oblong hymn book sits on my desk. Scrolled across the top of the book in gold letters is the title, *The Sacred Harp*, 1991 edition. The shape and dramatic title are not the only unusual aspects to this book. Upon opening the book, I am greeted with a rudimentary guide to music theory, and an explanation of a most curious notational system called shape-notes. Following this explanation are pages and pages of hymn settings; some are recent additions, but other hymns are 200 plus years old and are part of America's musical past. Works by prominent composers, such as Isaac Watts and William Billings, and beloved hymns, such as "Amazing Grace" and "Wondrous Love," have benefited from inclusion in this book. Their inclusion in *The Sacred Harp* preserved them for the enjoyment of future generations.

B.F. White and E.J. King, the original compilers, arrangers, and often composers, published the first *Sacred Harp* in Georgia in 1844. Of the thirty-seven tune books created between 1800 and 1860, only *The Sacred Harp* still enjoys an extensive following. *The Sacred Harp* is a constantly evolving compilation of music. Since its original publication in Philadelphia, the hymnal has undergone successive additions and revisions. During these revisions old music is constantly assessed and new music is added to the hymnal. The music is constantly reviewed for its style and compatibility with the original shape-note tradition. As each revision of *The Sacred Harp* is under taken, a few contemporary composed pieces are added. As recently as 2012, a new edition by Cooper was released for public consumption.

The Sacred Harp and its unique notational system continues to grow and be performed throughout the United States and Europe. On March 3rd and 4th I was privileged to attend the Columbus, Ohio 2018 *Sacred Harp* convention where over a hundred participants gathered from

multiple states to engage in the sacred harp tradition. During the same weekend, a similar group of enthusiasts gathered in Ireland at a small Quaker meeting house. Both conventions were recorded and live-streamed for a YouTube audience. The tradition has survived intact for more than 175 years in this country and the music compiled in the hymnal is even older. Its longevity, vibrancy, and historical contribution to American music makes this material worthy of closer scrutiny and exploration.

Shape-note music goes by many names; southern folk songs, white spirituals, mountain music, or country music are just a few of these names. The source material for the melodies comes from immigrant folk song tradition, spiritual revival camp songs, and prominent composers of the mid- to late 1700's. The tradition that surrounds this music is long and rich; it stretches back to the first Puritan settlements in America. This uniquely American output of music shuns the traditional European rules developed for good voice leading and part writing in favor of a more organic expression of music. The music employs dispersed harmony to create an other-worldly sound. Dispersed harmony makes common use of open chords omitting the third and does not follow the standard western European model for part writing in choral settings.

Music, like a family tree, takes many branches. Another even more widely known and popular Southern genre, suitable for inclusion in the choral classroom, is bluegrass. This genre utilizes several of the same musical techniques present in shape-note music but from a more modern prospective. This genre provides a mainstream access point to the shape-note style of singing. The folk family resemblance of bluegrass to the shape-note tradition is apparent in the vocal style and source material. Bluegrass music provides an opportunity to study the evolution of musical styles as influenced by location and culture.

No one has done more to develop bluegrass as a popular and accessible genre than the Appalachian musician, Bill Monroe (1911-1996). He is given credit for assembling elements from shape-note and other Appalachian folk music into the cohesive whole known as bluegrass. Bill Monroe's creation of bluegrass by melding elements of shape-note singing and other folk genres would have been impossible without B.F. White's preservation and compilation of the shape-note literature. Both of these genres were developed and have deep roots in the Appalachian region of the United States. Bluegrass, as with shape-note singing, makes use of the melodic material already present in the folk songs and ballads of the Appalachian region. Primarily from Ireland, Scotland, and England, these tunes traveled across the ocean and made their home in the Appalachian region where it was mixed with the influences of African-American gospel and blues music. Because this region was relatively isolated until the early twentieth century, much of this music has remained unchanged from the original European versions. Traditional unaccompanied ballads and dance music from Appalachia make up the core material. Bill Monroe brought into prominence the role of the banjo and the high lonesome sound in mainstream music. The subject material originally revolved around day to day life experiences on the farm and the Appalachian Mountains. Since its introduction, the topics have changed and evolved with the genre to include many other subjects such as love, loss, death, and hardship. Bill Monroe characterized the style as "Scottish bagpipes and ole-time fiddlin'. It's Methodist and Holiness and Baptist. It's blues and jazz and it has a high lonesome sound." Because bluegrass is relatively well-known, it is an ideal folk music genre to bring into the choral classroom.

When examining the diversity of choral music available for the classroom, shape-note singing and bluegrass folk genres are underrepresented. Performing shape-note singing or

bluegrass without historical and style considerations can lessen the music's impact. We should offer students a window into the origins and historical significance of this music and open the door for enhanced musical study and appreciation of the cultural importance of shape-note and bluegrass genres. Perhaps the issue with this music is the approach we take in bringing it into the choral classroom. To perform this music with vibrancy and integrity, we must understand the roots of the music and the history that brought about this repertoire.

Much of the population in American owes its existence to immigration. As immigrants traveled from various points on the map to make America their new home, they brought with them several things considered too valuable to leave in their lands of origin. Among those valuable assets were the culture and music that was an integral part of everyday life. Entertainment, teaching lessons and moral reminders were encased in traditional melodies passed down from generation to generation in a never ending oral tradition which constantly changed as each vocalist provided a unique perspective on the music. As the stream of immigrants continued from various countries across the globe, the various melodies brought across the ocean were mixed and merged to form the rich tapestry of music that became American folk music.

In the 20th century, a folk music revival took place with a renewed interest in our nation's traditional music. It was only a matter of time before composers sought out folk music as a potential source for choral literature. As the music has been transmitted orally, composers sought to change the music to a suitable form for choral consumption. There are many avenues to pursue when choosing folk music for the classroom and the difficulties with performance practice can be daunting. All folk music has vast potential to inform the vocalist and the listener about our past, but bluegrass and shape-note singing are two readily accessible genres to begin

the exploration of folk music and they have some very interesting crossover techniques that can be utilized for both genres.

In summary, this dissertation will explore the merits of incorporating shape-note and bluegrass music into choral classrooms. It will delineate how to maintain good choral technique. It will examine the currently available material and discuss how to maintain the integrity of the music in our choral approach.

Currently, the pool of shape-note and bluegrass music is limited. There are many untapped sources of folk music worth exploring. Even though parts of these tunes can already be found in our choral tradition, a list of approachable material and suggestions for performance techniques will be provided.

Through this dissertation I will present a plan for implementing shape-note and bluegrass music into the choral classroom and provide insight and guidance on making these genres an effective part of the choral canon. The plan will cover both technical issues (such as vocal pedagogy, choral voicing, stresses to the voice, performance venues, research issues, instrumentation) and stylistic considerations. An approach for bringing this material into the classroom while maintaining its unique character and flavor and performance practices will be developed for choral conductors.

CHAPTER 2. A HISTORY OF SHAPE-NOTE SINGING AND BLUEGRASS MUSIC

2.1 History of Shape-note Singing

The seeds of shape-note singing took root long before B. F. White and other 19th century tunesmiths began to mass produce numerous shape-note hymnals. The tradition of congregational singing that gave rise to the shape-note style began with the popularity of English psalms. The T. Sternhold and I. Hopkins, *Book of Psalms* imprinted by John Day in 1562 is one of the most popular examples of this genre. The book, *The Whole book of Psalmes collected into English Metre*, was widely adopted and used almost exclusively for the next 250 years.[1] The tunes were based on popular English folk ballads. These tunes permeated Christian religious life and became a fundamental part of worship services. The idea was to have members of the Christian faith sing songs with inspiring words and to avoid the more secular ballads of the time.

As religious persecution intensified against the followers of the Puritan faith in England, members began to look overseas for religious freedom. Their collective gaze settled on the New England region of North America and the pilgrimage began. The psalm tradition,[2] which had so dominated the Puritan way of worship, travelled across the Atlantic Ocean and took root in colonial America. The Puritans carried with them everything needed for survival including seeds, livestock and tools, but there was little room for the luxuries of English life. Music was one

[1] Irving Lowens, "The Bay Psalm Book in 17th-Century New England," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1955): 23.

[2] The practice of using sacred songs or poems during worship.

luxury that did not add weight to the boat and was of immeasurable value. However, the harsh realities of creating a new life in an untamed wilderness left little time for the pursuit of musical knowledge. Over time, the musical knowledge of the colonist Puritans began to weaken and there was a decline in the musical quality of worship services.

In 1640, after two decades of colonization, the Massachusetts Bay Colony published *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre*.[3] It recommended the use of standard psalm tunes that fit the metrical patterns of the translated psalms. Over 30 New England ministers contributed to the translation of Hebrew psalms into English for use in the book. The book contained lyrics, but not music. Since many of their parishioners could not read music notation and the psalm tunes in the book were commonly used, the pastors did not include the musical notation.

The Bay Psalm Book[4] was quickly adopted by New England Puritans and 17,000 copies were originally printed. Although the first generation of Puritan immigrants included musically educated members, their musical skills fell into disuse as the colonists battled the brutal conditions in the untamed wilderness. The successive generations found little need or opportunity for musical training.[5] Survival and economic progress propelled daily life. In addition, it is possible the immigrants were thirsty to form their own traditions. A new and fresh musical style influenced by the sounds of this new environment was needed.

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[3] Lowens, "The Bay Psalm Book in 17th-Century New England," 24.

[4] The commonly used name for *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre.*

[5] Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 57-58.

Psalm singing was the prescribed music method in the colonial church. It was chant-like and rarely had any instrumental accompaniment. Often the musical practitioners displayed poor vocal technique and failed to adhere to the recommended melodic path. A single monophonic line, devoid of harmony and with a slow tempo, characterized the music. Often, because of the lack of musical training, a psalter would sing the melody to the congregation in a call and response method often referred to as lining out.[6] Both English and American colonial churches used this technique.[7] Parishioner songs were learned by rote, since few possessed the skill to actually read music.

By the 18th century, Reverend Thomas Symmes and other high ranking members of the Puritan faith believed that music in church services had reached a disgraceful state. To voice his dismay at the state of music in his congregation, Reverend Symmes wrote a much publicized sermon titled,

> "The Reasonableness of Regular Singing, or Singing by Note. In an Essay to revive the true and ancient mode of singing psalm-tunes according to the pattern of our New England psalm books, the Knowledge and practice of which, is greatly decayed in most congregations. Writ by a Minister of the gospel. Perused by several ministers in the town and country, and published with the approbation of all who have read it."[8]

[6] One of the few innovations was the 1644 introduction of "lining out," a practice in which the clerk or leader spoke or chanted the psalm in call and response fashion, one line at a time, answered by the congregation.

[7] David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of The Sacred Harp* (Chicago: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 2010), 40.

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

Symmes and his contemporaries called for an increase in music education to address this music issue. They believed that singing by rote was detrimental to the musical portion of worship services and they called for singing by note.[9] Unfortunately, no system existed for music education and those with the skills to educate were few and far between. The concerned pastors called for the creation of singing schools.[10] By the early 1700's, two notable books that covered the proper singing of psalms and outlined methods to develop music literacy were published to answer the needs of the singing schools. These books were *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes* written by John Tuft and *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained* by Thomas Walters.

John Tufts was one of the first Americans to devise a system of reading notes that broke with the long standing European method and to publish one of the first American music text books.[11] Tuft's system utilized a standard diatonic scale much in the same way that we currently use seven syllables for the modern movable *Do* sight reading method. The scale from tonic to tonic is *fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, fa*. John Tuft's innovation to the fasola systems was to use the first letter of each syllable and place it directly on the staff instead of standard European note heads, as shown in Figure 2.1.

[9] Ibid., 7-9.

[10] Cobb Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music,* 58.

[11] Steel and Hulan, *The Makers of The Sacred Harp,* 42.

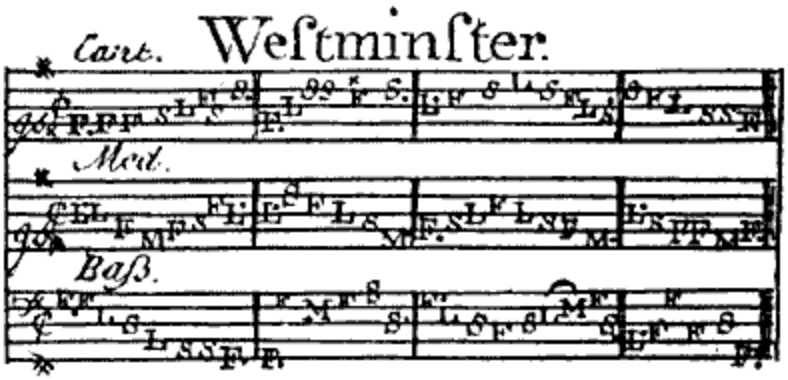

Figure 2.1. John Tufts, Westminster[12]

This *fa sol la* system of solmization did not originate with John Tuft but had existed in the British Isles as a truncated form of Guido d'Arezzo's original system developed hundreds of years ago.[13] The system's English roots made it familiar, traditional, and easily acceptable. His method was a new, quick and easy approach to sight singing. Tuft's innovation provided the first American step towards the development of shaped notes.

This renewal in singing by note instead of by rote had several initial obstacles to overcome. First, the majority of Psalm books lacked musical notation. This lack of materials forced congregations to use a learning by rote method. The next obstacle involved transmission of this new method. How could educated musicians share their talents with the masses and improve music literacy? What source material existed to give novice musicians something to practice their newly acquired skills? Pastor Symmes recommended the new world adopt the old model of singing schools to provide the dominate way of gaining musical literacy.[14] New and borrowed

[12] John Tufts, Westminster, *Westminster, in three parts with new notation,* (Boston, 1727).

[13] Van Waesberghe, "The musical notation of Guido of Arezzo," *Musica Disciplina* 5 (1951), 53.

[14] Allen P. Britton, "The How and Why of Teaching Singing Schools in Eighteenth Century America," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 99 (Winter 1989), 24-27.

music from masters, such as Isaac Watts, and notable folk songs, were taken for use in tune books at these singing schools. Singing schools were not designed as a brick and mortar structure. Instead they consisted of traveling musicians who travelled from one town to another. They used their musical skills to educate students and they promoted their own compositions for use in these schools.

The school teachers themselves were a marvel of American ingenuity and capitalistic engagement.[15] The original singing school teachers had very little music education; their education stemmed from hard working self-instruction. They saw an opportunity to make a living by traveling from town to town sharing what they had acquired through self-instruction and natural ability. Often a teacher would advertise through the local church system or newspaper that a singing school would take place for a prescribed amount of time and for a set fee, often referred to as a subscription fee. Classes could be as short as a single weekend or extend for several weeks at a time, depending on the town and the singing master's availability. During the weeks of instruction, the singing school master would supply the space by renting out a town hall, church or other municipal building and have all the necessary materials available for purchase. A small payment was made to the teacher, but the real money was accumulated from the sale of each master's personal tune book. As music literacy grew, singing began to function as a way to pass the time, especially for the young. The desire to have more secular material for consumption increased.

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[15] Garvin James Campbell, "Old Can Be Used Instead of New: Shape-Note Singing and the Crisis of Modernity in the New South, 1880-1920." *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 463 (Spring 1997), 59-60.

Singing schools served two purposes, first to improve musical literacy and second as a social outlet for young members of the community.[16] Many courtships and hand-fasting would accompany the end of a singing school's tenure in the town. This increased social aspect made singing schools an event that the community greatly anticipated and singing school masters were placed in a position of high social standing. Singing schools promoted the creation of many original compositions and tunes and the folk songs and tunes that had been brought with the European immigrants were recorded for posterity. Singing school masters, out of necessity, became tunesmiths. As singing schools grew in popularity, the need for more musical material grew. The school masters had to look inward for the music required to continue offering a varied curriculum.[17] These tune books became the basic manual for instruction in singing schools. Singing schools reached an apex in notoriety during the last quarter of the 18th century, 1775-1800.[18]

The singing school tradition had unexpected and positive consequences for American choral music. By mid-1750 the increase in musical literacy began to bear fruit. Professional musicians and choirs emerged and some of the early American composers such as William Billings (1746-1800), Timothy Swan (1758-1842), Daniel Read (1757-1836), and Amos Bull (1741-1825) were actively composing. These composers filled the need for truly American music by producing several choral compositions that still enjoy performance, such as "When Jesus Wept" by William Billings. Most of these composers were also singing school teachers. They owed their livelihood to advancing musical literacy. The music used for worship service in most congregations began

[16] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 60.

[17] Steel and Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp,* 36-37.

[18] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 59.

to increase in difficulty. Professional choirs emerged, especially in the New England region of America. The nation as a whole was developing and becoming more prosperous. Instead of merely scraping a living, this new society began to have leisure time. Time for entertainment became a reality and chorale singing, so ingrained in the fabric of society by this point, was a natural outlet.[19]

Near the mid- to late 1700's the enthusiasm for the New England singing school began to falter. A strong inclination for all things European, including musical style, permeated the middle and upper classes of the colonies. There was a natural desire to be accepted and viewed as equals, not as uncultured heathens.[20] Lowell Mason and Thomas Hastings, often considered the progenitors of music education in America, insisted on imported music from Europe and followed the strict guidelines for composition established in the European schools.[21] Both individuals considered this European music to be far superior in form and style when compared to the rough and often unpolished American polyphony.[22]

The rules for European music composition were either unknown or not considered relevant by American composers like Billings and Read.[23] Both composers weren't formally educated in music and, in fact, began careers in other fields. Through his social influence, Lowell Mason

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[19] Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong*, 19.

[20] Ibid., 20-23.

[21] James Scholten, "Lowell Mason and his Shape-Note Tunebook in the Ohio Valley: The Sacred Harp, 1834-1850," *Contributions to Music Education* 15 (Fall 1988), 49.

[22] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 62.

[23] Rose Dwiggins Daniels, "William Billings: Teacher, Innovator, Patriot," *Music Educators Journal* 74, no. 9 (May 1988), 22-25.

pushed the singing school teachers out of the main public spotlight. The general opinion of singing schools diminished to the point that the music itself was considered low class. The tradition of singing schools was forced into smaller towns and rural areas of New England and eventually migrated west and south towards a population ready to embrace the sacred nature of the fuging tunes and who were anxious for the social and entertainment value provided by singing schools. Southern pride in heritage and American tradition benefited the singing teachers and their style of American music.[24]

At the end of the 1700's, singing schools and the fuging tradition were firmly established in the Deep South and Appalachia. The interest in music fluency continued and new ways to increase the speed at which students could master the notational reading were developed. The crux of the problem is one that still exists today. How can an instructor appropriately and quickly teach the ability to read music from a score at first sight? William Smith and William Little developed a solution which they outlined in the book, *The Easy Instructo*r, in 1801.[25]

This new system utilized the *fa so la* solmization of sight reading with a scale consisting of *fa, so, la, fa, so, la, mi, fa*. Smith and Little added a visual component to provide three chances for the vocalist to identify the pitch accurately. This new system used shaped note heads to help the practitioners identify the correct *fa so la* syllable to sing. This system avoided the sometimes cumbersome issues of key changes that can derail the standard moveable *Do* system, favored currently in America. Another advantage of their system was that as the vocalist sings syllables

[24] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 63.

[25] Irving Lowens and Allen P. Britton, "The Easy Instructor: (1978-1831): A History and Bibliography of the First Shape-note Tune Book," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1953), 30.

or words, the shapes are reinforcing the quick identification and intervallic relationship between pitches. This system of sight singing allowed even the novice beginner to quickly latch onto the correct syllables; thus, the pitches followed and provided a triple mental association that linked the notes of a scale to a syllable and a shape,[26] as shown below in Figure 2.2.

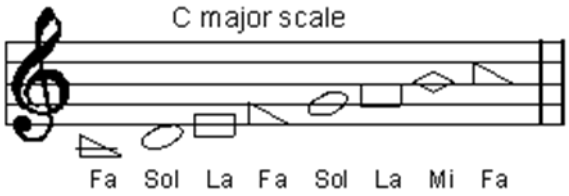

Figure 2.2. Taken from: http://ncshapenote.org/what.shtml

Several other systems of notation arose during this time period including one that utilized the more traditional solfege system, but the four shape-note system developed by Smith and Little was utilized by many hymnal compilers of the early and mid-1800's. Eventually, the European movable *do* solfege system was adopted into the public schools, but in the South, the four shape notation lived on in *The Sacred Harp* tradition.[27]

By 1815, collections of southern singing school compositions had merged with the four shape-note system and found their way into one of the first successful compilations, *The Kentucky Harmony*.[28] Several tune books followed in the early 1800's such as the *Virginia Harmony* (1831), *Missouri Harmony* (1820), *Union Harmony* (1837), and William Walker's *Southern Harmony* (1835). All of these tune books incorporated shape-note singing into their

[26] Ibid., 31-35.

[27] Cobb Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 62.

[28] Ibid., 66.

music. Although referred to as "Dunce Notes" by Lowell Mason and disdained as an inferior model of sight reading, the shape-note style flourished in the South and helped many towards music fluency.[29]

These new tune books were used primarily as a pedagogical tool and repository for music. The original model for singing school masters continued in the southern United States. Singing school masters would compile and sell tune books such as *The Kentucky Harmony* as part of a singing school to be used as the text book. Most tune books included rudimentary examples of how one should approach the music and how to interpret the shape-notes and rhythms that would be found in the hymns.[30]

Folk hymns, fuging tunes and anthems were typically incorporated into the new tune books. The folk hymn could be broken down into three categories: an original melody composed in folk song style, a tune composed of preexisting melodic fragments which had been rewritten with religious lyrics and a tune that was taken directly from an old secular source and repurposed to serve in the tune book by reworking the lyrics to fit a more religious context.[31,32] Fuging tunes, perhaps the most popular compositions in the tune books, followed a set formula for composition. These traditionally start with a homophonic section that cadences on tonic and is

[29] Scholten, "Lowell Mason and his Shape-Note Tunebook in the Ohio Valley: The Sacred Harp 1834-1850," 49.

[30] Allen P. Britton, "The How and Why of Teaching Singing Schools in Eighteenth Century America," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 99 (Winter 1989), 24.

[31] James Scholten, "The Tune book that roars: The Sound and Style of Sacred Harp Singing." *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 6 (Feb., 1980), 34.

[32] An example of this last type would be the hymn, "Wondrous Love," which was originally an old British Isle sea chanty, "Captain Kid. "

followed by a fugue section in sometimes quite complicated contrapuntal construction. A return to a homophonic section concludes the piece.[33] The third type was the anthem which combined the best of both fuging and folk tune styles. These were usually quite a bit longer than the other styles with a significant amount of original content. There are several anthems composed by well-known composers, such as William Billings, in these tune books.[34]

It is important to note that this music was designed for the singer, not the audience. This was a participatory culture; everyone sang and did their best to improve their sight reading and singing ability. The purpose of the experience was for the participant to become captivated by the music; the sound for the audience was not important. Often, no audience was present for the performances of these pieces, since all in attendance were part of the group singing. This idea, that the music was designed to be sung, not heard, helped drive the style. Parts weren't written to produce the smoothest, most homogeneous sound, but instead were written to provide an engaging musical experience for the vocalist.[35]

Many of the tune books referenced above had long and successful careers in the South, but no tune book has come close to the longevity and influence on southern singing culture as *The Sacred Harp,* published on August 31, 1844 by B.F. White and E. J. King.[36] B.F. White was by far the senior of the dynamic duo responsible for this collection of music and is often given the credit for most of the work involved in compiling and arranging the musical selections.[37] Both

[33] Scholten. "The Tune book that roars: The Sound and Style of Sacred Harp Singing," 34.

[34] Ibid., 37.

[35] Steel and Hulan. *The Makers of The Sacred Harp,* 49.

[36] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 68-69.

[37] Ibid., 68.

men were, at one time, singing school teachers. King actually studied under the tutelage of B.F. White. Unfortunately, not much is known about E.J. King. He passed away shortly after the first publication of *The Sacred Harp* on August 31, 1844. However, King's contributions to *The Sacred Harp* should not be entirely dismissed. In the first edition of *The Sacred Harp*, King's name appears frequently as composer or arranger for hymns. His credited works include, "The Child of Grace" and "The Gospel Trumpet," that have become favorites in *The Sacred Harp* tradition and still enjoy lively performances at present day meetings.[38] One need only look to YouTube and search "sacred harp" to find a long scroll of selections that illustrate the continued popularity both in America and abroad of *The Sacred Harp* music. [39]

It is doubtful many viewing a YouTube video would realize that these tunes link us to our colonial past and beyond. Many of the tunes from *The Sacred Harp* are taken from earlier tune book publications; thus, a chain of publication was created that stretches far back into America's past musical history. Since the process of taking and rearranging these tunes was wide spread, tunes traveled through time effortlessly and were revised and perfected by each arrangement. Many of the singing tunes from the New England singing schools of the 18th century made their way through history in this tune book tradition.[40] *The Sacred Harp* is more than an old repository for colonial tunes. The book includes original compositions lying side by side with traditional tunes. The 1869 edition of *The Sacred Harp* contained 217 songs by 70 of B.F.

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[38] Ibid., 72.

[39] "The Child of Grace," led by Robert Wedgbury at the second Ireland Sacred Harp convention, Filmed March 2012. YouTube video, 2 minutes, Posted December 2012.

[40] Scholten. "The Tune book that roars: The Sound and Style of Sacred Harp Singing," 34.

White's contemporaries who lived in the southern regions of the United States. [41] Even in *The Sacred Harp*'s 1991 edition, new composers and new music, written in the style of *The Sacred Harp,* have been added to the hymnal. B.F. White's ability to combine old and new material in the hymn tune tradition and his desire for constant revision wasn't unique. This updating continues to be successful based on its present day popularity.[42]

B.F. White was a prominent figure in his southern community. He was born into a South Carolina family and was the youngest of 14 children. White began his musical career at the age of twelve when he served as a military fife player in the War of 1812. In the tradition of William Billings, White was a self-made man. He was given little advantage in life and through his own industrious nature and hard work, he rose in status and wealth. Like most singing teachers, White had minimal formal education in music and the other humanities.

White viewed nature as the source of his musical education and inspiration. He would spend hours immersed in the sounds of his natural environment. The harmony present in nature intrigued White. The sounds of parishioners singing in local churches or the work songs sung by men and women fueled his inspiration. Snippets of these tunes would find their way into his compositions. Much in the same vain as his counter parts, Vaughn Williams and Butterworth in England, White is best known for his ability to transform and arrange folk tunes, camp meeting songs and ballads into enduring musical pieces, such as "The Morning Trumpet," found in the 1991 *Denison Sacred Harp*.[43]

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[41] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music, 74.*

[42] Kiri Miller. "First Sing the Notes": Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission," *American Music* 22, no. 4 (Winter, 2004), 476.

[43] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 72.

As a prominent member of the community, B.F. White served in many public capacities. He served as the mayor of Hamilton, Georgia, Harris county court clerk, and a major in the militia before the start of the Civil War. The community of Hamilton, Georgia, proved to be a fertile ground to plant the seeds of *The Sacred Harp.*[44] The community was extremely supportive of White's and King's efforts; they would gather outside of the White household and sing his unpublished works. Through this process, White discovered flaws in his arrangements and made corrections. With the full support of the community, the book became a favorite source for musical gatherings.[45]

The Sacred Harp continued to grow in popularity in the South and amassed a large following. White ensured the acceptance and widespread use of his new hymnal by using it at large singing conventions. Singing societies and conventions began to spring up around *The Sacred Harp*.[46] These single or multi-day events gave members of isolated, rural southern communities the opportunity for regular social interaction. They sang from their favorite tune books and shared the love of music-making with kindred spirits. As the Southern secession sentiments grew and gained support, conventions and the music from *The Sacred Harp* continued in the camps of southern soldiers.[47]

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[44] Ibid., 71.

[45] Ibid., 72-73.

[46] Steel and Hulan, *The Makers of The Sacred Harp, 9.*

[47] Ibid., 18-19.

Despite the devastation of the Civil War to Southern culture, the tradition of conventions and singings[48] continued. Many conventions are still held in the same locations that have been used for more than 170 years. B.F. White's death in 1879, the Civil War and the floundering of southern social society did not lessen the South's fascination with *The Sacred Harp* and its style of singing. B.F. White's and E.J. King's *The Sacred Harp* has become an important aspect of southern social life and values for Sacred Harp enthusiasts.[49]

Interest in *The Sacred Harp* and the tradition surrounding this music has waxed and waned over the years.[50] The family traditions of group singings and the ties with communities across the South have aided the music's survival. Families like the Wooten's of Sand Mountain continue to embrace the tradition of singings and *The Sacred Harp*.[51] As a younger generation of enthusiasts reach adult hood and assume the mantle of responsibility for this tradition, they are bolstered by the stalwart older generation of practitioners.[52] Most enthusiasts attempt to maintain the tradition as it has been passed down to them; thus, customs are preserved. The music has even found its way into mainstream movies. In 1994, music from *The Christian Harmony* was included in the movie *The Journey of August King*. *The Sacred Harp* music was

[48] A "singing" is a convention or gathering of people for the purpose of singing together in the Sacred Harp tradition.

[49] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 143-145.

[50] Ibid., 158.

[51] David Carlton, "To The Land I Am Bound: A Journey Into Sacred Harp," *Southern Cultures* 9, no. 2 (Summer, 2003), 51.

[52] Miller. "First Sing the Notes: Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission," 478.

featured in the 2003 movie, *Cold Mountain,* which was set in the Civil War, and in the movie, *The Songcatcher,* in 2000.

Although rooted in the South, *The Sacred Harp* has begun to expanded northward in the past 20 years. The music of *The Sacred Harp* and its traditions have been re-discovered. Currently, singing groups are present in many northern cities, including Chicago and New York City. This return of interest in this music, originally from the north, is encouraging because it helps to ensure the longevity of this musical style. The northern enthusiasts rely heavily on the southern tradition and invite prominent members of the southern Sacred Harp tradition to give lectures on style and performance practice. The musicality and sight singing methods originally developed by Smith and Little are still in use and the traditions that have grown to surround this phenomenon have been successfully transferred to another generation.[53]

Although there have been several revisions to *The Sacred Harp,* most recently in 2012, the tradition has remained steadfast. The music and gatherings continue to appeal to a variety of individuals. Some come to observe the historic social rituals surrounding this music form. Some are astounded by the sight reading of these amazing vocalists. Finally, some come to enjoy making music in a communal group, not for the benefit of the audience, but for the benefit of the singer.[54] Singing schools themselves are still active in the rural south and gatherings of singers

[53] Ibid., 475-476.

[54] Ibid., 477-478.

can still be found.[55] For example, The Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association (SHMHA)[56] sponsors Camp Fasola, a singing school which provides yearly adult and youth classes.[57]

Sacred Harp conventions with large gatherings of supporters have been held since 1852 with the first meeting of the Chattahoochee Convention. B.F. White soon followed the example of the Chattahoochee Convention and created the Southern Musical Convention in 1867.[58] Over 700 conventions are still held every year.[59] Most conventions take place in northern Alabama and northwest Georgia, but conventions have recently been held as far away as Ireland, Scotland, and Poland.[60]

The performance practices of *The Sacred Harp* conventions and in the shape-note tradition can be viewed as quite odd by the traditional choral vocalist.[61] These traditions have been passed down in an oral fashion from generation to generation. A unique feature of this event is its participatory nature. Everyone at the convention takes part in the singing and the leading of music. Sacred Harp gatherings can be called singings, singing school, conventions, singing class,

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[55] A current list of national and international singings can be found at https://fasola.org/singings/.

[56] The Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association (SHMHA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which sponsors Camp Fasola.

[57] "Fasola, A Summer Camp for Learning and Singing Sacred Harp," Camp Fasola. Accessed May 22, 2017. https://campfasola.org/

[58] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 135.

[59] Scholten. "The Tune book that roars: The Sound and Style of Sacred Harp Singing," 37.

[60] A current list of national and international singings can be found at https://fasola.org/singings/.

[61] Miller, "First Sing the Notes: Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission," 487.

all-day singing, or any number of other titles; the name depends on the nature of the event and the region. The events are usually held in local community buildings such as community centers, small churches, school houses or family residencies. There are a few buildings in the Deep South built specifically for shape-note gatherings. Most gatherings last a day, but conventions or camps for youth singers, such as Camp Fasola started in 2003, can last up to two weeks.[62]

The all-day singings are typically held on the same weekend each year. The day starts between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. with the song, "Holy Manna," a prayer and a short organizational meeting to line up who would like to lead and which songs they will be leading. There are few breaks in the singing with the exception of an hour for lunch and socializing. At the end of lunch, the singers file back into the building for several more hours of singing. In the afternoon a break may be taken to perform a memorial for a singer who has passed. The festivities usually conclude around 4 p.m. and vocalists disperse for home.[63]

Regular attendees have favorites that they routinely lead, but as the hymnal is so large, many pieces are not performed in the course of a day's singing. Although the poetry is religious in nature, singings are not connected to any one congregation and should not be mistaken as a church service.[64] All are welcome at a singing despite denomination or religious preference. Single day singings are usually non-stop with the exception of a potluck lunch. The experience is so positive that many families make it part of their annual tradition and travel long distances;

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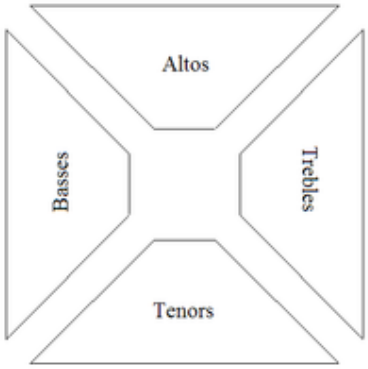
[62] "Fasola, A Summer Camp for Learning and Singing Sacred Harp," Camp Fasola. Accessed May 22, 2017. https://campfasola.org/

[63] Miller, "First Sing the Notes: Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission, 37.

[64] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 19.

thus, the longevity of the tradition is ensured. As this is a participatory event, shape-note singing by nature is egalitarian. There is no one leader of the singing or a head conductor. At most, no person leads more than one or two songs in the course of the all-day singing. Everyone has an opportunity to lead the group; even newcomers are encouraged to lead with the help of older more experienced singers.[65]

The formation of the singings is unique. Music for shape-note singing is performed in the hollow square. Basically, singers set up in parts SATB with each section occupying a side of a hollow square as shown below:



The standard distribution of voices is the same as in any classical choir with one or two exceptions. The altos typically choose either the alto part or the tenor part, depending on their ranges. The tenor and treble parts are sung by both tenors and sopranos. This doubling of parts provides a multitude of parallel octaves and gives the music some of its distinctive sound. The treble line is not the melody, as is often the case with contemporary vocal pieces, but instead it serves as the high harmony.[66] The alto line or second line from the top is sung by low voice

[65] Ibid., 10.

[66] Miller, "First Sing the Notes: Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission," 484.

females or on rare occasion a high tenor or two. In a few instances, the alto line is not present in three part compositions. In these situations the alto usually gravitates to the bass line. The tenor or lead line serves as the main melody. This music was written to provide interesting lines for all parts; so although this is melodic material, it is sometimes hard to identify the melody. The bottom line is reserved for low male voices and is the only line written in bass clef.

In the center of each hollow square stands the leader. The leader is simply a member of the group who has been called up to help the group stay together as they sing. The leaders' responsibilities are simple and the only requirements are to keep time and help with the starting pitches. The pitch is given without the aid of a pitch pipe and is often very loosely related to the actual given key. The chosen pitch is almost always lower than the original key. The conducting style is a simple up and down movement of the arm. In 4/4 time the leader would move the arm up on beats 1 and 2 and down on beats 3 and 4 in a swinging motion. The gathering often mimics the motion of the leader so all can stay in time with each other.

The first run through of any piece at a shape-note gathering is sung using the fasola method. The characteristic solfege syllables ring out with startling accuracy through the first stanza of the hymn and are followed by the actual poetry.[67] In lock step, the fuging parts resound in synchronized harmony. New choristers usually sing a single syllable until the shaped note heads become familiar and the intervallic relationships become recognizable. Encouragement and help are offered to the new and struggling singer. Dynamics are not indicated in the music and the vocalist wavers between forte and fortissimo with little significant dynamic contrast for the

[67] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 9.

duration of each piece. Vowel unification is not displayed, nor is it required. Vowels tend to be bright and spread very close to the speech patterns of the singing group. This tends to create a wide variety in vowel choices. It is a sing as you speak approach that requires no additional training.

Most of the vocalists involved are not skilled singers; at least not in the consonant and smooth style our American ears are accustomed to hearing.[68] This is not a style of music that receives the polished touch of choral masters over countless rehearsals. The untrained voice with minimal vibrato is the normal sound. The benefit to this straight tone approach produces a renaissance quality and makes the tuning pure and piercing.[69] The final consonants such as M and N are often held on sustained tones instead of the more traditional primarily vowel elongation. The lower female voice is sung in a slightly pushed chest voice even as the music ascends forsaking head voice or any pretense of lightening. As the lower female voice descends, the chest voice is pressed even tighter giving it a grinding, wailing quality on lower tones. In general, all voice types have closed throats and depressed soft palettes forcing the sound to utilize the nasal passage as a resonator.

These technical issues might lead one to believe that an ENT might make a small fortune on the vocal nodules developed in this style. However, Sacred Harp vocalists can typically sing at the limits of their dynamic ranges for hours and suffer no apparent harm. Whether this is a result of the lowered keys or the voice becomes accustomed to this abuse, the reason for this lack of harm is not understood.[70] Perhaps the infrequent nature of these gatherings helps to provide time

[68] Carlton, "To The Land I Am Bound: A Journey Into Sacred Harp," 54.

[69] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 45.

[70] Ibid., 2.

for the voice to recover. As stated previously, this music is for the performer, not the audience and an attitude of abandon is often employed in performance.[71]

Another unusual character of this music is that the printed the page does not determine what is heard in performance. Very few lines in *The Sacred Harp* music are sung exactly as written. Over the years traditional embellishments have been added and passed down from experienced singer to novice in an oral tradition.[72] In general, the embellishments occur on shorter moving notes filling in an open intervallic gap and employing scoops or slides leaving the longer sustained harmonies intact. Another embellishment seen only in the minor key is the raising of the sixth scale degree by a half step to give the piece a modal sound. There is some debate on whether the sixth scale degree should be raised or if it should be sung as written. There are singing groups on both sides of this debate depending on what oral tradition existed in the group.[73]

The final component that sets this music apart is the use of dispersed harmony. This term applies to the unique style and setting of chords in the Sacred Harp tradition. Dispersed harmony occurs when the distance between the bass and soprano are at least two octaves apart, or there is significant part crossing between the alto and soprano parts. Open chords are employed extensively in the Sacred Harp tradition. Dispersed harmony also refers to the addition of open fifths, fourths, and octaves, as well as crossing voices, unprepared and unresolved dissonances

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[71] Ibid., 41.

[72] Miller, "First Sing the Notes: Oral and Written Traditions in the Sacred Harp Transmission," 479.

[73] Ibid., 481.

and other non-traditional western European writing techniques. [74] A general disregard for the traditional writing styles present in most main stream choral music provides the rustic and ancient sound most experience when confronted with a recording of shape-note music.

The tradition has survived the many obstacles placed before it. Whether it will continue to prosper is up for debate, but the music and the sight singing tools provided by this technique are a wellspring of historical culture.[75] They have the potential to be used in the future to improve our own musical abilities and to inspire new choral works based on centuries old tunes which would help keep our cultural heritage alive and make perfect music to help educate our students.

2.2 Rudiments of Reading Shape Note Music

It is important to return to the source material to fully appreciate shape note music. Many selections from *The Sacred Harp* are short and can be used to capture the style of this music before attempting more modern adaptations. Unfortunately, when viewing a piece of music from *The Sacred Harp*, students and directors can find the inclusion of shaped notes to be daunting. Thus, any introduction of this music should be accompanied with an explanation of the shape note system. Choral directors and vocalists alike will benefit from a rudimentary education in the process of reading shaped notes.

The Sacred Harp employs a four shape system utilizing the solfege syllables, *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *mi*, that were originally introduced by William Little and William Smith. The system uses standard notation and rhythmic devices, the only exception is the shape of the note head. When

[74] Wallace McKenzie, "The Alto Parts in the "True Dispersed Harmony" of "The Sacred Harp," *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1989), 158-160.

[75] Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, 160.

put into a major scale from the tonic pitch, the syllables would read *fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi,* and back to *fa*. Each solfege syllable can be easily identified in shape note music by its distinctive note head. The genius of this system is that it allows the vocalist to easily identify the solfege syllable without knowing the initial key or name of individual notes. One need only memorize the shapes and sing the corresponding syllables. The intervallic relationship between pitches remains constant and allows vocalists to easily move through different keys and tonalities. The shapes are distinct and easy to read. By referencing Figure 2.3, the shapes and syllables can be quickly identified. The shape for *fa* is a triangle, the shape for *sol* is a circle, the shape for *la* is a square, and the shape for *mi* is a diamond.

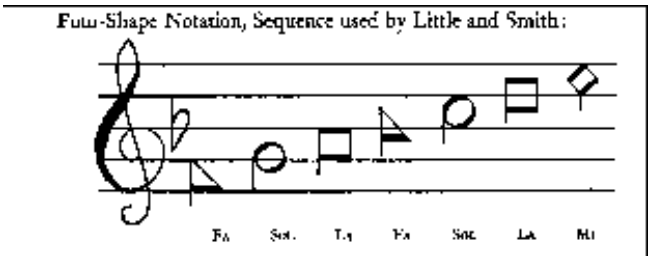

Figure 2.3. Four-Shape Notation[76]

All other conventions for modern notation are followed, only the shape of the note head is changed. Rhythm, location on the staff, and meter considerations remain constant with standard notation practices. No significant changes are needed to navigate minor keys. The syllables and shapes remain constant.

[76] George P. Jackson, *White Spirituals In the Southern Uplands,* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1932), 14.

Other shape note systems have been utilized in the past and include some seven note systems that follow the standard *do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do* pattern utilized by most high school programs as in Fig 2.4.

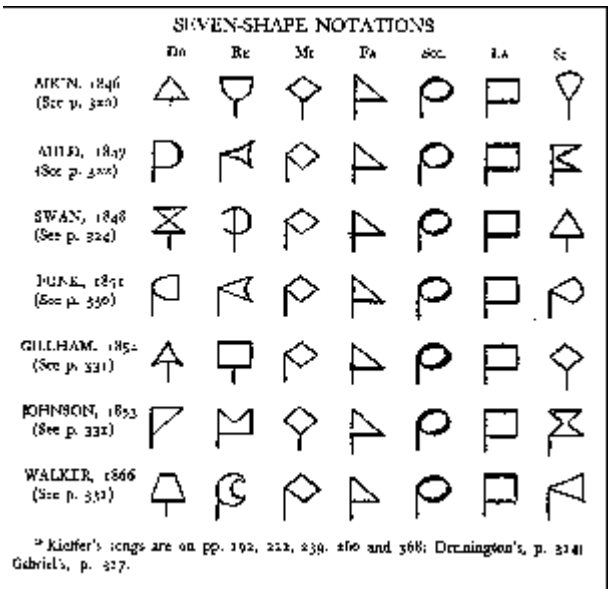

Figure 2.4. Seven-Shape Notations[77]

For the purposes of this study, I will constrain myself to the four shape system, as *The Sacred Harp* makes use of this system.

2.3 History of Bluegrass Music

Shape-note, mountain music, or country music, whatever name you give the music, is music that has come from the rural areas of the southeastern and Appalachian regions of the United States. Shape-note singing is not the only musical tradition that has found shelter in the Deep South and Appalachia. Another of the more successful genre of music from these regions is

[77] Ibid., 337.

bluegrass. This genre incorporates some of the same elements that exist in shape-note music: a high tessitura, folk harmonies and a vocal quality that emphasizes a straight slightly pushed tone. As with shape-note music, bluegrass music should find a more permanent home in the choral classroom. With minor modifications, some of the same adjustments for shape-note music could be used for bluegrass music in the classroom. The added element that makes bluegrass a desirable genre to incorporate is its emphasis on improvisation and freedom in melodic expression. These traits, combined with the tradition of old American and European tunes passed down from our immigrant ancestors, makes bluegrass music a perfect companion for shape-note music in our schools.

Bluegrass music hit audiences in the 1940's and 50's at a time when the country was first discovering its musical roots. An offspring of country music, bluegrass combined some of the best aspects of gospel, the blues and the Appalachian sound to form a genre that embraced all three.[78] Indeed, bluegrass absorbed many of the sounds from the southern region of the United States. Through careful manipulation and discipline, Bill Monroe crafted a musical style that brings together some of the best aspects of the southern sounds that are often referred to as Hillbilly music, or folk music on overdrive. Characterized by the virtuosic and improvisatory playing of mandolin, violin, guitar, and banjo, the music of bluegrass is instantly recognizable. Bluegrass's close ties to Southern Gospel and the high and piercing sound of old Appalachian balladeers made it a favorite of southern and Appalachian audiences. As the form continues to develop, the choral field has taken notice and has incorporated several of these ancient tunes into the choral canon for performance. This genre makes use of some materials utilized in shape-note

[78] Joti Rockwell, "What is bluegrass anyway? Category formation, debate and the framing of musical genre," *Popular Music* 31, no. 3 (October 2012), 365.

singing and spins the music out in a different way while still maintaining its links to our musical past. The addition of close harmonies and a full string band can make this music ideal for the choral classroom and can provide an interesting juxtaposition from the dispersed harmonies of the shape-note tradition.

Bill Monroe is considered to be the "Father of Bluegrass."[79] His band and musical preferences defined the style and sound that is now termed bluegrass. As Bill Monroe and his band gained popularity, other groups began to emulate the band's particular sound. Popular and recognizable groups like the Stanley Brothers rose to fame in this way. In an interview, Bill Monroe defined bluegrass as follows:

> "To start with, I wanted to have a music different from anybody else; I wanted to originate something. I wanted to put all of the ideas that I could come up with, that I could hear of different sounds and, of course, I've added the old Negro blues to blue grass. And we have some of the Scotch music in it-the bagpipes-and we also have hymn singing-you'll notice that down through the melodies and through blue grass. Starting with numbers like the 'Mule Skinner Blues', when I first started, it had a timing to it-the beat-that just fit perfect for what I wanted to do. It's faster than most people would do 'Mule Skinner' and it's in a time that you could dance by. It's good to listen to and it's good for your lead instruments like the fiddle to play the music, to play 'Mule Skinner', 'cause it's got the blues in it and it just makes it perfect like that. We use the mandolin as a kind of a rhythm instrument in the group, and it sets perfect for the mandolin to keep the time the way we've got it arranged ... [asked about where he got the idea to record 'Mule Skinner Bines':] You know, I have a yodel with 'Mule Skinner'-it's got a little laugh on the end of it-and when I seen that it would sell, that little yodel would help sell the number, why, I know then we had something going that would be to my advantage on down through the years, with the timing of that number and everything. And with the Blue Grass Boys, it's been kinda like you going to school-you've got a good teacher over you, somebody that knows what you should do and what you shouldn't do. So we have had to kinda set a pattern with blue grass, and, of course, each year, why, I have brought out a little something different as we've gone along."[80]

[79] Ibid., 346.

[80] Ibid., 365-366.

The influences and styles Bill Monroe experienced in his life were all brought to bear in the creation of the genre. His perception of what would be commercially viable and acceptable, in addition to his own musical experiences, provided a template for other acts to follow. The original template may have changed from band to band over the years, but the elements of bluegrass music, acoustic instruments, fast tempi and the high lonesome vocals are present in every band that claims the bluegrass genre.[81]

Bill Monroe was born in Rosine, Kentucky, on September 13, 1911. He was the youngest son of eight children. His family made a living working their land. It was a modest living, but there was free time for entertainment purposes. The Appalachian tradition of home entertainment was alive and well in the Monroe house.[82] The Appalachian society strongly believed that if you wanted entertainment or music, then you had to learn how to play an instrument.[83]

Music was one of life's few enjoyments in the rough life of an Appalachian farmer. The communities were spread out and it was often difficult to maintain communication from day to day. The entire Monroe family had some ability with musical instruments. Bill's father was well known as an excellent dancer and his mother was well versed in some of the old ballads and songs from the Appalachian region. His mother also played the harmonica, button accordion and the fiddle. Bill's mom would often walk through the house singing old ballads.[84] The majority of Bill's siblings and extended family could also play instruments. Bill was orphaned at an early

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[81] Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 364.

[82] Ibid., 28.

[83] Ibid., 29.

[84]Richard D. Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin' The Life of Bill Monroe: The Father Of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2001), 9.

age and his uncle, Pen Vandiver, became his guardian. Pen played fiddle and contributed much to Bill's musical heritage.[85] After dinner, Pen would sit by the fire and play fiddle tunes. Pen, or Uncle Pen as Bill referred to him, inspired Bill to take up the fiddle and was one of the first musical influences in Bill's life. Unfortunately for Bill, as the youngest sibling, Bill was also required to play the mandolin.[86]

Since the mandolin was used primarily for harmonic support and rhythmic interest on the off beats, the mandolin was not considered an important instrument. This placed Bill with his mandolin as a backup instrumentalist and he did not like this position. One of Bill's favorite family stories revolves around his being allowed to play only four of the mandolin's eight strings; his brothers didn't want him to make too much noise and ruin the family group sound. However, Bill was a stubborn child and this set back only increased his interest in music and his desire to find a way to take what he had been given and use it to be successful. Bill would ultimately transform the mandolin into a lead bluegrass instrument which would be at the forefront of any bluegrass band.

In Rosine, Kentucky, the singing school tradition of shape-notes was still quite active. Bill's first musical education was provided by the same type of singing school masters discussed earlier.[87] Bill had many singing school masters for short periods of time in his youth. They taught him the rudiments of music and exposed him to some of our country's musical heritage. *The Sacred Harp* hymnal and other shape-note hymnals were Bill's first exposure to music that was

[85] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 29.

[86] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin*', 19-20.

[87] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 28.

not created by his family band. Since Bill was born with poor vision, shape-note singing was a good technique, since it focused on the sounds of the music and was learned mainly by rote. He absorbed the ballads that his mother sang and the historic sounds of the shape-note tradition during his formative years.

Although many of his teachers were family members and singing school teachers, Bill was also influenced by the different ethnic groups that shared Rosine with the Monroe family. The African-American community played a strong role in forming the sound that Bill would one day name "bluegrass." Since the logging and coal mining industries were prosperous and always looking for new workers, African-American laborers were prevalent in the community. At several dances and social functions, Bill would play back-up or rhythm guitar to some outstanding local African-American musicians.[88] Bill was impressed by the virtuosic solo rifts of the African-American musicians. The solos were unique and more often associated with the blues rather than traditional country music. African-American styles were mixed with mountain melodies. As he grew older, Bill continued to be influenced by African-American musicians; he found inspiration in the style. Blues and gospel styles, unique to the African-American community, can be found in the style of bluegrass. The influence of the black banjo tradition was again felt when bluegrass adopted banjos with the African short-thumb fifth string reattached to the tone ring combined with the large resonator that had been invented for the tenor banjo. These

[88] Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 30.

heavy metal banjos rang out across the mountains and across the country with the three-finger picking of Earl Scruggs-style playing.[89]

Bill was also influenced by the increased access to popular "hillbilly musicians" through recordings. His brother Charlie, who later would join with Bill to become the Monroe Brothers, often purchased records by some of the best known country acts, such as the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. These styles, African-American blues and gospel and "hillbilly music," eventually found their way into Bill's musical style and the bluegrass genre.[90]

Bill's first public performances were held under the watchful eye of his Uncle Pen, who recognized his musical talent. Bill often commented that most of what he knew he learned from his Uncle.[91] By age 16, Bill's father and mother had passed away and Bill moved in with his Uncle Pen.[92] Most of Bill's siblings had already moved to more prosperous activities in urban locations with more opportunity. This left Uncle Pen and Bill to work on music outside of the shadows cast by his siblings.

By 18 years of age, Bill had moved to Chicago and joined his brothers who were working for an oil refinery in southeast Chicago. His brothers, Birch and Charlie, were already active in the music scene of southeast Chicago when Bill arrived. They happily included him in the band that often played for dances and other social gatherings. As the band solidified, the brothers were

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[89] Cecelia Conway. "Black Banjo Songsters in Appalachia," *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (Spring - Autumn, 2003), 164.

[90] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 29.

[91] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin'*, 27.

[92] Ibid., 26.

able to pick up gigs at the local radio stations in Hammond and Gary, Indiana. Both towns were just across the state line a few short miles south of Chicago. This small success continued and the brothers gained some small popularity among locals in south Chicago.[93]

The brothers' big break came in 1932 when they were approached by Tom Owen who ran a weekly radio show called the "National Barn Dance." The show was broadcast on WLS, a station in Chicago, that had one of the longest reaches of any radio station in the area. The National Barn Dance was a musical variety show employing several bands. The show's popularity grew so much that a theater performance of the show was set up in downtown Chicago where they played to packed houses. This coverage gave the Monroe Brothers a platform to promote their music and their particular sound.[94]

Birch, Charlie, and Bill continued to work in local oil refineries and played whenever they could manage to get gigs. Charlie, the guitarist and vocalist, was the leader of the band at this time; Bill was developing as a mandolin player of some repute. Bill had decided that the original fundamental role of the mandolin as a primarily rhythmic instrument didn't showcase the true value and versatility that was possible. He began to showcase the mandolin as a solo instrument and developed his virtuosic playing to a new level. He emulated the old time fiddle players like his Uncle Pen and began to pick out melodies on the mandolin at a break neck pace.[95] Other musicians and promoters began to take notice.

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[93] Rosenberg. *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 87.

[94] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin'*, 34.

[95] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 30.

In 1934 the Monroe Brothers got the break that would allow them to make the dreams of being professional musicians a reality. Charlie was approached by a sponsor called Texas Crystals. They wished to engage Charlie as a solo performer and move him down to Shenandoah, Iowa. Charlie felt uncomfortable as a solo act. His solution to this problem was to bring Bill along. Birch stayed in Chicago working refineries. When they moved to Iowa, the brother duet of the Monroe Brothers was formed. Finally, the brothers were making a living wage doing what they loved, making music.[96]

The brother duet was not unique to the early 1920's through the 1940's. The Monroe Brothers joined a long tradition of brother duets. The Delmore Brothers, the Callahan Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys and the Morris Brothers were a few of the widely popular acts. It was generally accepted that the unique harmony of a brother pair was preferable, especially when dealing with old mountain music. The music was very simple, clear and clean.[97]

These brother duets provided a rich source of material for later bluegrass bands. The subject material covered all of the basic themes of country music, such as religion, family and life on the farm and in isolated areas. The duos generally accompanied themselves with stringed instruments which were typically guitar and another instrument for color, such as the mandolin or banjo. The harmonies were close and the tessitura was high for the tenor of the duet. It was a

[96] Ibid., 31.

[97] "Brother Duos," *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, 2018, Encyclopedia of Appalachia. 8 Mar 2018 http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/entry.php?rec=76.

distinct sound that later was given the name of the high lonesome sound which became a style of singing in the bluegrass repertoire.[98]

The Monroe Brothers, now firmly established as a popular brother duo, began to travel to various radio stations around the eastern portion of the United States. To give balance and depth to their hymns, the Brothers picked up a bass, Byron Parker. Parker served as radio announcer, bass vocalist and manager for the duo.[99] This partnership helped further define the Monroe's act and helped sell the pair to radio audiences.

Parker continued to travel with the Monroe Brothers to the Georgia and South Carolina region where they sang for the Crazy Water Crystals Barn Dance in 1935.[100] The Monroes were in the middle of country music's bastion of power, southern Appalachia and the South, a fortuitous place to be if you were a country act looking to make a big splash. Bill Monroe absorbed the styles of the string bands and later incorporated some of the innovations into his own string band. During this time, the Monroe Brothers' show was pre-recorded; this allowed them to be broadcast from multiple radio stations.

In 1936, the brothers were approached to do their first professional recording by Bluebird Records. Initially, the brothers were too busy with radio slots and gigs to pay much attention. Eli Oberstein from Bluebird Records eventually won out and the Monroe Brothers' first recording was created. Bluebird Records sent a team of recording engineers and the record was cut in an old warehouse in Charlotte, N. C. This drastically increased the Monroe Brothers' reach into the

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[98] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin'*, 109.

[99] Ibid., 58.

[100] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 31.

living rooms of many Americans who had previously not heard their music.[101] Following their initial recording success, the Bluebird record label would visit Charlotte every five or six months and the Monroe Brothers would be invited back to do some more recording.

The Monroe Brothers began to influence and impact the music scene in a real way. Although there were many other brother duets in the area, the Monroe Brothers had two additional elements that set them apart. The first element was Bill's ability to sing high and piercing harmonies on top of Charlie's melodies. The second element was Bill's amazingly virtuosic playing of the mandolin. These two elements allowed the brothers to perform some of their repertoire at a break neck pace and allowed the mandolin to continue its meteoric rise as a solo instrument.[102] Bill Monroe was turning the mandolin into a must-have instrument in any group performing Appalachian or hillbilly music.

Although the Brothers had a wide range of repertoire choices, very few pieces were original. Over half of their songs were religious in nature and taken from popular hymns or gospel numbers. The other half came from music the brothers had heard growing up or on records. Although the music wasn't original, the popularity of the Monroe Brothers thrust this literature into the spotlight and helped to maintain it for future generations.

Success often brings strife for musical groups; the Monroe Brothers were no different. In 1937, their manager and bassist, Byron Parker, left the group to attempt a solo career and eventually formed his own band, The Mountaineers. This loss of leadership created a vacuum in the group causing them to separate. Both Bill and Charlie were very hard working and talented

[101]Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin',* 43.

[102] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 34.

musicians and each of the brothers felt that he could strike out on his own, if given the opportunity. Bill is quoted as saying "If we'd had a manager you know, no telling how far we could have gone. But so many brothers can't get along good…one wants to be boss and the other one's mad because he does and so it was just better we split up."[103] The brothers decided to call it quits and went their separate ways; a rivalry was created that followed both men for the remainder of their performing days.[104]

As the lead man, Charlie had a much easier time of transition than Bill. Very quickly Charlie found another mandolin player and essentially continued using the same repertoire the brothers had developed. Charlie also maintained all of the recording contracts and gigs leaving Bill to fend for himself. While offering Bill the opportunity to take a firm hand in his own destiny, the split encouraged the development of bluegrass as a genre.[105]

It took longer for Bill to bring his personal style back to the public. He moved to Atlanta, Georgia and hired Cleo Davis as lead guitarist. Davis's sound was incredibly similar to his brother's sound. The duo then spent two months practicing their repertoire. Bill taught Cleo all of the tunes he had sung with Charlie even down to the same runs on the guitar.[106] The two men eventually emerged as a cohesive duo and sought work at local Atlanta radio stations. The two men found some success in the Atlanta area. They developed a gospel quartet singing group to supplement their duets, but there wasn't much money in this relatively small area. Bill decided to

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[103] Ibid., 35.

[104] Smith. *Can't You Hear Me Callin',* 46.

[105] Ibid., 52-53.

[106] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 40-41.

move to the most influential country show of all time, The Grand Ole Opry, and attempt to bring his band more firmly into the spotlight. His band auditioned for The Opry in 1939.[107]

The Grand Ole Opry can best be described as a mecca for any vocalists involved in the genre of Country Music. Founded on November 28, 1925, The Grand Ole Opry is a weekly country music stage show. It is similar to the barn dances that Bill Monroe and his brothers originally played in Chicago. The big difference is in the range, scope and influence this particular stage show holds on the development of American country music.[108] Originally called the WMS Barn Show, it has catapulted many country stars into the mainstream. George D. Hay, a popular radio announcer at the time, is given credit for the creation of this show, but there were several shows in production at the same time. The Opry became a Saturday night event in nearly 30 states. As the event grew, it moved several times. The Ryman Auditorium, where the Opry stayed for 50 years, is often referred to as "The Mother Church of Country Music." To be named as a member of the Grand Ole Opry is one of the most coveted appellations for a country singer.[109] This membership requires frequent performances and a current member's recommendation.

With its 50,000 watt station signal and its 30 state reach, it is no surprise that Bill Monroe gravitated to the National Barn Dance. Bill had sought the spotlight for years under Charlie and he now had an opportunity to succeed. Of course, the Opry had not attained the repute it enjoys now, but it was in the process of setting itself up as a power house in the country music

[107] Ibid.,, 46.

[108] Ibid., 45.

[109] Ibid., 108.

industry.[110] Bill and Cleo descended upon the Opry in 1939. The audition went well and George Hay "aka Judge Hay," a regular Opry personality, hired the duo. "Mule Skinner Blues," one of their audition songs, became their signature song. As has been the case in almost every situation, Bill's virtuosic playing of the mandolin and his no nonsense business attitude set him apart from other talented country acts and propelled him into prominence.[111]

Bill Monroe began experimenting with popular "hillbilly" songs. He wanted to mesh the folk style of string bands with the more modern country music. He used rhythm as the main component to merge the styles into a cohesive whole. In this way, he presented himself as a new and ground breaking professional while he still maintained his roots and the sense of old time folk music. This style of playing made him a perfect fit for the grand old Opry since he was able to simultaneously appeal to both young and old audiences.

He demanded a high level of virtuosic playing from his Bluegrass Boys band.[112] He was a kind teacher to the inexperienced members of his band. Speed was the name of the game. As Bill modified tunes to suit his purpose, he inevitably increased the tunes in tempo. He took slow and moderate tunes and drove them at a break next pace. The speed required the musicians to be incredibly proficient on their individual instruments.

Bill Monroe took the Bluegrass Boys away from the traditional country music keys of C, D, and G major.[113] He explored keys all through the circle of fifths trying to find the sound that he

[110] Ibid., 45.

[111] Ibid., 48.

[112] Ibid., 47.

[113] Ibid., 47.

thought fit best with what the band was playing. Bill Monroe prized the ability to be versatile and looked for this quality in his musicians. These new keys helped Bill feature his high registered voice and use it to its fullest potential. Music in general was viewed as an ever changing medium. These innovations began to shape the style that would later be known as bluegrass.[114] Bill did not create the term, bluegrass. The moniker came about as a result of Bill's Bluegrass Boys and the sound they developed.

Fortunately for Bill, the Opry had an Artists Service Department that helped young Opry talents manage life as performers and it actively looked for gigs outside the Opry to supplement the young artists' incomes. The Artists Service Department would take aspiring acts and combine them into a cohesive traveling show, or tent show. The tent shows would rent out local buildings across the area covered by the Grand Old Opry radio show. These shows were well-planned shows composed of comedians, musical acts and other talent based novelties. Bill and his well-rehearsed band were now being heard over a large region and making a sustainable living. As their popularity grew, requests for the Bluegrass Boys increased and Bill began traveling all over the southern states. By the 1960's, bluegrass festivals based on the tent shows would spread across America. Many of these festivals are still in existence today.[115]

In the early 1940's the membership of the Bluegrass Boys continued to fluctuate as members of the band left for more lucrative opportunities. Bill was always quick to replace members and would lead each new recruit through an intensive process of rehearsals. Bill's ideas about how his music and style should be played were the strongest influence on the band. During this time,

[114] Rockwell, "What is bluegrass anyway?", 364.

[115] For a current list of festivals, dates, and locations, see www.beanblossum.us.

the Bluegrass Boys frequented the recording studio. Record sales at this time were not a primary way for country musician to make a living, but the popularity of the records was increasing and Bill's coverage with the Opry helped to make his band a sought after resource. Playing for Bill Monroe wasn't something that would end in a big paycheck. The trade off to low wages was the acquisition of musical skills that would translate into solo careers or break-off bands and the exposure to the sea of Bill Monroe's country music fans.[116]

Although the composition of the band would change regularly, Bill managed to keep many of his veterans close at hand and was always training new and promising talent to fill the voids created. The status of the Bluegrass Boys continued to grow and soon talented musicians would track Bill down to audition for the group.[117]

As popular as Bill Monroe was during the late 30's and early 40's, nothing could prepare the burgeoning bluegrass industry for the popularity explosion of the mid to late 40's.[118] Several factors contribute to this surge in popularity. First, as WWII continued to rage in Europe, men and women from rural areas saw potential opportunity available in urban areas. Factories were hungry for a work force and the strong work ethic and hardworking attitudes exhibited by rural Americans made for a perfect match. Secondly, as rural America started to move to the cities, they brought their love of country and folk music. Finally, rural Americans, who had been farmers, now had a steady income to use to purchase records. This influx of rural culture raised

[116] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 79.

[117] Ibid., 62.

[118] Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown, 144.*

awareness of music like Bill Monroe's and the music soon became even more popular among the urban working class.[119]

Soon the pop music of the forties and fifties shared center stage with the sounds of the South and Appalachia. Record companies were breaking down the doors of the Grand Old Opry and clamoring for the popular acts to record their music. The music industry has always had its hand on the pulse of American musical tastes and it had already realized that the burgeoning taste for folk and country music would not be satisfied anytime in the near future.

Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys were one of many acts to accept the offer to record with Columbia Records.[120] Several veteran members of the band returned for the recording session and they laid down four tracks. Bill added a second guitar, banjo, and accordion to the band filling out the sound. "The Bluegrass Special," an important track from this session, helped to solidify the bluegrass sound and some of the conventions normally associated with it. [121] In this instrumental piece, each member of the band took instrumental solo breaks. In this way, the improvisatory nature of jazz was brought into the music and each member was given the chance to showcase his or her talent. The breaks were completely improvisatory and would often change from performance to performance. A bar for virtuosic playing had been set. The balance of string forces was not completely solidified but was coming closer to what we now traditionally consider bluegrass.[122]

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[119] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 69.

[120] Peter Wernick, *Bluegrass Songbook* (New York: Oak Publications, 1976), 387.

[121]Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown, 246.*

[122] Rockwell, "What is bluegrass anyway?", 364.

Bill Monroe's own notoriety was somewhat less than other country acts. Bill insisted on a variety of sounds in his band. Much in the same way that "The Bluegrass Special" emphasized all members of the band, Bill was not much of a self-promoter; consequently, he was not viewed as a headliner in his band. Although Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys had yet to be viewed from the national prospective as household artists, they continued to flourish in the forties and early fifties.[123]

In 1944, Lester Flatt, who played guitar, joined the Bluegrass Boys; he was another key figure in developing the bluegrass genre. Bill and Lester became a successful songwriting team. They shared songwriting credits; Bill had rights for Lester's original material that they recorded together; and Lester was given songwriting credit on the record label.[124] Soon after Lester joined the band in 1945, Earl Scruggs joined the band to replace a banjo player; he would change the direction of bluegrass development. Earl Scruggs' impact on the band and bluegrass, in general, would be monumental.

This band, composed of Monroe on mandolin, Lester Flatt on rhythm guitar, Scruggs playing three-fingered style on banjo, Chubby Wise on fiddle, and Howard Watts on string bass, was "the original bluegrass band (1945-1948)." This line-up, fusing Monroe's driving mandolin with strong vocals, defined the bluegrass sound and produced Bill's most innovative and significant recordings.[125]

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[123] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 77.

[124] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin',* 139.

[125] Neil V. Rosenberg. "From Sound to Style: The Emergence of Bluegrass*," The Journal of American Folklore* 80, no. 316 (Apr. - Jun., 1967), 143.

They recorded twenty-eight songs in Columbia's Chicago studios. The recordings of "Kentucky Waltz" and "Footprints in the Snow" were major hits in 1946. Columbia released the recordings slowly through 1949. Through his in-person appearances and the weekly broadcasts on The Grand Ole Opry, Bill became a star. These recordings contained the elements that later came to define bluegrass: breakneck tempos, strong harmony vocals, and proficient solo performances on the mandolin, banjo, and fiddle.

By 1948 Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs had left the Blue Grass Boys and formed their own band called the Foggy Mountain Boys; they even hired two former Blue Grass Boys, fiddler Jimmy Shumate and bassist Howard Watts. This group would become strong, successful rivals of the Blue Grass Boys. During the next decades, the composition of the Blue Grass Boys band changed frequently as featured artists left to pursue solo careers and to further promote the bluegrass sound. These soloists included Jimmy Martin, vocalist and rhythm guitar, Don Reno and Rudy Lyle, banjoists, Carter Stanley of the Stanley Brothers, and Bobby Osborne of the Osborne Brothers.

In the late 1950s, the rise of rock and roll and changes to the style of country music had a negative impact on the popularity of bluegrass music. Since the demand for live performances and recordings had diminished significantly, the main source of income for the Blue Grass Boys came from the Grand Ole Opry. It was a struggle to maintain the band.

In the early 1960s, there was a growing interest in traditional folk music which spawned the "folk music revival." This would become the favorite music of young adults and college students and create new audiences for bluegrass music. Proponents of the folk music revival, such as Mike Seeger and Ralph Rinzler, felt that bluegrass music was part of this revival. They believed that bluegrass music was part of the folk tradition for three main reasons:

> "it did not use the electric instruments then identified with the mass culture "pap" of rock 'n' roll and popular Country-Western music; Bluegrass recordings included a large number of traditional or tradition-based songs; and its instrumental styles, especially that of Earl Scruggs on the five-string banjo, were seen as exciting innovations based on folk styles which appealed to the revivalists."[126]

When Ralph Rinzler became Monroe's manager in 1963, Monroe's musical audience expanded from a southern country music circuit to a national audience. It was during this time that Monroe consented to his first magazine interview with *Sing Out!* Magazine; this article marked the first time that Monroe was referred to as "the daddy of bluegrass."[127]

By the time the folk music revival was no longer popular in the mid-1960s, bluegrass music had a loyal audience and bluegrass festivals began to appear. Monroe founded an annual bluegrass festival at Bean Blossom, Indiana, in 1967; it has been held annually since. Bill performed at the festival until 1988 when he retired from live performance. Bill continued to perform on the Grand Ole Opry and make live performances. In 1980, almost seventy years old, he was still on the road and making about 200 shows a year.[128] In 1980 Bill was diagnosed with colon cancer; he was back to performing within six months. His last performance was in March 1996; he had a stroke in April and was no longer able to perform. He continued to be an active member of the Grand Ole Opry community until his death in September 1996.

[126] Ibid., 149.

[127] Tom Ewing, Ed. *The Bill Monroe Reader*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 22.

[128] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin',* 237.

2.4 Bluegrass as a Genre

Bluegrass as a genre can be very difficult to define. As with other music sub-genres, there is an ongoing, intense and enthusiastic debate about what is true bluegrass. Performance practices for bluegrass music are equally murky.[129] Fortunately, the origin of the classic bluegrass sound is generally accepted as the 1946 version of the Blue Grass Boys, led by Bill Monroe with Earl Scruggs on banjo, Robert Russel (Chubby) Wise on fiddle, Howard Watts on string bass and Lester Flatt on guitar. The sound created by this group is given credit for the solidification of the bluegrass genre and its signature sound.[130] For this reason, understanding performance practice and genre must lie with the practices and stylings of the Blue Grass Boys from this time period. Emulation of the Blue Grass Boys' style and the original band members' departure from the group helped to propagate the genre. Focus on the original Blue Grass Boys sound and practices that are universally accepted should provide a reasonable understanding of genre and performance practice.

A bluegrass band typically consists of four to seven instrumentalists. All members of the band are expected to contribute to the instrumental and vocal sounds. Originally, a bluegrass band was male dominated; it has just been in the last decade that female vocals have found their way into bands.[131]

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[129] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 363.

[130] Ibid., 58.

[131] Ibid., 7.

Acoustic instrumentation is a driving factor in all bluegrass music. The tradition of bluegrass stems from the "old string band tradition"[132] that existed long before Bill Monroe ever incorporated other performance practices into the bluegrass template. As he continued to develop the bluegrass sound, the instrumentation in Bill Monroe's band varied over time. In general, a string band of acoustic instruments is required to achieve the characteristic sound of bluegrass, but percussion instruments, as well as other chordophones such as the accordion and harmonica, have been added to bluegrass ensembles for additional color. The 1946 Blue Grass Boys was composed of a lead guitar, mandolin, bass, banjo, and violin. [133] Each instrument in the bluegrass ensemble plays an important and unique role in the ensemble. All instruments also play a subservient or backup role to the vocal line when present. The genre is punctuated by improvisatory solos, high singing, and fast paced virtuosic instrumental playing.

The string bass plays a primarily rhythmic role in the ensemble. As the music for bluegrass is often in duple meter, the bass typically plays on beats 1 and 3; thus, it provides a strong sense of the beat and holds the ensemble together. The ability to push or drive the tempo is firmly rooted in the bass. This instrument also provides runs leading up to form changes and to add additional movement in the bass line. A popular technique utilized by Howard Watts was the walking bass line which provides four beats of bass to the measure and moves smoothly from chord to chord while providing interesting contour. [134]

[132] The "old string band" was usually composed of fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin and bass.

[133] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 364.

[134] Ibid., 69.

The guitar plays two roles in the bluegrass band. Often played by two separate individuals, the lead guitar handles melody and solo sections, while the rhythm guitar plays a more rhythmic role in bluegrass music. Occasional solos are possible for all instruments, but in Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys of 1946-1948, Lester Flatts role was primarily lead guitar. All instruments responsible for melodic solos provide melodic support and rhythm roles when not engaged in solo work. [135]

In Bill Monroe's hands, the mandolin became an important player in the ensemble. As a rhythm instrument, the percussive strum of the mandolin on beats 2 and 4 in duple meter provide an additional drive to the music juxtaposed by the basses 1 and 3 movement. This percussive strum was the original role of the mandolin before Bill Monroe expanded the potential of this instrument. The mandolin in bluegrass bands now serves an important role as solo instrument and driving rhythm instrument. Bill Monroe's ability to play the mandolin faster and more proficiently inspired others to emulate his style and brought the mandolin into the forefront of the bluegrass band.[136]

The fiddle has enjoyed great success in Appalachia and predates Bill Monroe and bluegrass. In the early 1800s, the fiddle played an integral role in rural celebrations; it was played at parties, dances, and worship services. In the 1930's, Old Time Fiddle conventions and string bands made extensive use of the fiddle.[137] Speed and technical ability were highly valued and virtuosic

[135] Ibid., 7.

[136] Ibid., 34-35.

[137] Ibid., 21.

playing was rewarded at fiddle competitions held in Texas and Southeast regions of America.[138] As Bill Monroe began to expand the repertoire of his band to include more country and old time folk music, he added the fiddle to his band. The fiddle in Bill Monroe's bluegrass band played a central role alongside the banjo and mandolin. It plays melody and provides rhythmic and melodic backup for vocals.

As with the fiddle, the banjo has played a major role in country and folk music. In fact, a major characteristic of bluegrass music is the sound of the syncopated three-finger banjo picking. Lester Scruggs contributed this feature to the bluegrass sound. [139] The banjo was brought to America with African slaves in the early 1700's. [140] The banjo played a role in many early American musical forms, early jazz, minstrel music, even parlor music of the late 1800s. The banjo had two prominent techniques utilized by most of the established performers. The first style was called claw hammer or frailing. This style emphasizes rhythmic strumming of the banjo with most of the strumming moving in a downward pattern. The style was awkward for bluegrass, if the band wanted a solo or lead instrument. [141] It was used sparingly in bluegrass as a rhythmic accompanying instrument, but not used as a solo instrument.

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[138] Ibid., 240.

[139] Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin',* 8.

[140] Jay Bailey. "Historical Origin and Stylistic Developments of the Five-String Banjo," *The Journal of American Folklore* 85, no. 335 (Jan. - Mar., 1972), 59.

[141] Robert B. Winans and Elias J. Kaufman," Minstrel. Classic Banjo: American and English Connections," *American Music* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), 1-30.

The banjo was used for some small instrumental solo breaks. In general, it couldn't keep up with the speed at which Bill Monroe was driving the music.[142] Bill had worked with banjoists to develop a picking style that more closely fit what Bill thought the role of the banjo might be in his band. The two fingered picking style originated where the instrument itself originated, West Africa. This style emphasized a downward stroke of the thumb and two fingers plucking. As with the claw hammer technique, this style was also suited well for the role of accompanying instrument, but not for solo work or extended improvisatory passages.

The banjo currently used for the bluegrass sound is a "plucked chordophone of the lute family with a vellum soundboard and four strings plus a fifth "thumb string" anchored half-way up the neck."[143] Often associated with bluegrass music, its rise into prominence as a lead instrument didn't occur until Earl Scruggs joined the Bluegrass Boys in 1945. Earl Scruggs brought with him a new picking style. The three fingered style, often referred to as the Scruggs style, allowed the banjo to move out of the role of accompanying instrument and into the role of lead instrument. Although this style is not unique to bluegrass music and Scruggs is not the originator of the style, he is responsible for its cultivation and advancement. [144] The style was already prevalent in western North Carolina, but it wasn't well known at the time. It was heavily influenced by African-American syncopated rhythms and playing style.[145] The Scruggs style chains together a seemingly endless stream of eighth notes by using the thumb, index and middle

[142] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 77.

[143] Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 27.

[144] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 138.

[145] Ibid., 71.

finger. Each finger picks notes and creates a rolling sound of continuous plucking strings. [146] Scruggs' virtuosic ability with this new style allowed the banjo to move into a new role as a lead instrument that has come to be synonymous with the bluegrass sound.[147]

The final distinctive instrument in Bill Monroe's 1946 bluegrass band was the voice. The high lonesome sound characterized by singing in the upper tessitura of the male voice, with a more forward placement and a slightly pinched production, was a staple of bluegrass music. This sound was developed by Bill Monroe during his time in the Monroe Brothers and was brought to fruition during his time at the Grand Ole Opry. Singing in bluegrass bands ranges from solo work to duets, trios, and quartets. The melody is typically sung with the high lonesome sound reserved for the tenor in close harmony above. A baritone and bass part are often added below the melody in quartets.[148]

The repertoire for bluegrass bands includes traditional folk songs from the Appalachia region, Christian religious music, as well as newly composed numbers presented by bands. The music can be purely instrumental or include up to four vocal parts. The themes revolve around home, tradition and love. Religious music, which is typically an important part of a bluegrass bands repertoire, is sung in quartets often with very minimal or no instrumental accompaniment. It is taken from gospel music and old spirituals.[149]

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[146] Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound*, 101.

[147] Stan Gottschalk. "Pete Seeger, The 5-String Banjo and American Culture," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 25, no. 2 (December 2006), 20.

[148] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 7

[149]Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A His*tory, 8.

While these characteristics and instrumentation combine to create what is known as traditional bluegrass, a diverse combination of instrumentation that claims a relationship with bluegrass music can be found on YouTube and in progressive bluegrass bands. This new sound is starting to gain popularity. As with shape-note singing, bluegrass provides an appropriate vehicle to introduce folk music into the choral class room and is a new source of material to explore for additional choral repertoire.

The general characteristics of the genre were summed up nicely in "An Introduction to Bluegrass" by M.L. Smith[150]:

1. Bluegrass is hillbilly music, played by professional, white, Southern musicians, primarily for a Southern audience.
2. Bluegrass is not dance music.
3. Bands are made up of from four to seven male musicians who play non-electrified stringed instruments and sing as many as four parts.
4. The interaction among instruments and voices is somewhat like that of jazz, and instruments serve one of three conventionalized, changing roles: melodic lead, ornamental melodic accompaniment, and rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment.
5. Every bluegrass band includes a banjo played in 'Scruggs style' or some derivative thereof.

[150] Mayne L. Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965), 245.

CHAPTER 3. SURVEY OF CURRENT PIECES AVAILABLE FOR PERFORMANCE AND THEIR ACCESSIBILITY

When looking for bluegrass or shape-note music, the logical place to start would be one of the large music repositories such as J.W. Pepper. An inspection of these sites finds only a modest selection available and many of the pieces have a relatively loose connection to either genre. Through study of both genres and their characteristic styles, it is possible to put together a list of desirable traits appropriate for use in classroom settings.

In this chapter, I will analyze nine compositions that I have used with my choirs; these compositions were nurtured from the rehearsal process to public performance. I will discuss the pros and cons of utilizing this literature in a classroom setting. I chose these pieces based on availability and accessibility to my students. These pieces also provided me an opportunity to hone my skills and will serve as ground work for more difficult compositions. A comprehensive list of available compositions can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. The pieces selected for review include:

Shape-note Examples

- "My Spirit Looks to God Alone" arr. by Derrick Fox
- "Wondrous Love" by Betty Bertaux
- "Emerald Streams" by Seth Houston
- "Soar Away" by A.M. Cagle

Bluegrass Examples

- "Shady Grove" arr. by Tom Shelton
- "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger of Grief" arr. by Keith Christopher
- "Orange Blossom Special" words and music by Kevin T. Rouse, arr. by Audrey Snyder and Michael Bardossi
- "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" arr. by Keith Christopher
- "Sail Away Ladies" arr. by Audrey Snyder

3.1 Shape-note Music

The selected shape-note arrangements are traditional pieces from the shape-note canon, pieces that have taken shape-note melodies and repurposed them for other styles, and pieces composed in the style and tradition of shape-note music. I found few pieces available that truly encapsulated all the sound of the shape-note tradition, but the pieces chosen come close. The main stylistic features of shape-note music that most readily identify the genre include: dispersed harmony, doubling of parts, fasola notation or syllables, dynamic intensity, rhythmic intensity or polyphonic elements, and *a cappella* settings. The use of original source material and topics add flavor and tradition to this music which many of these composers took advantage of in their compositions. The original source material also allows continued discussion into the history of this music. This is a significant advantage for choir teachers interested in expanding the learning opportunities in class. This material is readily available and can be repurposed for warm-up or even performance. "Emerald Streams" was composed in the style of shape-note music. "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," and "Wondrous Love" are adaptations of existing source material taken from *The Sacred Harp* hymnal.

Dispersed harmony is one of the most defining characteristics of shape-note singing. When discussing the quality of any arrangement, the question must be asked, "Is dispersed harmony a major part of the composition?" The disregard for standard choral writing, including long series of open chords, parallel 8ths and 5ths and the omission of the 3rd, especially at cadence points, provide the other worldly and archaic sounds associated with this music. When choosing literature based on or written in the shape-note style, dispersed harmony is essential. Each of these pieces contains dispersed harmony to some degree. In Figure 3.1 from "My Spirit

Looks to God Alone" mm. 40 through mm. 43, parallel 5ths and 8ths abound. This can also be observed several other times in the piece, such as in measures 36-38.

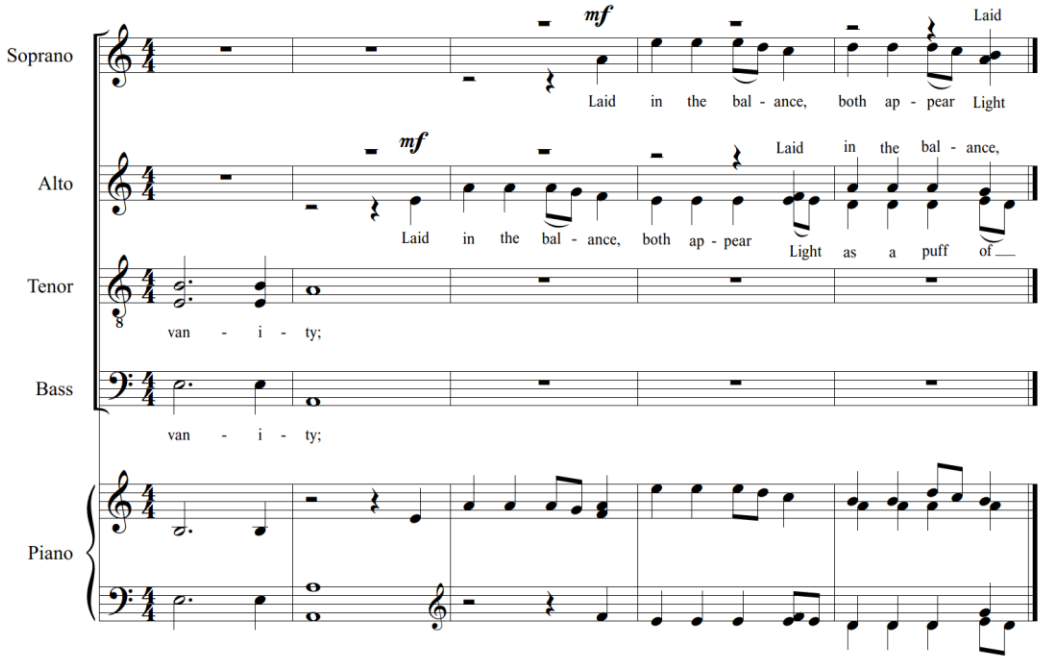

Figure 3.1. Derrick Fox, Arr., "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," mm. 40-43.[151]

"Wondrous Love" (Figures 3.2-3.4) and "Emerald Streams" (Figure 3.5) also have similar streams of flowing parallel 8ths and 5ths.

The omission of thirds at some major cadence points was missing from many of the shape-note compositions. For example, "Emerald Streams" consistently carried a third at cadence point. However, as seen in Figures 3.2-3.4, the omission of the third could be found in "Wondrous Love." Similar treatment of the third could be found in "My Spirit Looks to God Alone" at measures 34, 48, 54, and in the final chord of the piece. Based upon my experience conducting "Emerald Streams," I speculate that the composer, Seth Houston, incorporated the

[151] Derrick Fox, Arr., "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 2013), 6.

third to provide a slightly more modern interpretation in an effort to increase the comfort level of choirs attempting this literature for the first time.

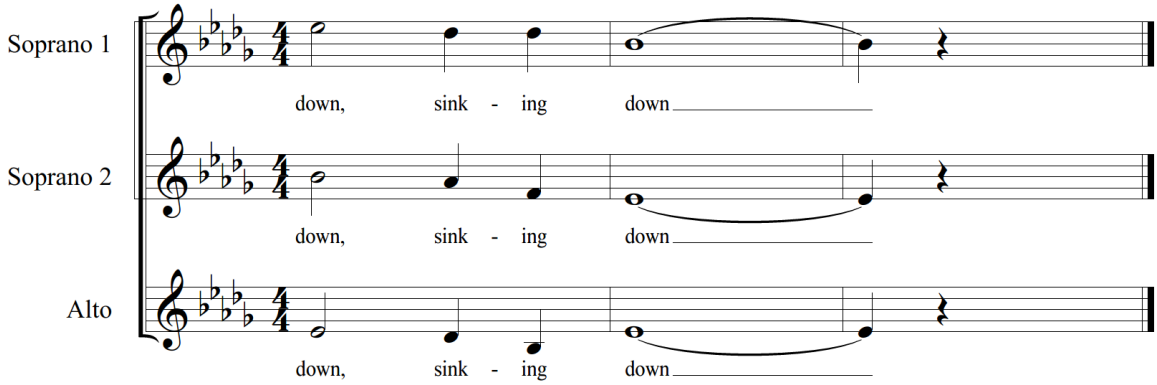

Figure 3.2. Betty Bertaux, "Wondrous Love," mm. 22.[152]

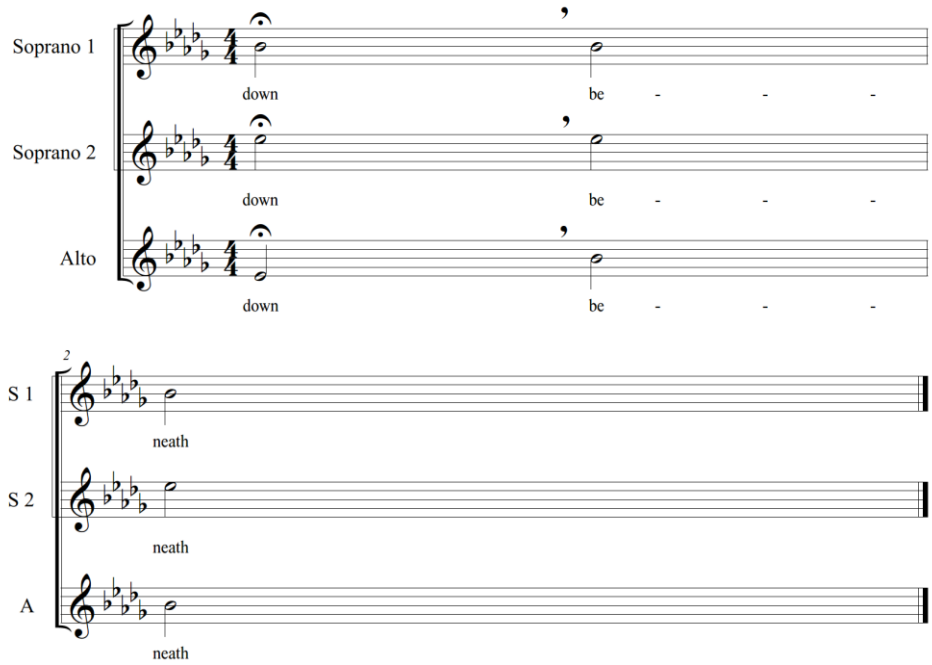

Figure 3.3. Betty Bertaux, "Wondrous Love," mm. 30.[153]

[152] Betty Bertaux, "Wondrous Love," (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 2005): 3,4.

[153] Ibid., 3,4.

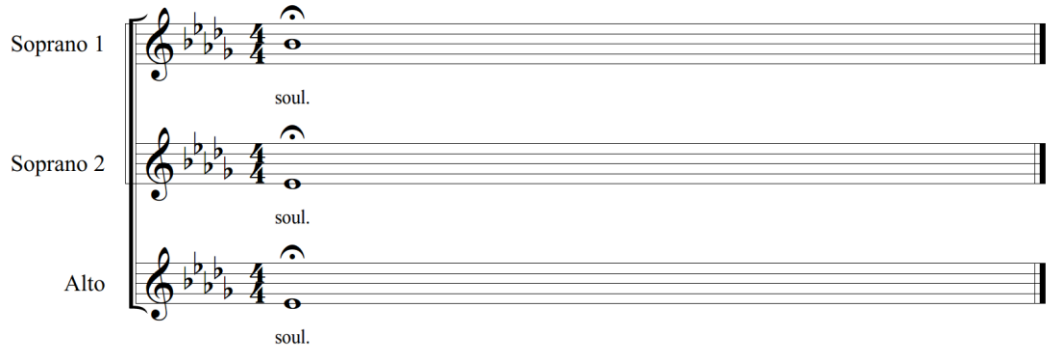

Figure 3.4. Betty Bertaux, "Wondrous Love," mm. 39.[154]

A defining performance practice of the shape-note tradition is the doubling of parts and the location of the melody within the choral structure. The occurrence of parallel 5ths and 8ths, as well as open chord structures, is achieved to a greater extent through this doubling of voices. Most of the pieces lacked open chord structures so indicative of this music. Only one of the shape-note pieces reviewed mentioned doubling of voices in any way. In Figure 3.5, the composer of "Emerald Streams" suggests that the tenor line may be doubled by the sopranos from mm 41 until the end of the piece. This addition of soprano to the tenor lead line is a typical performance practice of shape-note singing. In fact, at the shape-note conventions I've attended, all parts, with the exception of the bass, are doubled at the octave with male and female voices. This lack of doubling could easily be remedied in the choral setting with judicious doubling, but, as it is not directly called for in these pieces, some of the flavor of the original style is lost.

[154] Ibid., 3, 4.

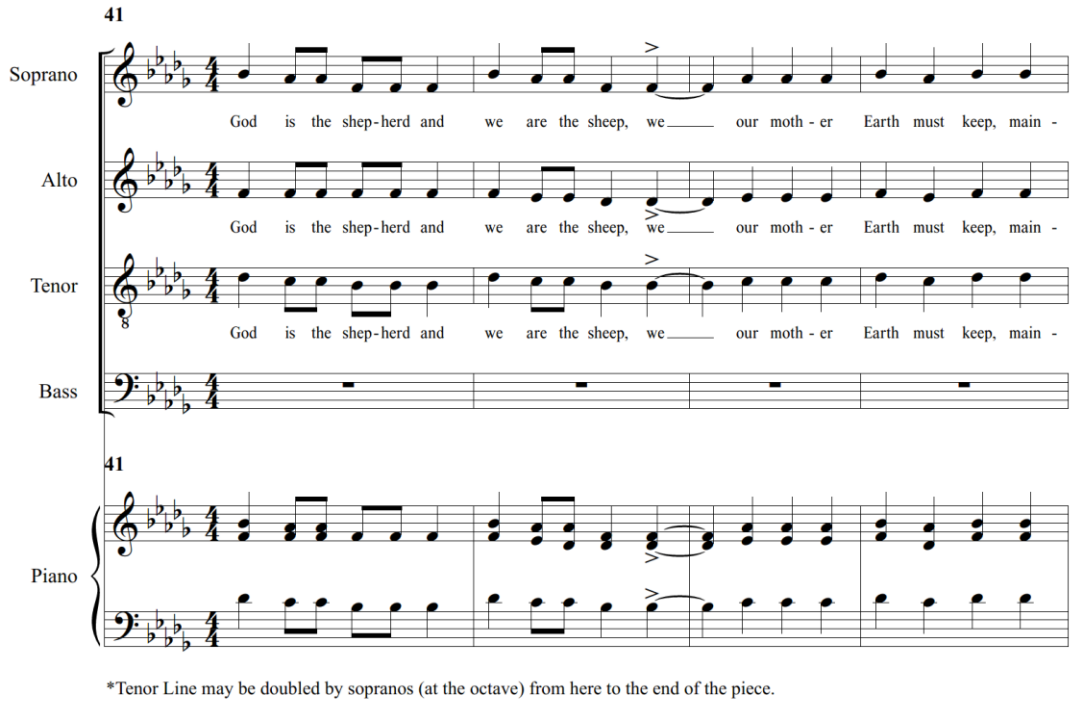

Figure 3.5. Seth Houston, "Emerald Streams," mm. 41-44.[155]

In the shape-note tradition the tenor is utilized for the melody; this is a departure from most modern compositions that primarily utilize the soprano voice for this task. The shape-note pieces reviewed at times deviate from this norm. In the SSA composition, "Wondrous Love," no male voices are present to carry the melody; however, the composer adapts by placing the melody in the second soprano part. This allows the melody to still occupy a similar location to an SATB composition. "My Spirit Looks to God Alone" keeps the tenor as the lead voice. "Emerald Streams" experiments with the basses as the primary holders of the melody. From a choral prospective, it is refreshing to provide the basses with interesting melodic material, but it is out of context with the performance practices of the shape-note tradition.

[155] Seth Houston, "Emerald Streams," (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2011): 7.

Shape notation or fasola syllables are not present in the pieces reviewed to any significant degree. “My Spirit Looks to God Alone” uses the opening tenor melody as an homage to the syllables by placing the first six measures with fasola syllables, but quickly reverts to the original text of the piece. This section of music uses standard notation. In shape-note tradition performers sing through the piece using shape-note syllables first. The performers then return to the beginning and forge through on the text. For a modern choir, unfamiliar with reading such shapes, this practice might prove difficult. Unless an educator desired to use the shaped notes as a sight reading tool, using the syllables to sing through a piece would, unfortunately, lose the genre’s original intent of sharpening sight reading skills.

Two of the three shape-note selections can be considered fuging tunes, as they have lengthy passages of polyphonic writing. In both cases, the composers set up the fugues in antiphonal waves. In Figure 3.6, taken from “Emerald Streams” mm 17-19, and Figure 3.7, “My Spirit Looks to God Alone” mm 13-17, the basses begin the imitative polyphonic passage. The choir repeats the polyphony several times with different text throughout the piece. The form in both pieces follows the pattern of shape-note style. The pieces begin in a homophonic four part opening followed by the polyphony. Often the composers disregard European part writing rules in these sections of polyphonic writing. Although “Emerald Streams” and “My Spirit Looks to God Alone” both include fuging, the rhythmic intensity often associated with fuging tunes in the shape-note tradition is restrained. For example, compare the sections of the two pieces provided in Figures 3.6 and 3.7 with the relative disregard to metrical patterns in “Soar Away” from *The Sacred Harp* (Figure 3.8). Both fuging sections in Figures 3.6-3.7 and 3.8 are relatively simple and rhythmically lose some of the intensity of the original style, but for a beginning choral experience, it makes the polyphonic section approachable and accessible. The music in “Soar

Away" provides an interesting line of music for the singer. This intent springs directly from the singing school tradition, where an interesting line was far more important than the overall understandability of the text. In "Emerald Streams" and "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," the composers chose to limit the rhythmic intensity. This is advantageous for the beginning choir since the rhythmic intensity can be overwhelming. "Wondrous Love," the one piece without fugue writing, would be considered a standard hymn setting in the shape-note tradition. Its homo-rhythmic texture and lack of polyphonic fuging sections make it easy to identify.

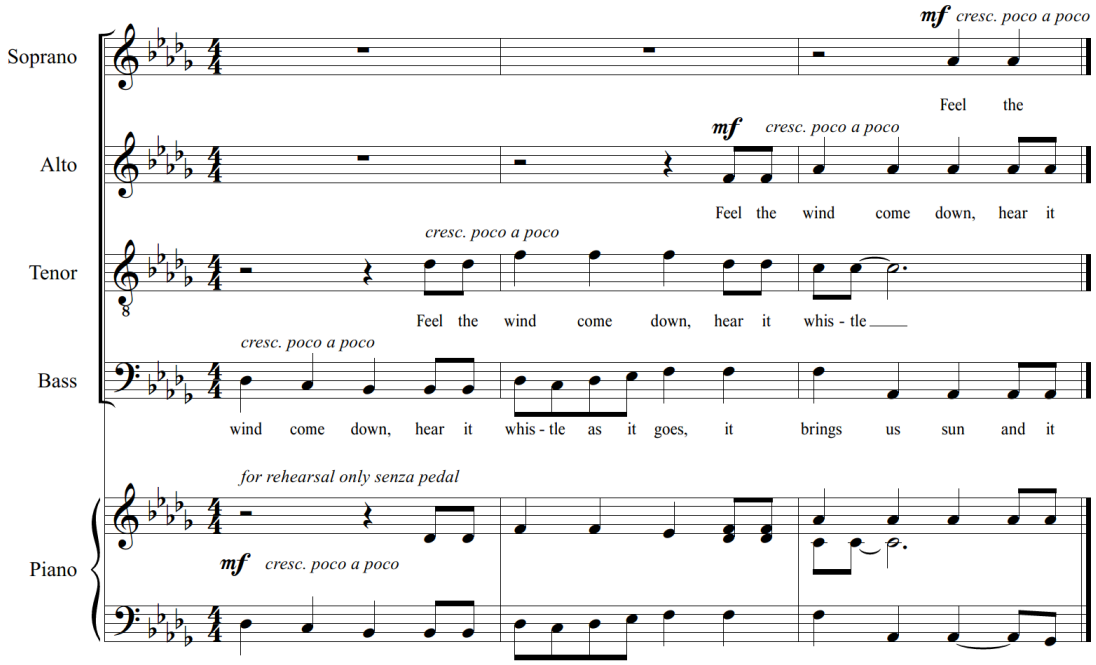

Figure 3.6. Seth Houston, "Emerald Streams," mm. 17-19.[156]

[156] Ibid., 4.

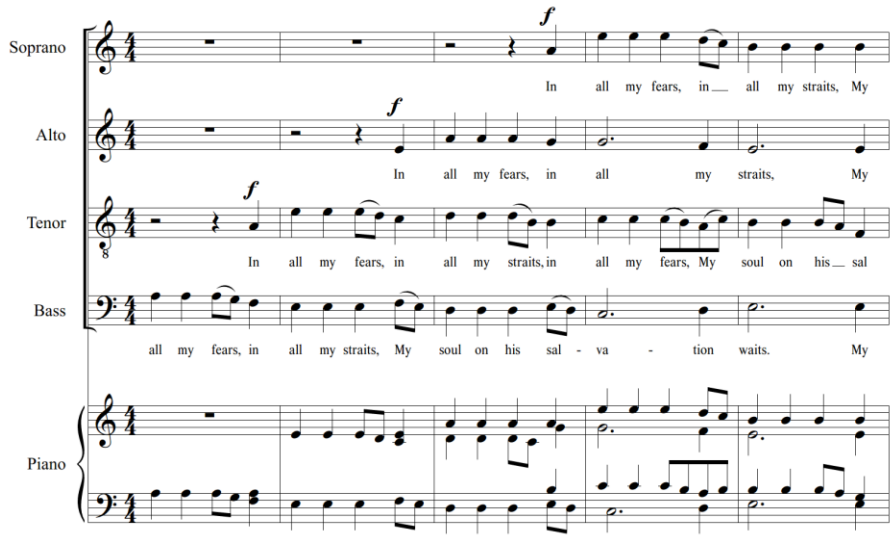

Figure 3.7. Derrick Fox, Arr., "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," mm. 13-17. [157]

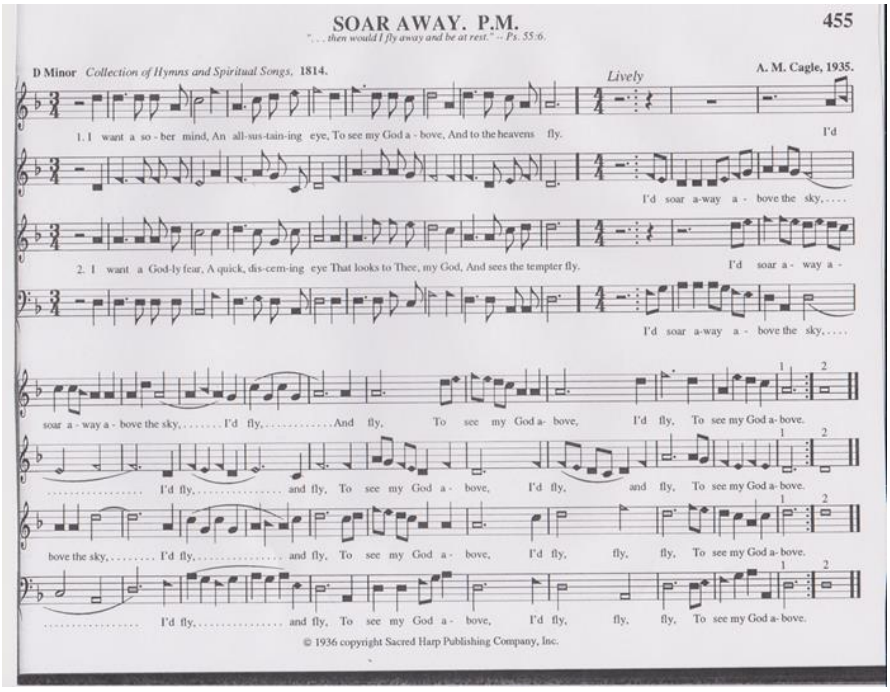

Figure 3.8. A. M. Cagle, "Soar Away" from *The Sacred Harp* # 455.[158]

Choir directors or performers of this literature should consider two final components in evaluating shape-note arrangements: dynamic intensity and suitability for *a cappella*

[157] Derrick Fox, Arr., "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," (New York : G. Schirmer, Inc., 2013): 4.

[158] King and White, *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*, 455.

performance. Each reviewed piece easily follows the tradition of unaccompanied singing, but each composer chose to deviate in small ways from the performance practice of *fortissimo* dynamic. With any choir, expression of dynamics is key to a positive, musically expressive performance.

My first experience with Sacred Harp singing occurred at the 2018 Columbus, Ohio Singing Convention. I was forcibly struck by the sheer volume of the sound when the choir sang *The Sacred Harp* hymns. Over my two day experience, I observed that the fantastic decibel levels seemed to be a performance practice of the music that has been universally adopted. I was impressed with the execution of practices established 150 years ago with the original hymnal. In the performance notes of the arrangement "Wondrous Love," the composer describes the chin-jutting singing by *The Sacred Harp* enthusiasts as "lusty and loud." In fact, in "The Rudiments of Music" section of *The Sacred Harp* hymnal, it states "The voice should be pure, full, firm, and certain….the singing should be strong with a tendency to sing louder on higher pitches but at the discretion of the group."[159]

The Sacred Harp hymnal also admonishes individuals to keep their voices in check and not over sing. These instructions seem at odds with the performance practice of full volume singing outlined in the performances notes and my own personal experience. This presents a small dilemma for the choir director striving to follow conflicting directions. As a compromise, I suggest identifying pieces that allow a full range of dynamics, but *forte* and *fortissimo* should be used judiciously to maintain a connection to the original performance practice.

[159] Ibid., 20.

All three pieces reviewed contain sections requiring full-bodied singing. Each individual composer handles this dilemma in a slightly different way. In "My Spirit Looks to God Alone," the arrangement closest to the source material, Mr. Fox maintains a dynamic range of *mf-f*. Fox has obviously embraced the traditional performance practice and desires to maintain it in his arrangement. Ms. Bertaux also maintains *mf-f* for the majority of "Wondrous Love," adds a few *piani,* and closes the piece with a *decrescen*do to *niente*. "Emerald Streams," Mr. Houston's piece, has a much wider dynamic range. Mr. Houston sets "Emerald Streams" with dynamic qualities ranging from *piano* to *fortissimo* with significant *crescendo* and *decrescendo* sections. This increase in range follows *The Sacred Harp* guidelines more closely. For a choir interested in more expressive qualities, "Emerald Streams" provides opportunities for dynamic diversity.

The number of modern shape-note arrangements for the high school or collegiate classroom is limited. The older, traditional source material is still readily available, but the shaped notes can intimidate choirs. The three pieces reviewed provide an easily accessible bridge between the older unfamiliar shape-note style and what a modern choir will find familiar and comfortable. They all contain simple harmonies and not particularly challenging for an experienced choir. Each piece holds true to aspects of the shape-note style while allowing a choir to experience the distinctive sound of the open sonorities in a familiar way. Appendix A provides a list of available pieces worthy of exploration in the shape-note tradition. Some of the compositions have expanded the source material into truly difficult and challenging eight part arrangements. These compositions maintain some of the distinctive sounds from this tradition but could challenge a young choir's abilities and should be carefully evaluated by choir directors for suitability.

Overall, the pieces chosen for review provided several advantages and disadvantages. None of the pieces chosen completely melded with the performance styles of shape-note music. Whether lacking rhythmic and dynamic intensity or failing to incorporate the shaped notes into the score, all fell short in some aspect of the genre. The disadvantage for using music written at least 150 years ago means some compromise will be required for adaptations to the modern day choir classroom. Of course, the original source material is readily available for use in the classroom. A simple search on Amazon.com will yield a low cost *Sacred Harp* hymnal. Incorporating *The Sacred Harp* into some portion of classroom instruction will provide context for appropriate performance of these adaptations. *The Sacred Harp* has gone through many revisions but has maintained most of its original material. The advantages to these adaptations outweigh any deficiencies in performance practice. Each piece contains important elements of the shape-note style in an easy to understand format. “Emerald Streams,” “Wondrous Love,” and “My Spirit Looks to God Alone” would make a fantastic introduction to shape-note music. These are wonderful pieces to begin the exploration of this body of literature and to enjoy some sounds from our American heritage.

3.2 Bluegrass Music

Bluegrass music is a more difficult genre to categorize, as some of the elements that contribute to the genre do not easily fit into arrangements of choral music. Unlike shape-note music, bluegrass incorporates a virtuosic string band that plays with close vocal harmonies. Whereas the shape-note tradition of *a cappella* four part singing can be easily brought into a choral group that already contains four part *a cappella* singing, bluegrass does not so easily assimilate into choral literature. Most of the available bluegrass choral arrangements are simple. Retaining the bluegrass sound with a choir relies heavily on what is readily available to

supplement the arrangement. A farsighted conductor must consider several questions when analyzing an arrangement. Will it be orchestrated with piano, bluegrass string band, or other instrumental combination? How much liberty will be taken by the solo sections? Will the vowels be modified; should it sound country? Answering these questions will help bring the choral performance of bluegrass pieces closer to an authentic sound.

Bluegrass pioneers, like Bill Monroe, originally wrote with an eye towards commercial success. Unlike shape-note music that embraced both genders, the origins of bluegrass focused on male voices. As with our culture, bluegrass has evolved to embrace both genders in modern performance. The close harmonies in bluegrass make it ideal for SATB arrangement and choral performance. Bluegrass contains these specific elements: form, improvisation, a string band accompaniment, close harmonies, and contrasting forces, i.e. solo vs. ensemble performance. Bluegrass offers unique advantages to a choral instructor with a talent for arranging. The flexibility of bluegrass allows choral conductors to utilize the forces available at their institutions to best effect.

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" and "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger" arranged by Keith Christopher, "Shady Grove" arranged by Tom Shelton, "Orange Blossom Special" words and music by Kevin T. Rouse, arranged by Audrey Snyder and Michael Bardossi, and "Sail Away Ladies" arranged by Audrey Snyder are the bluegrass pieces I chose for performance with my choirs and analysis for this dissertation. As with the shape-note arrangements, these pieces fit most of the criteria laid out to achieve a desirable bluegrass sound, but all fall short of perfection. It is up to the choir director, through the rehearsal process, to add the necessary performance practices that bring this music to life.

I contacted three colleges that specialize in bluegrass music, Berea College in Kentucky[160], East Tennessee State University[161], and UCLA Music Department[162] looking for arrangements and advice on bringing this music into the classroom. Through email correspondence, professors from each university offered consistent observation and advice. All three schools found that the most successful performance occurred when professors composed and arranged for specific choral groups at their university. The consensus was that many of the available commercial pieces were too generalized and generic; they did not provide the individuality brought to a bluegrass piece by individual performers and had a structure that was slightly prohibitive to improvisation.

Based upon my research of bluegrass and the advice of my peers at the three universities, the dilemma, as I examined the literature available for purchase, was to identify pieces that allowed some flexibility for improvisation and that provided some structure for a group that had little or no experience with the genre. It was important to find pieces that incorporated as many of the elements of bluegrass as possible to ensure that a convincing sound could be produced. The pieces chosen for review make use of these elements and provided the necessary loose structure to incorporate the individuality required by this genre. A list of all bluegrass compositions found is provided in Appendix B.

Vocal and instrumental improvisation is one of the elements of bluegrass that links it to jazz and the blues. With much of the standard choral canon devoid of improvisation, bluegrass

[160] Al White, e-mail message, November 15, 2018.

[161] Daniel Boner, e-mail message to author, November 15, 2018.

[162] Timothy Taylor, e-mail message to author, November 16, 2018.

provides an opportunity for students in the choral classroom to develop this valuable skill. Bluegrass enthusiasts anxiously await instrumental breaks in performance to hear what the musician can accomplish on the spot. A good arrangement for a bluegrass choir must incorporate this element into the structure of the piece. Ideally, a piece might include both instrumental and vocal improvisation.

The songs, "Poor Wayfaring Stranger," "I Want Jesus To Walk With Me," and "Shady Grove," include the element of improvisation in the opening lines of the pieces. All begin with unaccompanied vocal solo. The instructions at the top of the page read, "with much freedom" or "very freely." The melody is sketched out to provide a harmonic basis for the soloist, but there is enough room to improvise on that melody line. These solos are unaccompanied. In Figure 3.9, taken from mm 1-9 and mm 45-48 of "I Want Jesus To Walk With Me," the structure of the melody is clearly visible, but the possibilities for a gospel style improvisation are endless. The second solo is accompanied by choir and string band and allows the vocalist the support of a harmonic structure for even greater security.

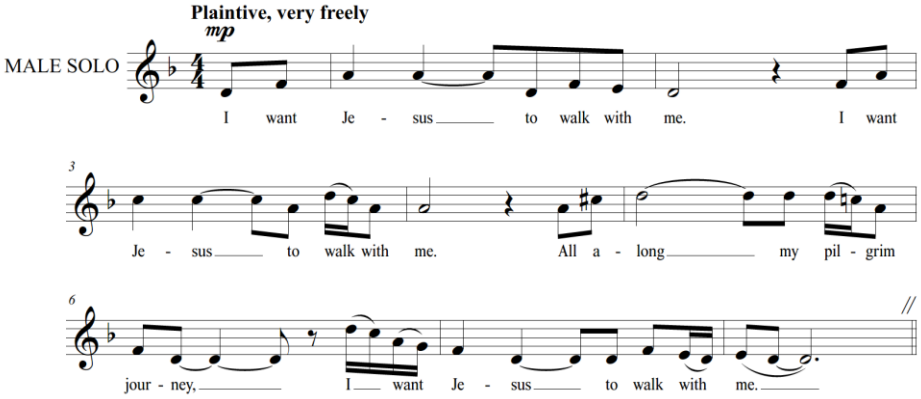

Figure 3.9. Keith Christopher, Arr., "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," mm. 1-9.[163]

[163] Keith Christopher, Arr., "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," (Nashville: Shawnee Press, 2013): 3.

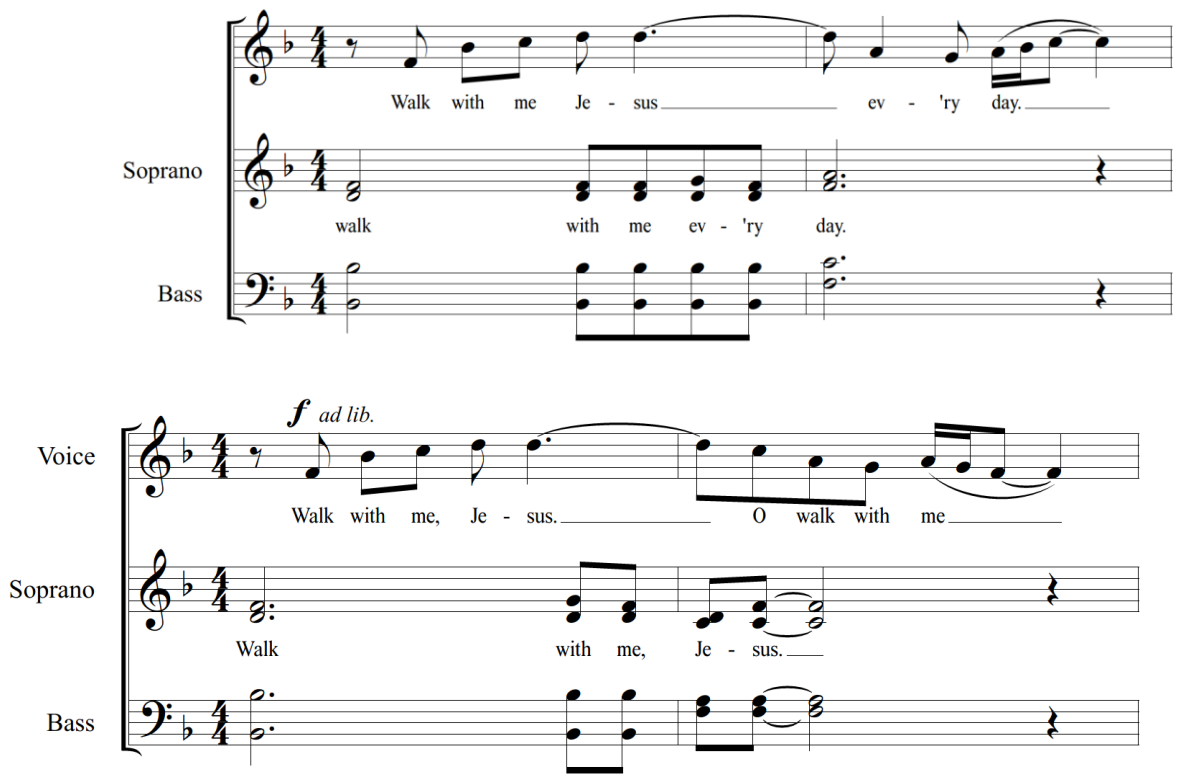

Figure 3.9. Keith Christopher, Arr., "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," mm. 45-48.[164]

"Sail Away Ladies" and "Orange Blossom Special" provide small solo sections with instrumental accompaniment. Each of these solos are just a few measures long and Audrey Snyder, arranger of "Sail Away Ladies," suggests in her composer notes that the solos should be *ad libitum*. Unfortunately, only one of these pieces provides solo improvisatory opportunities for the instrumentalist. Of course, as none of the instrumental parts are written out and they must be created from chord symbols, a certain improvisatory atmosphere still exists. Most bluegrass arrangements do not provide fleshed out instrumental parts. A piano accompaniment is often included and in the case of "Orange Blossom Special" and "Sail Away Ladies," a violin part is also included.

[164] Ibid., 9,10.

"Orange Blossom Special" is the one piece that incorporates an instrumental break and provides an opportunity for the violin to improvise. In Figure 3.10 mm. 49-51, we can see the beginning of the break and the suggested violin solo. This piece originated as an instrumental number for virtuosic violin playing, so it is appropriate that much of the piece features the violin.

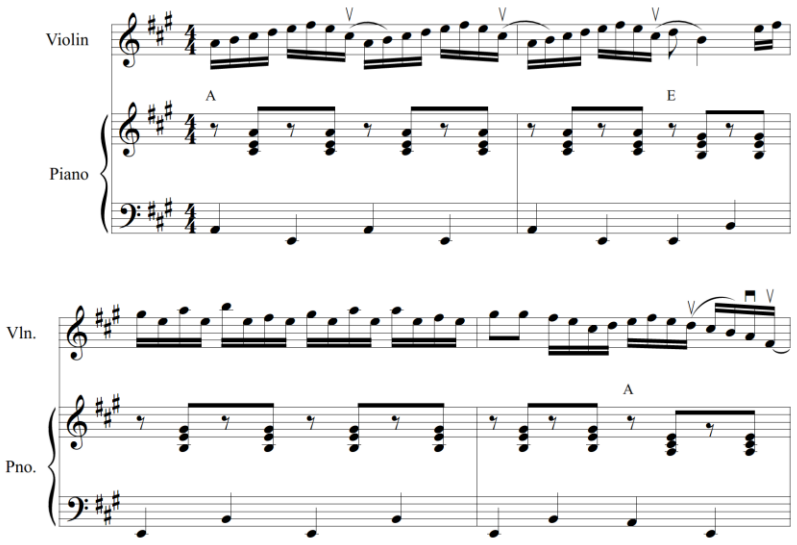

Figure 3.10. Kevin T. Rouse, Arr., "Orange Blossom Special," mm. 49-51.[165]

Close harmonies and closed chords are as much a hallmark of bluegrass music as improvisation. The harmonic progressions are simple and repetitive and allow bluegrass vocalists to perform harmonies on demand. Typically, bluegrass harmonies are tertiary and all three parts of the triad are represented when singing in three or four parts. These simple harmonies are illustrated in Figure 3.11 mm 17-25 taken from "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger of Grief." The page is dominated with tonic only moving to the sub-dominant for a measure before returning to tonic. In traditional bluegrass, these harmonies where produced by male quartets. Fortunately, in an

[165] Kevin T. Rouse, Arr. by Audrey Snyder and Michael Bardossi, "Orange Blossom Special," Violin Part and Acc. (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2011): 4.

SATB chorus, less strain needs to be placed on the upper female voices to achieve a similar close harmony.

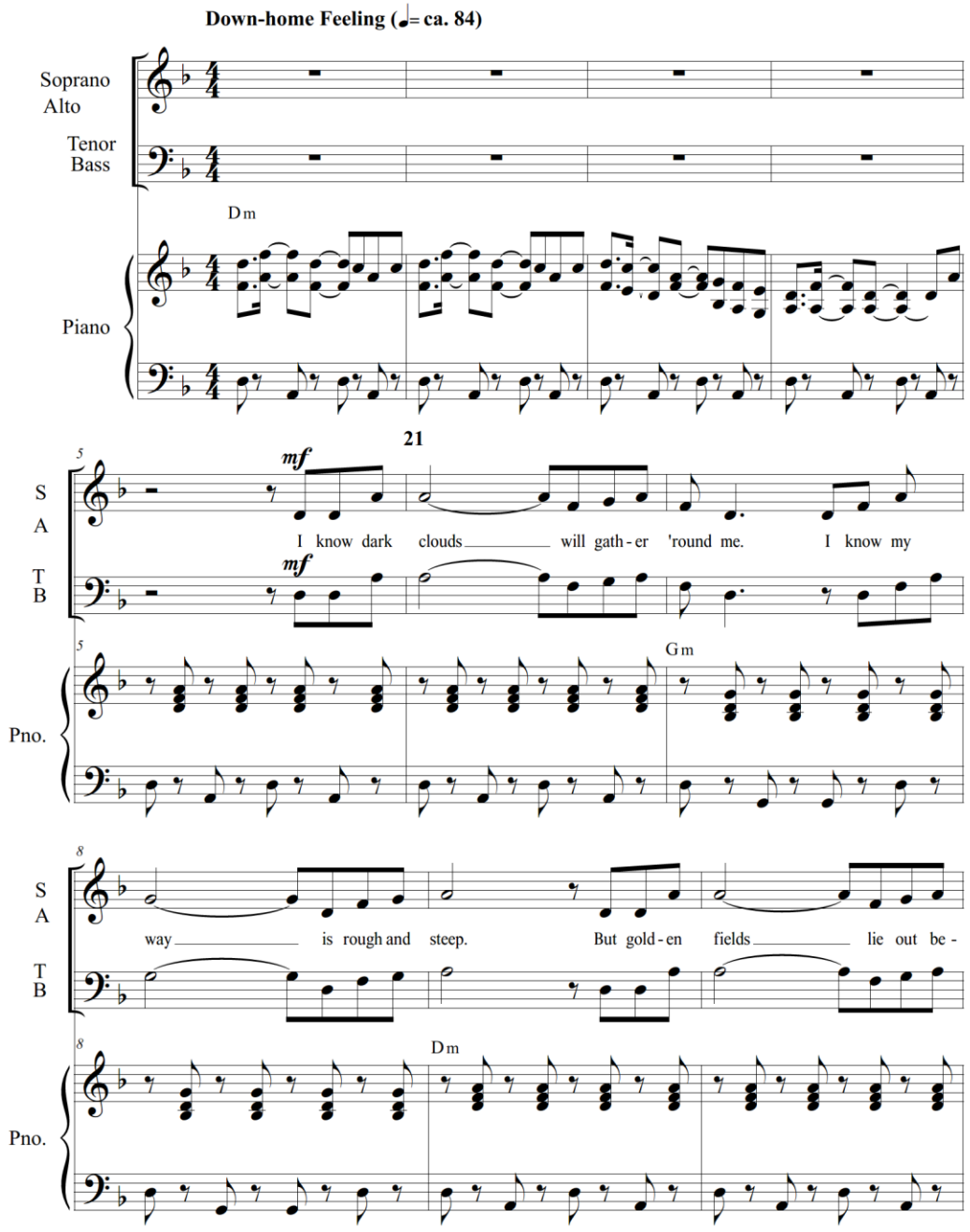

Figure 3.11. Keith Christopher, Arr., "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger of Grief," mm. 17-25.[166]

[166] Keith Christopher, Arr., "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger of Grief," (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2016): 7.

Secular music is usually sung in three parts: a tenor, lead, and baritone. These parts are named for their relationship to the lead part; gender is not taken into consideration. The tenor is above the lead and the baritone is below. Sacred music is typically sung in four parts with a possible high part sung above the tenor. The high part is usually just a doubling of the baritone part taken an octave up and often utilizes a reinforced falsetto or a strident vocal production. Bluegrass arrangements should utilize closed chord positions primarily and should keep the harmony as tight as possible. This close harmony results in long strings of thirds and triads. In Figure 3.12 mm 21 – 26, a phrase from "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," demonstrates typical bluegrass harmony. The reviewed bluegrass pieces stay in closed position chords without exception for the majority of the time. This provides an excellent harmonic bluegrass template.

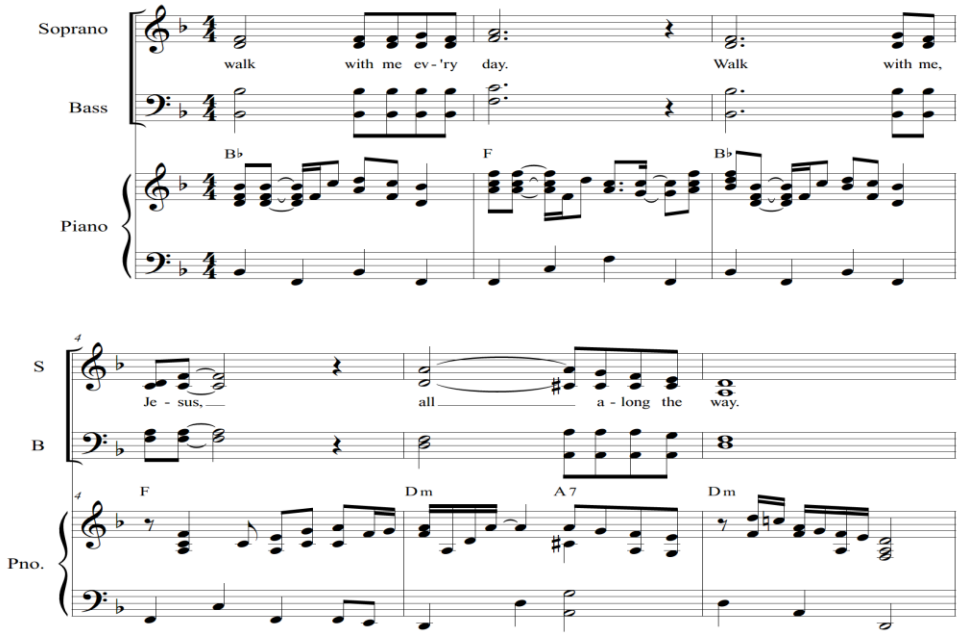

Figure 3.12. Keith Christopher, Arr., "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," mm. 21-26.[167]

[167] Keith Christopher, Arr., "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me," (Nashville: Shawnee Press, 2013): 5

Although the initial number of selections for shape-note and bluegrass genres is slim, there are many pieces available for purchase that encapsulate a plethora of the stylistic characteristics. Of course, the original source material is available for purchase and easy to obtain. Pieces taken directly out of *The Sacred Harp* hymnal provide a wonderful access point for choirs beginning to explore this literature, but the notation may provide a small obstacle to initial success. Bluegrass music continues to be composed commercially and the amount of music available for arrangement is large and accessible. While not all educators may feel comfortable with their arranging skills, this is the best way to make a piece of bluegrass music work for an ensemble.

In choosing published choral music, keep in mind those qualities that best communicate the styles of these two genres. Shape-note music should be full of open sonorities, sections of fuging, solid *a cappella* singing, and running sequences of parallel octaves and fifths. Shape-note music should break the western European model of choral writing with multiple sections of part crossing and doubling of parts. Bluegrass music needs close harmonies, a string band, and in the case of gospel music, tight *a cappella* quartet writing. Remember, the string band instrumentation is flexible. Even Bill Monroe experimented with different instrumentation before settling on the standard guitar, mandolin, banjo, violin, and bass. The published music is not particularly challenging but can provide educators with an opportunity to focus on style. The pieces that have been reviewed would make excellent points of entry into these two genres.

CHAPTER 4. ADJUSTING CHORAL SOUNDS TO NEW GENRES

Several technical issues can arise when incorporating shape-note and bluegrass music into the choral classroom. The standard western European model for American choral music does not seamlessly mesh with these genres as it does with other standard compositions. The sounds and styles of shape-note and bluegrass genres go against years of choral training in good vowel placement, dynamic volume, vocal production and tuning. To prepare the vocalist for this music, several strategies should be employed to ease their immersion into these genres. It is important to remember that the sounds in this music deserve respect and should not become a parody of a bluegrass hoedown. The music should be adapted to suit the voice and the style of these genres in the same way in which we adapt to world music or spirituals. Avoiding the temptation to overly affect the voice to make the choir sound more "country" creates respect for the musical tradition. My choir did not attempt to create a parody of this music. Instead, the music and tradition is treated with respect and it is added to the list of possible choral selections for the choir. This chapter will focus on some of the technical issues that I encountered when these genres were introduced to my students and it will outline some of the most productive strategies incorporated to resolve the issues.

Many students display initial wariness of these genres. Bluegrass and shape-note genres, often associated with hillbilly music, have been considered uncultured and unsophisticated artistry in the past by the musical elite. Nothing could be further from the truth. Bluegrass encapsulates some of the most amazing virtuosic playing of any genre outside of classical Paganini. Most of my students had never heard of shape-note music or appreciated its context in our nation's music history. The importance of the singing schools and shape-note music to the history of music education and our own choral education cannot be overstated. Before

proceeding, the instructor must address the student's unfamiliarity with the historical background and musical advantages of the literature. In this way, the initial hesitation towards these genres is overcome. The students' ears must be enlightened to the open sonorities and folk sound.

The incorporation of bluegrass and shape-note music into the choral classroom doesn't require a radical shift from the way choral conductors approach the standard choral canon advocated by the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). As choral musicians, bringing these genres into the classroom requires flexible technique. Exploring these genres can provide a breath of fresh air and allow choral conductors to expand their repertoire. This is not something out of context with what is often done with other choral pieces. For instance, conductors wouldn't approach an Eric Whitacre choral composition piece in the exact same way they might rehearse "Ave Verum Corpus" by Mozart. Instructors must spend time in detailed score analysis and delve into the music to find which unique characteristics to emphasis and emulate.

Finally, we must consider the vocal health of our students. Shape-note singing requires extreme dynamics. Younger voices, still learning proper vocal technique, might struggle to embrace the sound in a safe way. Bluegrass and shape-note singing require a more forward sound placement in the mask of the face, and excessive forward pressure encourages over singing. Choral music instructors must balance two solemn responsibilities: the need to protect young voices and the desire to fulfill the ethical imperative to perform the music in the most authentic manner possible.

Educators must first open their students' ears to the complexity and unique nuances inherent in shape-note and bluegrass music. Aural and visual stimulation effectively exposes students to the styles in a format compatible with modern sensitivities. This may appear to be a simplistic

approach, but sites such as YouTube, Spotify, and Pandora as well as other streaming media sites, offer a plethora of audio examples. These familiar venues offer the added bonus of modern relevance to students. The inclusion of these genres into popular sites serves as testimony to the enduring nature of these genres. Modern choral conductors are fortunate to have these tools readily available.

Planning and critical evaluation need to go into the selection process for listening exposure. Pointing out the highlights and significance of the performance while viewing provides many opportunities for educational development. The power of the resource rests upon the educator's ability to provide lecture, context and demonstration. In this way, students begin to grasp the unique characteristics of these genres.

In addition to familiarizing students to the sounds of these genres, performance practice and historical opportunities are available. My initial introduction to shape-note singing was through YouTube. Most modern singing conventions around the world record and post their all day singings on YouTube. Viewing a YouTube video allows students to get a feel for the raw vocal style and the archaic vocal technique. They will also benefit from seeing their modern peers participating in the music. Students will observe the seating arrangement of the open square which is a part of the 1850's shape-note tradition that has continued to the present time. The sound will initially be harsh to students trained ears, but, with exposure to the open sonorities, the sound will become familiar. Ordinary, untrained people attend the singings. The music is designed for the vocalist, not the audience. As with any media, some singing conventions are better than others. As these are not trained musicians, the occasional wrong note does occur. Students will hear the harsh chest voice of the alto's exuberant singing, and the enthusiastic nasal resonance of the tenor section. I would suggest the Second Ireland Sacred Harp Convention of

2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhqKWzTHBI4&list=PLvxawOZ9FezfphaWSCH2d8vONSXM8S0d7 or several good videos out of the Henderson, Texas, all day conventions.

For historical context, there are several old recordings from the 1960's and earlier. An album entitled, *I Belong to the Band*, has recordings from 1922. These older videos and recordings suffer from poor production quality, but offer authentic sound, and show a link to a musical tradition virtually unchanged in the last hundred years. The Alabama Sacred Harp Singers from 1942 were recorded by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szuiPWgbN6I. With little effort in research, other older recordings can be found.

Another potential path for immersion in shape-note singing would be to attend the multitude of local singings held across the United States. A Google search for local singings provided results for time/date and locations of local groups. I contacted several groups as I researched this genre and was met with enthusiasm and support for my research at every turn. Nothing in my research compared to the experience of standing in the hollow square while enthusiasts of the shape-note tradition serenaded me at peak volume.

I attended the Columbus, Ohio 2018 Sacred Harp Convention (March 3-4). Veteran singers welcomed me with warmth and encouragement. At first, I merely observed the tradition unfolding before me but was soon encouraged to take a more active role. Veteran singers convinced me to experience the sound from the middle of the hollow square. Surrounded by 200 vocalists, I led a rousing rendition of "Idumea" from *The Sacred Harp* hymnal. To ensure my comfort, a more experienced member mirrored my movements. The experience was transcendent; it further inspired my love of this music and encouraged my need to share it with

my students. There is no better way for students to gain an understanding of the genre than to experience it for themselves.

Another valuable resource for developing an understanding of shape-note's national influence is fasola.org, one of the shape-note official websites which is sponsored by *The Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association (SHMHA).*[168] The organization provides detailed information about the performance and traditions of shape-note singing. The website also contains information about Camp Fasola. This camp provides a classroom setting for those interested in learning more of the theory behind shape-note singing. Included in the website is an exhaustive list detailing every larger convention and singing in the world. The events are listed by state making it easy for a conductor to find local singings for student involvement. Immersion in shape-note experiences is one of the best ways to grasp its significance, understand its importance and adjust to its dispersed harmony.

Most country music historians have credited Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys of the late forties with originating the "bluegrass" sound. Fortunately, because this sound evolution occurred in the middle of the 20th century, it is easy to gain access to the primary source. YouTube offers many Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys performances. Most performances of the Blue Grass Boys include Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, both original band members, and provide quality listening examples. Focusing on the older bluegrass recordings ensures exposure to the traditional sound. Unlike the shape-note tradition, which has maintained much of its original sounds and performance practices, bluegrass has continued to evolve as a genre. As a

[168] According to the fasola.org website, "SHMHA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose purpose is the preservation and perpetuation of Sacred Harp singing and its traditions. SHMHA's interests include Sacred Harp music, history, traditional singing practices, singing schools, singings, and singing conventions."

commercial music, the needs and fickle desires of the paying public have played a role in continual bluegrass evolution. Some of the changes to the genre include women as vocalists, more traditional country vocals bereft of the high lonesome sound, and less traditional instrumentation such as electrified string instruments. Although the evolving genre still contains many of the characteristics of original bluegrass, older recordings tend to capture more of the original sound.

Traditional bluegrass presents in three distinct forms: unaccompanied vocal music, accompanied vocal music, and purely instrumental pieces. Although the focus of the choral teacher rests upon the voice in bluegrass, it is important not to overlook the instrumental improvisation and virtuosic playing of the instrumentalist. Developing aural sensitivity for vocal bluegrass music must include a strong awareness of the improvisational choices in purely instrumental bluegrass music. Keep in mind the YouTube videos are not a stand-alone tool. To engender student understanding of this genre requires careful planning and guided viewing. Improvisatory choices must be examined and compared. With careful guidance by the educator, a beginning understanding of the flavor, the flow, and the character can all be acquired through primary source recordings. This awareness will allow students to begin understanding what is possible in their own vocal improvisations and ultimately improve assimilation into this genre.

YouTube videos might be easier to acquire, but nothing compares to live bluegrass performances and these performances abound across the United States. Historical bluegrass conventions, such as the Bean Blossom Festival begun by Bill Monroe, are still held annually. Live performances offer the opportunity to observe ‘on the spot’ improvisation of solo instruments. A bluegrass convention is as unique as the genre itself. Having attended several bluegrass conventions, it is important to note that the educational experiences begin in the

parking lot. Amateur enthusiasts are engaging in impromptu jam sessions and are sharing favorite songs and techniques in the parking lot. People from all walks of life show off budding skills learned by ear or nurtured through YouTube clinicians. Although more commercially slanted than shape-note singing, a bluegrass convention also shares the blurring of the line between audience and performer by encouraging group participation.

Another option for immersion might include inviting competent bluegrass musicians into the classroom. A demo concert could be arranged with performances of music that the choir is learning. This can yield positive results and help students draw on the musicians' performance as inspiration for their improvisation and immersion. Students can hear the original form of the piece and identify where the choral adaptation diverges from string band performance.

After viewing both genres either in concert or video, students can begin to work towards their own performance. The next logical step to continue adjusting our choral ears begins in the warm-up process for each rehearsal. Warm-up exercises provide essentials to vocal growth and healthy vocalizing. Students should strive for proper vocal placement of the sound when working with this literature. In general, both bluegrass and shape-note styles utilize a forward placement. In my experience, most choirs avoid using the sinus cavity as a potential resonator and prefer the slightly darker sound generated by lifting the soft pallet while pulling the sound slightly back from the nose. This choral style provides a nice *chiaroscuro*, blending bright and dark sounds with strong consonant production. In bluegrass and shape-note singing, the desired effect is to emphasize the bright sounds while downplaying the dark. I have developed several warm-ups designed to unlock a student's ability to control the placement of the voice. These warm-ups work to unlock the student's potential to move the placement of the voice at will and to seamlessly adjust to any genre.

A visualization exercise works well as a first exercise on placement. Placement itself is really just a word used to refer to which areas the voice chooses to resonate. Each resonator carries different qualities for production. Using the mask of the face, or forward placement, allows students to make use of the nose and sinus cavity as resonating spaces. This tends to emphasize brighter overtones.

Begin by demonstrating the different voice placements by using an [i] vowel. Start with a good choral placement and then move the sound back into the throat and then forward into the nose. The student must understand that voice placement is optional. Using a hum, have students descend beginning on dominant moving to tonic. I tell students to close their eyes and imagine the voice as a ball of energy. As they hum, I tell them to picture that ball of energy moving from the front of the face located in the nose to the back of the throat. Students should take their time breathing correctly and beware of forcing too much sound as they experiment with placement. This should be a relaxing exercise. Tension will only create obstacles to moving the sound. The hum should continue down by half steps; the students should be guided in the direction to move the voice. The sound should move forward and then back. Pay attention to the choral sounds the students are producing and encourage students to experiment by moving the sound to other locations in the head and throat. The process is designed to free the voice of a predetermined placement while maintaining relaxation and reducing tension.

Move away from the hum and continue to experiment with other vowels especially [i], [a], [e], and [Ɛ]. These vowels are the easiest to modify and provide the most noticeable change. The vowels, [o] and [u], already dark by nature, remain dark in bluegrass and shape-note singing and require no modification.

I found it useful to have students imagine different popular artists in this process. I encourage them to emulate the artist's characteristic sound while humming. For instance, I might ask my students to give me a hum like the popular artists, Ariana Grande or Rhianna. This provides a cultural and aural reference from the student's current pop culture. Since both artists utilize a more forward placement, emulating their sound will generate better results if students are struggling to manipulate placement.

The next exercise, dealing with resonating spaces and placement, works in a similar fashion to the humming warm up. My second exercise develops proper breath support and modified placement while emphasizing the previous positive characteristics of forward placement. I emphasize that words should be approached in the same manner as in any other choral piece; there should be good attack, sustained consistent vowel sounds, and strong consonant placement. I encourage my students to avoid being sloppy, but intentional, as they focus on changes to technique. My focus is to manipulate vowel color and placement only. During this exercise, I chose words either from the piece we are working on or words containing a primary vowel of [a], [e], or [ɛ]. Students choose parts of a triad that I provide and sustain the word for four counts. I increase duration and dynamics from *piano* to *forte* and from 4 to 12 counts as the exercise progresses. I guide the choir as they experiment with different resonance spaces and placement of the sound. Exercises using long tones support proper breathing, endurance, energy maintenance, and tuning, while providing the students with ample time to find vowel unification with the rest of their section and the unified choir. I have had good results asking the students to stand in a hollow square formation with this exercise. Standing in this formation provides the same increased ability to hear the chord as the common practice of standing in a circle, but includes some performance practice elements drawn from the shape-note tradition.

Although any exercise can be modified, this third exercise has produced great results for my choir students. I took this exercise from a Facebook video at https://www.facebook.com/SingingVideos/videos/1877404599221565/ and cannot claim credit for it, but it's been proven effective with my choirs. I strive for control in my choir and this exercise emphasizes control and connection to the conductor. The hook of most popular songs can be an effective place to start and usually isn't particularly long. I arranged an easy four measure version of "Hey, Jude" by The Beatles for placement and dynamic experimentation. I used information from the Facebook video and arranged it into four parts for my choir. Using unison, two or three parts would be just as effective, depending on the ability of the ensemble. I taught the piece using standard choral technique by incorporating vowels with rounded *chiaroscuro* sounds. We all have preferences with choral sound; starting from a preferred placement will make it easier for students to understand what and how they are modifying the sound. After the arrangement is solid, begin modifying the sound using ascending and descending hand movements in a vertical line. As the hand is raised higher, the choir should sing louder, and vice versa. Now add hand movement on a horizontal plane. When your hand is moved forward and away from the body, the students should move the placement of the sound to a more forward placement. Next, move the hand towards the body to produce the opposite effect as students bring the placement of the sound back and into the throat. I change volume and placement as we repeat the song. This application allows the students to sing a line of music changing placement and provides an experience that resembles what performing a line of music with a different placement might sound and feel like.

Shape-note and bluegrass music carry a distinct southern sound to word pronunciation. I realized as I prepared to work with my students that placement of sound would provide the

necessary brightness and a beneficial skill when working with other literature such as a renaissance madrigal. The forward placement helps students execute and stay true to the southern roots of this music. The southern roots of the music should not be dismissed. When listening to this music, the spread vowels and southern drawl are easily observed and should be replicated on a small scale. Both bluegrass and shape-note music have spread to more northern locations in the United States and, thus, have lost some of their inherent southern characteristics. I feel that some modest modification is necessary to capture the original sounds. In my choirs, I spend a significant amount of time in warm-ups shading our brighter vowels. I am not interested in a dark and throaty sound, but a modified vowel leaning towards darker overtones. For instance, I might move a sustained [a] sound closer to an [ɔ]; this modification would ensure that the corners of the mouth stay neutral and counteract my students' tendency to spread the vowel. My choirs are typically populated with young and inexperienced vocalists who naturally lean towards shallow and bright sounds and because of this, vowel modification is needed. These modifications are made gently and with restraint.

My most recent choir was composed primarily of students from southeastern Kansas. In general, these students already tended to favor spread vowels in their speech patterns; this made my job a little easier. I decided on a speech-like approach to our vowel placement. This approach emphasized proper choral technique and allowed the relaxation of vowels. A speech-like approach to vowel unification meant allowing the corners of the mouth to spread slightly on [i], [e], and [ɛ] vowels. It also meant making use of diphthongs on sustained vowels. I did not abandon the vowel unification emphasized in warm-ups. The choir should strive for vowel unification, but embrace some alternate vowel shapes when singing these genres.

I like to begin the process of modified pronunciation by speaking rather than singing through the literature. I ask the choir to recite the lyrics as if we were singing them in the style of an Eric Whitacre piece. As expected, the students gave me the rounded and tall vowels that were painstakingly rehearsed in weeks of warm-ups. I asked the choir to identify the modifications that were made to improve unity and intonation. Instructor preparation and score study had already provided me with the necessary modifications to allow the discussion to be lead in the right direction. This served as an aural activity for my students. I would then direct my students to recite the lyrics again as if they were having a conversation with a dear friend. I emphasized that they should speak in their regular voices. Once the students were comfortable speaking the lyrics in a conversational manner, a cacophony of sound erupted with vowels more closely matching the spread vowels required for authentic reproduction of bluegrass and shape-note music.

After the ground work was laid with the spoken lyrics exercise, the students were asked to identify three characteristics present in the casual conversation approach that were not part of the more polished and restrained choir sound. I wanted them to realize, first, all vowels were more spread in production. The corners of the mouth had a tendency to spread east/west. Second, the words jumble together in a conversational style with fewer text accents. Finally, consonants were greatly diminished in intensity.

As rehearsal continues, focusing on the first two characteristics, the spread vowel and a conversational style should become the focus of the conductor. When no microphones are used in concert, strong consonant production becomes essential to allow the audience to understand the lyrics. The choir was directed to continue use of spread vowels. Eventually, through continued practice, these new vowels became another important tool my choir had in their vocal

tool box. My choirs identified spread vowels in the music with a "←→ " over the vowel indicating that this should be modified. Spread vowels tended to brighten the sound by retaining the original genre sound. At times, the enthusiasm of the choir needed to be tempered with discipline and a measured approach. The students were excited to employ these new sounds and restraint was necessary to maintain good intonation. Through practice moving placement and modifying vowels, the choir achieved a brighter sound while maintaining the flavor of bluegrass and shape-note music.

Another area that requires modification in both shape-note and bluegrass music is achieving the high lonesome sound and extreme range singing with proper technique. In both genres, the tenors sing in extreme ranges, usually sitting in their *passaggio* for extended periods of time at high dynamic levels. The attempted replication of a mature Bill Monroe sound by a younger singer could potentially be damaging to the voice. Bill Monroe had a special voice that seemed to handle the strain of high range singing with no ill effects. It would be irresponsible for an instructor to ask students to perfectly mimic the strain and strident sound of Bill Monroe.

The protection of young voices is less of a problem in the shape-note tradition. Most of the pieces sung from *The Sacred Harp* are pitched lower than written. The arrangements available for performance reflect this trend. If reading directly from a shape-note hymnal, such as *The Sacred Harp*, some modification to the starting pitch might be advisable.

To more accurately portray these genres a little flavoring of the high lonesome sound must be captured in choral performance. To overcome the issues of high range singing I looked to a

technique called "reinforced falsetto"[169]. Reinforced falsetto helps my tenors approximate Bill Monroe's sound and to navigate shape-note singing in a safe manner. To achieve reinforced falsetto, one must have sufficient breath energy to produce a full voiced sound and place that energy in the falsetto; this requires compressed breath and coordination. I tell my students to think of it as "falsetto with an edge"; it mixes in some head voice to the sound to provide a more beefy tone. The production of this kind of singing relies on significant sustained breath energy and an intensity in vibration. With the men in my choir, I often work in falsetto to achieve ease of passage from head voice into falsetto. This is done by driving up and down the range utilizing vocal sirens, making ascending and descending movements by half steps beginning in falsetto. During rehearsal I also often ask the men to sing the female parts in falsetto while working new pieces of music. Thus, my men weren't novices to the use of falsetto, but outside of the occasional high bass note or extreme soft tenor note, we hadn't employed falsetto in a performance setting. Breath support holds the key to this technique. In my experience, when men approach falsetto they drop breath support causing the sound to become weak and airy or pushed and strained, creating intonation issues. Students should work on proper breath support before attempting to sing with more weight in the falsetto. It is well known that extended time working on breath support promotes numerous benefits in additional to the execution of reinforced falsetto.

With a firm breath support foundation in place, the choir is now prepared to venture up the scale towards falsetto. It is important to address chin jutting and tension issues that arise as

[169] "Head-Full-Falsetto-Reinforced-Falsetto-in-Mass-Singing(tenor)," ChoralNet American Choral Directors Association, (Copyright 2019), accessed January 20, 2019, http://www.choralnet.org/forums.

practice continues in reinforced falsetto. Reliance on proper breath support while approaching falsetto promotes relaxation in the voice. Increased time in falsetto strengthened tone production. A more forward placement helped carry the sound and the spread vowels of bluegrass and shape-note supported this style of singing. The men began to see the benefits of supporting this part of their voices and would often sing SATB pieces with the basses and tenors covering alto and soprano parts for fun. The mastery of reinforced falsetto gives students yet another performance tool to express themselves musically.

Directors must also face the additional unique challenge of preparing a score in an unfamiliar genre. Bringing this wonderful music into the choral classroom makes the effort required to familiarize oneself with the genre worthwhile. Basic score study for this genre shouldn't proceed any differently than what is compulsory for good performance in any other genre. The unique aspects of score study include immersion, historical study, reaching out for resources, and awareness of style enhancements in the score. Through additional score study, a more complete understanding of the genre can be achieved.

Just as our students benefit from the experience of live performance of bluegrass and shape-note music, conductors should utilize the plethora of viewing possibilities. My own experience with shape-note music would not be as powerful if I had not attended several local singings and two conventions. These experiences empowered me to not only teach the notes, but share the history and cultural context behind this American music. Unlike many of the pieces available for choral consumption, these genres are supported by very specific community groups that meet regularly to maintain and enjoy the tradition and music.

A better understanding of the music and tradition can be gained delving into the culture surrounding these genres. Both shape-note and bluegrass have a healthy following of individuals

who are steeped in the history and fervently dedicated to the genre's preservation. The first shape-note convention I attended in Columbus, Ohio, was filled with helpful individuals who answered questions about performance practice, conducting, tradition and many others aspects of the genre. Members encouraged me to conduct a piece during the convention. I chose 47b, *Idumea*. When I mentioned my back ground in music education, veteran members advised me to keep my conducting simple. One shape-note practitioner told me to just "Keep the beat" and avoid "Excessive arm waving." By including participation as part of my score study, I gained an understanding of what parts played prominent roles in the genre. Attending this convention allowed me to experience the robust chest driven alto sounds, the slightly strident vocal qualities of the tenors and sopranos, and the dark and throaty bass voices. Simple historical research would never have allowed me to achieve the depth of understanding that I acquired through attendance at a convention.

In addition to the experience of the raw sounds, I learned that the starting tempo for these pieces was relative. There appeared to be collective agreement on the tempo based upon past experiences. The standard tempo could move several clicks in either direction depending on the individual leader of the song and the group's performance abilities and their familiarity with the song. The starting pitch was as variable as the tempo. Completely *a cappella* and lacking accompanying instrumentation, an individual from the group provides the beginning solfege pitch; this pitch was based on previous experience with no true sense of accuracy with the written music.

The bluegrass festivals in Winfield, Kansas and Olympia, Washington, similarly engaged me with a unique musical community. At both festivals, upon entering the parking lot, I was greeted with the sounds of several impromptu jam sessions. As I took my string bass out of my van,

random musicians approached me with invitations to join jam sessions. I achieved instant popularity as the bass is an instrument not often taken to festivals, and in high demand. Group consensus rules the jam sessions and all appeared to play by ear. Mistakes were made and overlooked. New songs were attempted and fell apart, while others took off and meandered through solos and tempo changes like a crooked mountain stream. Like the shape-note convention, participants were ready to offer aid and advice. The inclusive atmosphere encouraged participation. The love of bluegrass music was palpable. As I wandered from group to group, I observed several popular and traditional tunes, like "Pig in a Pen" or "Old Joe Clark." All lead to presentations in unique and stylistic settings. I heard vast tempo variance, different keys, and picking styles; all producing very different sounding representations of pieces built on the same source materials.

Attending the festivals allowed a clearer understanding of the possible interpretations of the music. Although my focus is on the choral experience, it became clear that the incorporation of a string band into a choral bluegrass ensemble would be essential. Once I acquired a bluegrass band, I would need to convey clear musical direction. Many bluegrass bands play primarily by ear. Score study had to involve more listening and I knew I would need to convey my ideas verbally to the band. As a genre primarily predicated on individual tastes and the ability to play by ear, listening must be a part of score study when tackling this genre.

Since bluegrass and shape-note genres have enjoyed long lifespans, well over 300 years for some shape-note music, historical study must be incorporated into score study. The continued success of these genres keeps relevant research available and readily accessible. The lively communities of these genres provide a first-hand resource for study. Although I was researching these genres for my dissertation and needed the background information, I grew to appreciate the

important historical aspects and came to realize that incorporation of this music greatly enhanced the choral experience.

Although attendance at bluegrass conventions is valuable on its own, academic research can enrich the experience. Bluegrass research must begin with what I consider the definitive book on this topic, *Blue Grass Breakdown: The making of the old Southern Sound* by Robert Cantrell. There are surprisingly few scholarly books that cover the origins of bluegrass, Bill Monroe, and the place of this music in the folk song and country tradition. The lack of significant academic research in bluegrass, like other "new art forms," is probably the result of the fact that its value has not yet been recognized. Cantrell, one of the first individuals that recognized the value of this art form, delved deeply into its roots going back centuries. In the book, Bill Cantrell focuses on Bill Monroe and covers his life in incredible detail. The book delves deep into the ancient roots of the Southern song and discusses how it originated from ballads and folk songs and found inspiration in medieval modes. The book covers bluegrass from its inception to the mid-1940's, the challenges and changes that the genre has faced and how it has continued to survive. The book also covers performance practices and the characteristic high lonesome sound desired in vocalists of this genre and where that sound originated. Most academic bluegrass articles written in the last 20 years cite Cantrell's research. Although published in 1984, most of the observations remain relevant today. This book provides a perfect primary and historical background to any teacher bringing this bluegrass into the classroom.

To supplement the Cantrell book I also recommend Neil V. Rosenberg's, *Bluegrass: A History*, published in 2005. Rosenberg adds a more recent perspective on bluegrass and often refers back to Cantrell's work on this genre. Together, these books provide all of the ground work necessary to begin educating students on the history of bluegrass music.

As the appreciation of bluegrass continues to grow, notable articles have been published in the last couple of years. The most useful and recent publication to choral musicians was written in 2017, "Watching Bluegrass Grow: The Rise of Bluegrass Music in the Choral World" by Matthew Bumbach, published in the *Choral Journal*. This article advocates for bluegrass music in the choral classroom, provides a brief history of bluegrass music, and furnishes tips on putting a band together to facilitate performance. Several other articles located in my bibliography explore the ethnic nature of this music and the origins of the banjo in Africa. Although this genre is predominately performed by Caucasians, many of its characteristics are borrowed from more ethnic sources. The research of ethnic origins could provide an additional avenue to research when bringing this music into the choral classroom. In summary, adequate research exists to provide either a cursory introduction or a deluge of sources that will satisfy an instructor's individual needs.

Bluegrass may be a term known to many, but the mention of shape-note music usually produces a blank expression and the comment "Shaped notes?" Although not well known by most choral musicians, the shape-note research far exceeds the research available in bluegrass. Shape-note music has a longer lifespan and its continued survival makes this music a more popular topic in academia. Books and articles abound for the first time enthusiast. Of the multiple books covering *The Sacred Harp* and the shape-note music, I found two most helpful: *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* by Kiri Miller and *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music* by Buell E. Cobb Jr.

Cobb published his history in 1978 and it is interesting that Miller's book, published 32 years later, found little change in the tradition of this musical genre. In *Traveling Home,* published in 2010, Miller chronicles the modern day practices of those who still actively participate in *The*

Sacred Harp tradition and four shape-note singing. Miller focuses on the difference between the written notation and the adaptations of the *The Sacred Harp* for two hundred plus years. Miller observed that although there have been multiple revisions, the traditions and musical characteristics of shape-note singing and the literature present in *The Sacred Harp* have maintained an active following in today's generation. I found Miller's book essential to understanding the genre's influence in present time. If attendance at a convention is problematic, this book would have been the next best thing.

The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music by Buell E. Cobb Jr. is an excellent and unique scholarly account of all aspects of *The Sacred Harp* tradition. This book covers *The Sacred Harp* from its inception and describes the origins of the original fasola solmization. Cobb provides an insider's view to the performance practices and methods of shape-note singing. Cobb also offers cultural context and insight into how this musical style and society functioned. In combination, these two books provide enough historical context to introduce this literature to a choral class.

It is possible to overcome the challenges to bringing shape-note and bluegrass music into the classroom with only light to moderate modifications in technique and study. The tools my choir gained transferred and strengthened their abilities in support of other genres as we progressed through the year. The students also gained less tangible and measurable skills such as a love of Americana music and a confidence in their own abilities to adapt to different genres. After performing this literature, my students viewed every piece as a new challenge to adapt to the performance practices of the genre. In gathering feedback after this experience with these two traditions, many students expressed a love of these genres. They no longer have a one size fits all mentality. The benefits are many and the modifications to achieve a satisfactory performance are few. Exposure, experience and keeping this music alive through incorporation in the choir

classroom is one of the important missions we as educators undertake and provides significant educational benefits.

CHAPTER 5. INCORPORATING PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

The performance practice for shape-note music has changed little over the years; thus, trends are easy to define. However, incorporating performance practice from the bluegrass genre into choral music can be tricky at best. The fact that bluegrass has changed significantly over the years makes performance practice an ever changing aspect of this music and difficult to define. As a commercial genre, the desires of the enthusiastic consumer are important to bluegrass artists and modifications are made to generate the most revenue by satisfying these desires. Thus, there have been several offshoots of the genre with titles ranging from "New Grass" to "True Grass." All of these sub-genres have characteristics inherited from their progenitor. The first step before incorporating performance practices is to decide which branch of the bluegrass family tree you wish your choirs to emulate. I chose Bill Monroe's original Blue Grass Boys of the late 1940's as the appropriate group to emulate. Both in instrumentation and sound, this group is still regarded as one of the gold standards of bluegrass music.

I believe there are three critical aspects of performance practice to incorporate into bluegrass choral performance. The first step is to organize and implement a bluegrass string band to accompany the choir. This aspect is essential to capturing the flavor of the genre. The next task is to maintain the improvisatory nature of bluegrass music. Finally, it is necessary to accept the idea of a leaderless ensemble. I narrowed my focus to a set number of performance practices and used the adaptive nature of bluegrass as an advantage. Since new instruments have been adopted into bands and combinations of original instruments have changed, a choir director is relatively free to make an ensemble from the instruments that are readily available. Today, even an unusual combination such as guitar, dobro, accordion, and string bass, would be perfectly acceptable in this modern era of bluegrass music.

Unlike bluegrass, shape-note music enjoys a community that has held the performance practices of this genre as sacrosanct. As each new enthusiast is welcomed into the community, they are taught the performance practice traditions. These traditions have survived in the southern Appalachian region of the United States for over a hundred years. As interest has grown in the northern regions of the United States, members of southern groups have made the journey north for singing conventions to impart the traditions and keep the performance practices alive.[170] Performance practices range from musical nuances to seating arrangements and include the event's organizational structure. Since shape-note traditions evolved around group participation and are essentially for the participant, it can be difficult to incorporate these nuances into performance.

I chose to focus on incorporating the four shape-note system and conducting styles of traditional shape-note performance practice. I used the hollow square arrangement for placement of singers in rehearsal, but it wasn't practical for performance. Most shape-note arrangements have already taken into consideration some aspects of performance practice. With so many performance practice traditions associated with this music, I found it difficult to choose what to keep and what to abandon. The choice eventually came down to pragmatism. For instance, as the focus of performance would shift from participant to audience, the normal dynamically bombastic vocal approach would be abandoned for a slightly more controlled and polished choral sound. I chose performance practices that could easily mesh with a choral group and that would add to the performance of the music. While we can't perform for eight hours a day and break for a pot luck, we can still maintain as many of the traditions as possible.

[170] Kiri Miller, "Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism," reviewed by Stephen A. Marini, *The Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 3 (August, 2010), 77.

The shaped notes remain one of the most defining characteristics of this genre. The shapes and the solfege system set this genre apart from other choral pieces. The *fa, so, la* solfege also provides a connection to a system developed hundreds of years ago in Europe.[171] The shaped notes, part of this musical tradition inscribed on all music in *The Sacred Harp* hymnal and the intonation of shaped note solfege begin every piece of music performed at a shape-note gathering.

Shape-notes and solfege pose a challenge for performance practice, but it may also provide an additional educational tool that has been overlooked by modern educators. Educators across the United State use a variety of sight singing methods, but shaped notes have, by and large, been disregarded as a potential tool. Although little research has been done on the efficacy of shaped notes as a method for sight singing, a study completed in 1960 by George H. Kyme and published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* showed positive results.[172] Kyme compared several other popular sight reading techniques to the shape-note method. Singing by numbers and traditional solfege methods paled in comparison with the shaped note method. His study, which utilized fifth grade students, concluded that the shape-note method was a viable music literacy tool. He further concluded that even in the instance where another literacy method was in place, shaped notes could still have a positive impact on music literacy.[173] The lack of published research since the Kyme 1960 study suggests this sight reading technique may be ripe for additional study.

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[171] Michael L. Mark, and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education*, 3rd edition, (Reston, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 1997), 73.

[172]George H. Kyme, "An Experiment in Teaching Children to Read Music with Shape-notes," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1960), 2.

[173] Ibid., 8.

In the 1800's when music education abandoned shape-notes in favor of a more European method of sight singing, educators may have abandoned an educational opportunity. Lowell Mason's contributions to the advancement of music education in America are invaluable, but his preference for European style music and sight singing gradually erased the indigenous shape-note method from public education.[174] The experimentation and reintroduction of the shaped note method may provide another valuable tool for educators seeking music literacy in their classrooms. Shaped notes may also hold Kodάly applications. An article published in 2008 by Daniel C. Johnson draws similar conclusions and outlines how shaped notes could be drawn into Kodάly methods.[175] Several of our national music standards revolve around literacy.[176] Whether it's for Kodάly applications or as a supplement to other methodologies, we shouldn't overlook the potential of shaped notes in our classrooms.

One of the problems I faced in my choral classroom was the introduction and rapid absorption of sight singing methods. Many students in my classes did not have the necessary sight singing tools, since the common practice in southeastern Kansas is to learn music by rote. The shaped note method allows students multiple opportunities to identify the pitches on the page. I found that even untrained singers could pick up the method in class with a little practice. Four shaped notes make remembering the syllables easy. The intervallic relationship between the

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[174] James Scholten, "Lowell Mason and his Shape-Note Tunebook in the Ohio Valley: "The Sacred Harp", 1834-1850," *Contributions to Music Education,* no. 15 (Fall 1988), 48.

[175] Daniel C. Johnson. "Shape-note Singing Tradition with Kodály Applications," *Kodály Envoy* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2008), 13.

[176] "National Standards for Music Education," National Association for Music Education, 2014. http://www.musicstandfoundation.org/images/National_Standards_-_Music_Education.pdf.

solfege syllables remains constant, further aiding the sight singing process. It also negates the need to spend time on key signature. Since the shapes identify the solfege syllables, the key signature is not needed. Although ideally students should have an extensive knowledge of key signatures, by removing this from the equation, the novice vocalist can move more rapidly towards music literacy.

If there is any doubt to the efficiency of this method one need only attend a shape-note singing and watch the method in action. Members begin the rendition of a hymn "singing the shapes," the terminology used for singing through hymns on solfege and for utilizing the shaped notes for direction. At breakneck speed, the group of vocalists perform the piece with startling accuracy. A performance utilizing the actual lyrics quickly follows each run-through. I initially attributed this fluency to familiarity with the songs, but I was mistaken. While visiting with other new participants who expressed an enthusiasm for the music and their surprise at how quickly the material was mastered, it became clear that the proficiency was both rapid and genuine. For the more experienced vocalist, pieces that were seldom or never performed seemed to hold no challenge.

My own experience, even as a trained musician, mirrored the obstacles I imagined a first time vocalist would encounter. The shapes were confusing and unfamiliar. I spent time looking at key signatures and trying to connect note names to pitches. To become effective in this method, I began to focus on the relationship between the solfege syllables. The fixed relationship between the syllables and the easy identification of shaped notes began to quickly build proficiency. By the end of my first hour, my frustrations and confusion began to ease. The music began to take form quickly and the solfege syllable and intervallic relationships became familiar.

Positive results followed the incorporation of this method into my choral classroom. Especially with vocalists that professed to no music reading ability, the shaped note system helped them grasp the music in a way that promoted fast fluency. Rhythmic fluency would follow pitch accuracy as students moved through hymns taken from *The Sacred Harp*. Fortunately, rhythms in *The Sacred Harp* hymnal tend to be very simple. In most cases, my students only had to deal with quarter and eighth notes with longer sustained notes only present at cadence points. I began introducing this method slowly with only portions of a hymn, but quickly moved ahead, as there were only four shapes to memorize. By the end of the semester, the students achieved a reasonable level of proficiency in this method. The constantly changing membership of a community college choir could benefit greatly from shape-note sight reading. Quick methods of improving sight singing are necessary and beneficial to promote music literacy and this is yet another point in favor of incorporating shape-note music into the choral classroom.

I experienced only one real concern when incorporating shape-note method into the classroom. The actual shaped notes provided the key to fluency. Although my students did find more success reading music from the standard choral canon after their experience with shaped notes, complete proficiency did not transfer without the shapes. While arranging pieces with shape-note notation would certainly be possible, it would add hours to an educator's already tight schedule. However, students displayed improvement in rhythmic accuracy, intervallic relationships, and confidence when working with lyrics or standard moveable *do* solfege. In general, for students struggling with beginning literacy, shaped notes could prove to be a wonderful starting point. The possible Kodάly connections and the wealth of historical relevance are additional advantages to the method. To truly understand and reap full benefits of the shape-note experience more research is needed and the commercial music industry would need to

invest resources to support the shape-note method. This sight singing method still offers a wonderful jumping off point for young inexperienced students and provides great depth of context.

Traditionally, a shape-note choir would perform each piece of music utilizing the shaped note solfege and then repeat utilizing the lyrics. This performance practice presents a difficult choice for the choir director because most readily available material does not include the shape-note solfege. Should each piece of shape-note literature be performed with this tradition? I observed this performance practice at local singings and the practice has been well documented by musicologists. A few of the commercially available pieces pay token homage to the shaped notes by including a page of initial shape-note solfege as in the case of "Emerald Streams" by Seth Houston; but in most cases, the solfege or shaped notes are omitted. It would be possible to simply add the solfege into the score for an initial run and then repeat the piece with lyrics as performance practice dictates. Unfortunately, since the original intent of the composer would be compromised, this is inadvisable. Instead, to include this performance practice into a concert, the director should simply program music directly from *The Sacred Harp* and follow the traditional performance practice. This educational opportunity for the audience and the students allows use of arranged material while still adhering to performance tradition. In this way, the audience experiences the contemporary arrangements beside their traditional counterparts.

Next, a conductor must consider the unique conducting style in *The Sacred Harp*. The tradition requires time be kept by swinging the arm forward and back to the steady beat, thus, helping the ensemble keep tempo.[177] The music traditionally only requires the leader to keep the

[177] Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music* (London: University of Gerogia Press, 1989), 48.

time, but many vocalists mirror the leader's movement. In shape-note tradition, the "leader" is never considered a conductor of the group, but instead he/she provides a focal point for the sound and a steady beat. The leader in the middle of the hollow square formation changes from hymn to hymn. Anyone is welcome to lead a hymn. Volunteers supply their names at the beginning of singings along with their choice of hymn. In most singings, an individual would rarely lead more than two pieces before the focal point shifts to another volunteer.

I found that the individual gestures and time keeping principals of shape-note music easily incorporated themselves into performance. My choirs experienced no problem with the addition of an arm gesture while singing. In fact, most choir members commented that the addition of a physical movement increased a sense of rhythmic impetus in shape-note music. Physical gestures also add a visual performance component, unifying the group. In shape-note tradition, the ensembles' collective thought rules in performance. Ultimately, this performance practice is well worth the small investment in rehearsal time.

Unlike a group controlled by a conductor, musical choices are left to the group. Although, a group gesture is shared, dynamics, crescendos and other stylistic considerations evolve from experience, tradition, and group conceptualization of the music. No single individual is responsible for controlling the group's performance and musical expression. Each performance is unique as the choices the group makes change. Students and conductors experience an innovative and conscious expanding opportunity to experience music in a less traditional way.

Bluegrass and shape-note share the leaderless ensemble characteristic. Through practice and collective decisions, the bluegrass ensemble keeps cohesion and tempo. During bluegrass performances, the individual solo controls the length of solo sections based upon individual inspiration. This concept allows for spontaneity in bluegrass and shape-note performance. The

performance of each piece of music takes on a unique character based upon the personality and composition of the participants. Although all live performances will vary slightly, the nature of these two genres encourages originality and spontaneity. Of the two genres, shape-note allows variance from the score while bluegrass openly encourages individual expression. In most music we strive for consistency, but these two genres allow us the opportunity to loosen the reins of control and place the responsibility for the music firmly in the students' hands. This variance in performance adds excitement and interest for participants and audience members.

This concept of a group dynamic devoid of formal leadership in both shape-note and bluegrass traditions is a performance practice that should be considered strongly for inclusion in the classroom. In my choirs, the students have experienced the benefits of a leaderless choir. I am not advocating the removal of the conductor as a leader and guide during rehearsal, but, in my experience, the instructor must overcome the assumption that a conductor is required for productive music making. With a conductor, students can become negligent in their duty to listen intently to the overall choral sound. When a conductor tightly controls an ensemble, students lose some of their individual musical expressiveness. Unfortunately, this method allows the students to neglect responsibilities in the music making process and rely on the conductor to make all musical decisions. Although many pieces require the expressive and dynamic leadership qualities that a conductor brings to a performance, I have found that allowing students to take a more active leadership role has enhanced the educational experience for my choral ensembles.

In performance, responsibility shifts from the conductor to the student in leaderless groups. Without a conductor in performance, students must rely on their own ear to interpret the sounds being produced and adjust accordingly. Allowing control to shift back to the students can create a cohesive choral ensemble unit. Without a conductor, elements of performance such as balance,

musicality, and dynamic expression must be agreed upon at the individual level. The choir becomes one massive living organism, breathing and performing with greater connection. This allows closer contact between performer and audience as the conductor is removed as an intermediary. With the conductor removed as the focal point, the responsibility to convey the musical message rests on the students' shoulders. Bluegrass and shape-note music offer the perfect opportunities to experience a closer audience-performer connection provided by a leaderless ensemble.

In shape-note and bluegrass performances, my choirs embraced the leaderless ensemble concept. Since I played string bass in the accompanying bluegrass band, I did not actively conduct the choir; however, I found it difficult to completely abandon the leadership role and helped with entrances using subtle head nods. I did my best to allow the music to progress organically during performance. With the performance of shape-note music, I performed the role of time keeper. I found it difficult to swing my arm back and forth without helping to shape the music but attempted to keep my conducting pattern neutral. Ultimately, it allowed the students to take true ownership of the performance. Whether as a rehearsal technique or in performance, a leaderless ensemble provides educational benefits.

In addition to the musical benefits, my students grew more confident. In this small college community, our bluegrass band was in high demand. Many of the songs rehearsed for the choir became staple additions to the band's repertoire list. Our outdoor performances around campus and at various street festivals drew choir students who now felt comfortable joining in the performance and in making musical choices with improvisation and harmony. Students who might normally have avoided performance fearing anxiety and public exposure felt comfortable sharing in this less rigid genre that embraced their individuality. Some choices were well-

received while others would require a little reworking, but I feel the confidence to make those choices came from the performance practice of a leaderless ensemble.

5.1 Accepting and Embracing the Improvisatory Nature of Folk Music

Improvisation, a performance practice that sets shape-note and bluegrass music apart from other choral music, must be seized to provide authentic reproduction. Many choral directors have experienced improvisation to some degree in their careers. Musical improvisation can range from interaction with a jazz ensemble or from embellishment on a melody line in Italian art song. There are many places to experience improvisation. Unfortunately, that exposure is often limited, since the repertoire typically programmed from the standard choral canon does not include much, if any, improvisation. This lack of exposure can make grasping improvisation difficult in the choral classroom.

A plethora of research completed in the last 20 years has provided proof of the important brain development which can occur when engaging in spontaneous music making.[178] Individual creativity, self-confidence, and improvement in a student's spontaneous ability to musically express himself are a few of the advantages to adding improvisational skills to instruction. Perhaps this is why the national standards for music education lists improvisation as a component of a well-rounded music education.[179]

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[178] David Beekstead, "Thinking and Playing Music," *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 3 (March 2013), 70.

[179] "National Standards for Music Education," National Association for Music Education, 2014. http://www.musicstandfoundation.org/images/National_Standards_-_Music_Education.pdf. Accessed January 25, 2019.

In my experience, jazz provides the most improvisation experiences available in the standard choir curriculum. In fact, when I ask my students in music appreciation classes, "What is improvisation?" I inevitably receive some form of this response, "It has something to do with jazz, right?" While this is a correct answer, it illustrates the general population's lack of awareness of alternative sources for improvisation in current choir music and it provides a significant reason to incorporate bluegrass and shape-note music into our choral classrooms. The addition of these new genres to the choral curriculum provides multiple opportunities for improvisation and for satisfying the students' diverse musical interests.

Of the two genres examined in this dissertation, bluegrass music provides the best vehicle for improvisational diversity. Shape-note music does employ an element of improvisation, but it usually takes the form of individual embellishments made spontaneously by members of the group during a rendition or the performance practice of raising the sixth scale degree in minor.[180] This sort of individual ornamentation in a piece of arranged choral literature does merit additional study, but might prove problematic when attempting to achieve a more unified choral sound. Because of these problems, the bluegrass genre was a more realistic focus for my students' studies in improvisation.

Bluegrass choral arrangements provide solo sections allowing improvisation in a controlled atmosphere. Although I understood the importance of improvisation in bluegrass, I had very little experience with its implementation as part of classroom instruction. Where should I start the process of improvisation? How could I lead my novice bluegrass vocalist down the path to

[180] Miller, *Traveling Home*, 104-105.

improvisation? Research answered many of my questions. Matthew Potterton, author of "Classical improvisation – A Powerful and Effective Addition to Choral Warm-ups," came to my rescue as I made my trek into the world of improvisation. As Mr. Potterton points out, "It is often difficult to find time during rehearsal to add improvisation into the curriculum."[181] He provides several concrete suggestions for how to incorporate improvisation into the choral warm-up process. Although Mr. Potterton's approach advocates for improvisation in classical genres, I found his warm-ups could be easily modified to suit bluegrass music.

The two Potterton exercises that I chose for modification and implementation were "Anything you Can Do, I Can Do Better**"** and "Give me a Beat."[182] The basic concept behind "Give Me a Beat" is to begin warm-ups utilizing body percussion. In a Simon Says manner, I would begin this improvisational activity by executing a simple rhythm utilizing body percussion. While standing in a circle, the students would imitate my movements. The rhythms utilized are simple, and the physical movements exaggerated and easy for students to mimic. The individual to my left would then add something to the movements that I had initiated. Each class member would follow suite and add a new movement to the repetition sequence. This activity would continue until each student in the circle had added a movement. Students were encouraged to keep it simple, but be creative. The class would repeat this exercise several times with different students taking over the role of leader, as I stepped back to observe and assess.

To bring this exercise into the realm of bluegrass music, I made two simple modifications. The first modification involved replacing body percussion with spoken words and text accents.

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[181] Matthew Potterton, "Classical Improvisation-A Powerful and Effective Addition to Choral Warm-Ups," *The Choral Journal* 56, no. 5 (December 2015), 57.

[182] Ibid., 57-58.

As the students gained confidence in the activity, the body percussion was switched for sequences of words. The students were made aware of text accents and each was encouraged to add to a sequence of words initiated by the leader. This modification allows the students to begin working with text accents and the conversational style of bluegrass.

The second modification introduces a steady sense of rhythm to this exercise. Utilizing the bluegrass string bass, a steady beat was introduced behind the word improvisation. The students continue to improvise using words and text accents over the constant rhythm provided by the bass. This allowed the students to work with improvisation in an already established framework; much in the same way as they might improvise in a standard piece of bluegrass choral literature. They must not only fit their improvisation into the time provided, but also maintain forward rhythmic motion. I have found this to be a wonderful exercise to break the ice of improvisation. Students engaged in play rarely think about their spontaneous actions and can create without the anxiety of peer approval.

With the second improvisational warm-up, "Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better," the students delved into melodic improvisation and were directed toward the bluegrass genre. This exercise consisted of having students design and improvise melodic fragments extemporaneously. First step, choose a confident student to begin the exercise. Then, a standard bluegrass progression is played on the piano and the student is asked to perform a melody utilizing this harmonic sequence. The lyrics are unimportant; the student could use any neutral syllable or series of syllables to outline the melody. After the first student completes the exercise, other students are invited to compete against the initial performers by trying to do it better. As suggested by Mr. Potterson, this exercise works with multiple genres. In bluegrass, I found it helpful to use chord progressions directly out of the music that we would be performing. Asking

the students to sing in a gospel or country format further helped in solidifying possible choices in the music. Exercises in improvisation require a safe place. I had already spent significant time developing a sense of team work and mutual support. As the students played in warm-ups, the atmosphere was accepting of choices made, encouraged risks, and forgave mistakes.

I read several insightful articles when I was divesting myself of improvisational insecurities. Mr. Potterson had several delightful warm-ups to offer, but I found the two described previously to be the most effective for my students. Improvisation is an inherent part of these genres. The addition of bluegrass music to your ensembles will add another potential outlet for students to become musically spontaneous. In southeast Kansas, bluegrass is more approachable than jazz, the most recognizable format for improvisation. Time is the most important aspect to consider when developing this performance practice for your choral classroom. It took several weeks of working and practicing with my students before they felt comfortable with improvisation. Once confidence and a release of their innate creativity took place, it was difficult to keep them from improvising on just about any melodic line. All of my students benefited from including this performance practice into the bluegrass genre.

5.2 Incorporating Strings into Bluegrass Choral Pieces

Incorporating bluegrass into the choral classroom requires one additional component to bring a successful performance to fruition. This challenge is the incorporation of a string band into a bluegrass choral piece. Not all bluegrass music requires a string band. Bluegrass gospel groups perform without accompaniment and are often a part of standard bluegrass repertoire. However, the incorporation of a bluegrass band adds an undeniable bluegrass flavor to the music. In addition, incorporating a string ensemble provides several educational benefits for the students. String bands provide unique color and texture to a performance by working students'

aural abilities. When working solely with piano in an accompaniment role, students often rely on the accompanist to follow them in a subordinate role. A bluegrass band is its own independent entity which requires a collaboration of equal parts. The string band requires students' to focus on collaborating as equals in a performance. Students must stretch towards a higher level of collaboration. Students will become a more cohesive ensemble when working with a string band.

My decision to incorporate a bluegrass band into my choral group was strongly influenced by the article "Watching Bluegrass Grow" by Matthew Bumbach.[183] The author champions the inclusion of bluegrass into the choral classroom. Bumbach suggests that finding an established band is the best course of action. Bumbach strongly believes an established band, immersed in the traditions of the music, could add firsthand accounts and true bluegrass experiences. It would bolster the educational advantages while decreasing the choral director's necessary oversight and time. An established band would also serve as an example to students. Students could observe the unity of an established group and benefit from the experience of performing with seasoned musicians. Bumbach's arguments were sound and persuasive. Unfortunately, locating a bluegrass band in a rural area wasn't part of the information supplied in the article.

After my decision to incorporate a string band into my choir, the greatest challenge I faced was finding a bluegrass band. I had diligently completed my score study and had a good idea about the sound that I wanted to accompany my choir, but southeastern Kansas was not a

[183] Matthew Bumbach, "Watching Bluegrass Grow: The Rise of Bluegrass Music in the Choral World," *The Choral Journal* 57, no. 11 (Jun/Jul 2017), 8-19.

hot bed of bluegrass talent. Another consideration was the cost of financing a local group, if available, for the appropriate amount of time required to have an educational impact.

Unfortunately, even if I had the monetary resources to support a professional band, there weren't any bands available in the small community where I was working. I am sure many other choral directors in rural areas find themselves in similar situations when attempting to locate a specific musical ensemble. Ideally, I'd prefer to find students or student instrumental talent for a solution, but in my situation, talent on the level that I needed wasn't readily available. This presented a wonderful opportunity to engage the community, faculty, and staff of my small rural town. Dedicated and musically talented staff and faculty filled our music department, although they were not necessarily bluegrass musicians. Since I had utilized the skills of the community on previous musical endeavors, I called upon the good rapport previously developed. In my experience, combining community members with collegiate professionals to create music increases the overall support and interest in a music program. The coalition of community, staff, and professionals allows them to become stake holders in the educational process and to enhance a music program's growth and longevity. Community support cannot be undervalued as a tool in a music program. For example, this support can manifest in monetary contribution. In 2016, a member of the community offered to pay the passport fee for music students performing on tour in Mexico. It is well worth the investment of time in the development of resources to engage the community in this endeavor. Through email, phone calls, and texts I put the word out that my program would benefit from a bluegrass ensemble. After the call went out, the musical faculty and community members eagerly stepped up to the challenge of forming a bluegrass band.

After the band members were identified, there needed to be sufficient time and advanced planning to ensure the bluegrass competency and skill of the musicians. This additional work

might not be necessary for a choral director in a more urban environment, but it will add to a director's overall competence with the bluegrass genre. Because many of us were novices, we began rehearsing as a group six months prior to the semester in which I had programmed bluegrass music. I wanted to generate a sound similar to Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys. Hopefully, this sound would immediately define bluegrass music and provide aural context for my students. The Blue Grass Boy's original instrumentation included a guitar, fiddle, string bass, mandolin, and banjo.

I had six eager participants willing to fill these roles; and the instrument parts were assigned based on familiarity with the instruments. The desire and ability to learn something new quickly factored into the choice. Several of the music faculty had some experience on bluegrass instruments. The band professor was moderately proficient on guitar and the other choir professor had recently purchased a mandolin. As a beginner, the mandolin player was less experienced than desirable, but I expected her musical talents would propel her towards competency. Our orchestra teacher was happy to pick up the fiddle and I had experience playing string bass. Our theater technical director, already a proficient guitar player, stepped up to the challenge of learning banjo. As an additional bonus, my administrative assistant, already an experienced percussionist, offered to add a wash board to the mix. With the group now complete and through group consensus, in true bluegrass fashion, the band christened the group, Chigger Picnic.

With the formation of Chigger Picnic, I achieved my goal of having a bluegrass band to accompany the choir. As a group, most members of Chigger Picnic had been working together for several years and that sense of team work carried over into our endeavors as a bluegrass

band. We began our rehearsal process in the same way as the students, with copious amounts of listening. Even the classically trained musicians in the group needed to modify their technique.

We decided to begin work by utilizing instrumental pieces that were part of the standard bluegrass canon. We primarily worked on "Red Haired Boy," "Old Joe Clark," "Blackberry Blossom," and "Red River Valley." All of these pieces had been performed by iconic groups, such as the Country Gentleman and The Blue Grass Boys, as well as amateur groups. This provided an overabundance of recordings to sample; each group provided an individual spin on the music. We developed timing, transitions from solo to group music, and our ability to play as a cohesive ensemble. As our abilities increased as a group, we added additional pieces with vocal harmonies to give us experience with accompanying singers and to learn the fine art of playing softly.

Chigger Picnic followed the bluegrass performance practice by eliminating a designated conductor and by adapting to be constantly attentive to subtle physical and musical cues while performing. This lack of defined leadership is one of the most challenging aspects that novices experience when approaching bluegrass. Although prior to performance, the group does determine solo order, the length of that solo is up to the individual performer. The band's ability to follow the soloist requires the reading of subtle cues which is crucial to a band's sense of ensemble.

I am not embarrassed to say Chigger Picnic struggled with the leaderless ensemble portion of bluegrass training. As the founder of the group, considerations such as tempo and dynamic often fell to me. To maintain more of a leaderless atmosphere, I struggled to push these musical decisions back on the group. It often takes years for a band to develop the kind of give and take that a good bluegrass band needs for quality performance, but in six months we

developed a reasonable group dynamic. Chigger Picnic compensated for the lack of experience by utilizing a detailed score. The detailed score also aided in the unfamiliarity of working without a conductor. Although the use of a detailed score would not fall within strict bluegrass tradition, it was a necessary compromise when working with an inexperienced band in a short amount of time.

Most bluegrass pieces utilize lyrics with tabs or simple chords to provide a very loose architecture. My research made me well aware that many bluegrass musicians play exclusively by ear.[184] In an educational setting, adaptations must be made to accommodate the experience of band members and the time provided for rehearsal. We would be serving in an accompanying role with a very strict score. Improvisation would be possible, but restricted in scope and duration. This concrete choral structure made it possible for our band to develop teamwork in a more restricted setting. This structure also allowed those of us used to reading a more complete score to feel comfortable.

With every rehearsal, Chigger Picnic's abilities improved. We began to work on the choral music for our collaboration with the Independence Community Choir (ICC). At this point, we were about 15 weeks out from the concert date. We were more comfortable with our instruments and the roles we played in the band. To facilitate ease of access for the choir concert, we converted the choral pieces into lyric sheets with tablature. We now knew the structure of the pieces and could safely leave the score behind. No longer constrained by the full score, each member developed a unique and individual sound. Moving away from the full score also allowed Chigger Picnic to embrace the improvisatory nature of bluegrass. The band was free to support

[184] Mayne L. Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965), 251.

the choir in areas of exposure and include additional musical interest to their parts by enhancing the overall sound. As a bluegrass researcher, it is interesting to note that although the score aided in the rapid progress of the band towards competency, its removal served as an impetus by propelling the band toward a more traditional bluegrass sound.

One such example of providing additional support while adding our own individuality occurs at the beginning to "Shady Grove" by Tom Shelton. Although the original score calls for an *a cappella* section with soloist, I felt that *arpeggi* on the guitar with single notes from the bass on chord changes added a more ethereal quality to the music. The very nature of bluegrass performance rests upon personal feelings and choices. Thus, following this tradition, some choral directors might prefer to leave the score unchanged, while others might prefer a more robust accompaniment. A director's decision springs from personal tastes and his or her perceptions of the music. This follows traditional bluegrass performance practice. As a director, I often took the liberty to improvise.

Combining the choir with Chigger Picnic presented the final hurdle. The band had evolved into a musically cohesive group of artists and the choir had assimilated the material, improvised, and grown confident in their abilities. The forces I had assembled were eager to put the new found skills to the test. Although enthusiasm flowed between students and faculty, combining these groups presented some interesting challenges. Balance, amplification, and collaboration were chief among these challenges.

Chigger Picnic began rehearsing with the choir approximately five weeks prior to the concert. This five week time frame allowed flexibility when scheduling rehearsal time and allowed for the band to become familiar with the genre. The accommodation of the working schedules of faculty and community members with choir rehearsals proved challenging.

Flexibility is desirable, since the band would often be missing players during choral rehearsals. When specific band members couldn't attend rehearsal, an opportunity presented itself to focus on the various roles played by the attending members of the string ensemble. One might assume that a lack of instrumentation might hinder the rehearsal process, but the opposite proved true. Without the full cacophony of a bluegrass band, students could more fully appreciate the contribution each instrument provided to the ensemble.

Students slowly became familiar with the string sounds, adjusted to the lack of a piano, and gained musical confidence. When the full band assembled, students were more prepared to aurally adjust to the full sound appreciating each instruments contributions. Fortunately, as I played string bass, my choir never lacked at least one instrument as accompaniment. The students were trained to listen down to the bass for a sense of rhythm and tempo. In a traditional bluegrass ensemble, as in my choral group, the bass drove the tempo. My bass served in the role of metronome and the students used their ears and my helpful head bobbing to maintain cohesion. The band and students initially struggled with the concept of a leaderless ensemble. Without a conductor, more of the responsibility for success rested on the individual students. Initial attacks of phrases and final consonants lacked cohesion and the tempo fluctuated. It helped that both groups were facing similar issues. The string ensemble had trained to follow individuals on solo instruments or single vocalists on solo lines. It was more difficult to follow a choir of amateur vocalists who were themselves figuring out how to work as a unified ensemble. I utilized the entire five weeks of rehearsal to unify the groups. At the end of the rehearsal period, the nearly 40 member choir had melded with the bluegrass band to become an integrated whole. Should the opportunity exist to work with a seasoned or professional bluegrass ensemble,

the rehearsal time may be truncated. The final planning decision rests with each choir director, but adequate rehearsal time must be set aside to overcome integration issues.

When Chigger Picnic joined the choir, balance became a major issue. I hadn't considered the balance issue initially because I mistakenly thought the small size of the band would negate the normal balance issues that occurred when working with an orchestra or larger ensemble. Brass and percussion are normally the culprits in larger groups, but I learned strings can be surprisingly overpowering when the instrumentalist lacks years of technique. An advantage of working with a professional band is the depth of technique that has developed over years of practice. My amateur bluegrass band had not developed that depth of technique. Playing dynamics at a piano level was challenging for Chigger Picnic. I employed some standard choral techniques. Fortunately, these techniques would also benefit the choir when working with any larger instrumental ensemble and thus, the students would gain transferable educational benefits. I focused on improving diction, text articulation, and projection. I have found these techniques improve a choir's ability to carry over the instrumentalist.

Early in the rehearsal process, I knew that lack of balance was a serious issue. Standing in the back of the rehearsal hall, it was surprisingly difficult to clearly hear the choral vocalists over Chigger Picnic's enthusiastic playing. I addressed the issue in four distinct ways. First, I encouraged the choir towards brighter vowels. The higher frequency formants and acoustic carrying power of these vowels would help cut through the inexperienced *forte* of Chigger Picnic. Fortunately, I had recently familiarized the choir to the concept of brighter vowels as these vowels are inherent in good bluegrass performance. Along with brighter vowels, I continued to build on good vocal production. I encouraged the choir to remove breathy, airy

sounds and replace them with open throated, well-supported singing combined with brighter vowels to produce the desired carrying power.

Increased consonant and articulation in text production formed the second technique to address balance issues. Working to improve the power at which unvoiced consonants were delivered, especially when occurring as initial or ending letters in words, improved the understandability and clarity of lyrics in performance. In areas that were heavy with text, I added a slight separation between words to provide some space. This facilitated even greater lyric clarity.

The third balance technique incorporated precision in consonant placement at the beginnings of phrases. The consonant was placed slightly ahead of the beat in the choir's initial attack of phrases. In bluegrass music, the guitar, bass, violin, and banjo are typically strongly strummed or plucked at the down beat of each measure. Adding this slight preemptive consonant strike, brings the choral sound to the forefront of initial phrases.

The final technique to improve performance balance centered around the physical placement of the choir and band on the stage. This concert took place in the 350 seat Inge Theater on Independence Community College's campus located in Independence, Kansas. The space was acoustically dry, the space provided little help projecting the vocalists' sounds over Chigger Picnic. Even with its shortcomings acoustically, the theater did have one large advantage, a spacious stage. For a group of 45, there were many options for staging the concert to provide balance relief. Different arrangements on stage where attempted and discarded. I rearranged my choir several times before deciding on a spot that served the choir and string band to best effect. The balance alleviating position used for this particular auditorium involved the use of risers and acoustic shells to enhance the choral sound. By placing the choir above the

instrumentalists, projection moved out unhindered. I placed the choir as far forward center stage as possible and then placed the band slightly behind and stage left of the choir. This positioning allowed the ensemble to be staged in front of the theatre curtains avoiding their dampening effect; the sound could now freely flow to the audience. Staging may seem a simplistic fix, but it can drastically change the sound quality for the audience.

Incorporating these four balancing techniques and utilizing optimum staging configuration helped the choir overcome the inexperienced instrumentalists. Avoiding the need to over sing and keeping the choir vocally healthy was a primary concern. Increased diction and articulation helped to provide projection to cut through the instrumentalists, while voices could maintain proper support and projection without strain. Although these techniques were required to balance the choir, I found that the conversational manner in which we initially approached bluegrass music suffered slightly. It is a delicate balance to maintain the folk style while still providing good projection through the string band. I believe we achieved that balance in concert and skills were developed that can be used when working with future instrumental ensembles.

Traditionally, bluegrass musicians employ microphones or some other form of amplification in concert, but most choral concerts do not. As previously noted, my balance issues centered on increasing choral projection while dampening the string ensemble sound. Amplification would serve as a short cut to my balance issues, but for educational reasons, I preferred for my students to rely on practiced choral technique. I chose to discard this performance practice for several reasons. I felt amplification would bring individual voices and instruments to prominence and would not fulfill my experiment's goal of producing a hybrid combining choral and bluegrass styles. Amplification might pervert the unified choral sound. The theater's small dimensions also reinforced my belief that the students would be able to

achieve a sufficient projection level. Amplification should always remain an option based on the individual factors facing a choral conductor. Facilities available, proficiency of musicians and maturity of the choral group should always be considered. After the concert, I queried audience members as to the overall balance and was pleased to find the choir sound carried over the instrumental accompaniment without overshadowing the Chigger Picnic.

My students acquired many educational benefits from the inclusion of Chigger Picnic as collaborator and accompaniment. Although the piano is a wonderful traditional tool for choral accompaniment, the use of varied instrumental ensembles forces students to move out of their comfort zones. My students initially struggled with the inclusion of string instruments to our bluegrass literature. Aurally, the diversity of the sound generated by plucked and strummed instruments confused the students who were used to the more percussive sound of the piano. Listening skills were improved. Concentration during rehearsal sharpened. The various instruments formed a unique texture that required active listening skills. Listening to instrumental solos increased students' confidence with improvisational skills. Students gained a new respect for ICC Faculty and community members as they watched Chigger Picnic work to support the choir. The display of team work encouraged students to continue their endeavors as a group. Working with the string band elevated the students' perception of the role that instrumentation can play in music settings when it moves from mere accompaniment to co-equal parts in performance. I believe this sense of team work will carry forward into my students' future musical collaborations and possibly in life outside of music.

Whether performing shape-note or bluegrass music, the performance traditions of these genres add depth and flavor. The music provides a lush soundscape for audiences to enjoy. The nature of both genres produces a sense of American history while providing possible

opportunities for cross curriculum collaboration. I found that the inclusion of these performance practices heightened the experience for both the audience and my students. Incorporation also yielded educational benefits. From the possibilities of shaped notes as a sight singing tool to collaborating with a diverse instrumental ensemble, my students increased abilities and skills. I gained satisfaction with the opportunity to expose an audience to unique historical music and educate them on the diversity of America's choral traditions. While inclusion of shape-note and bluegrass performances require inclusion of additional performance practices and work for the conductor, I believe that the benefits outweigh the cost.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

A red oblong book still sits on my desk as I complete the final sections of this dissertation. As I page through *The Sacred Harp* yet another time, bluegrass music plays lightly in the back ground. I feel a profound sense of gratitude to B. F. White, James King, Bill Monroe, the Stanley brothers and many other musicians, performers, and researchers. Their work as creators, compilers, or preservationists has maintained bluegrass and shape-note music and ensured our ability to enjoy it today. Unfortunately, this rich source of Americana music remains virtually untapped by contemporary arrangers and composers. Hundreds of melodies await exploration.

The Sacred Harp contains compositions whose ancestry traces back hundreds of years. The folk melodies of bluegrass music rest upon tunes buried deep in the Appalachian region of the United States and claim a lineage equally long. Although their journey to the American choral classroom may be similar in length, each brings a unique sound worthy of exploration. Both genres boast vibrant present day practitioners fueled by passion to preserve the music and maintain its traditions. Choral directors should tap into these resources to enrich classroom instruction, add legitimacy to the music, and aid in its preservation.

Bluegrass and shape-note music are both worth preservation and inclusion in the standard repertoire of any high school or collegiate choir. Both genres provide easily accessible material that can be tackled by beginning choral groups, but yet allow enough room for interpretation to challenge the more advanced ensemble. Inclusion of these genres provides the following benefits: improvisation, sight reading skills, technical flexibility, historical context, and

collaboration. In addition, shape-note music's non-conformity to western European choral traditions provides a refreshing departure from the standard choral canon, in much the same way that world music can enliven choral studies.

Bluegrass and shape-note performance practices are easily added and, thus, improve the music's performance and tie the genres to their historical roots. Bluegrass and shape-note community advocates can be invited into the choral classroom to strengthen ties to the living tradition while providing enrichment. This allows us, as educators, to fully appreciate these genres while avoiding appropriation.

The incorporation of a bluegrass ensemble will stretch students aurally. In my own experience, many of my students who had some experience with acoustic string instruments were inspired to form their own groups and to further explore the genre. Bluegrass festivals and shape-note singings provide avenues for additional self-motivated student discovery. My students' love of these genres was apparent in their enthusiasm to master and perform the material.

Because both genres chronicle part of the art and spiritual history of America's past, it is important to maintain respect for the music. I encourage my students to appreciate the origin of this music and to view the bluegrass and shape-note choral adaptations as a blending of styles. This hybrid version of bluegrass or shape-note singing captures many of the significant stylistic features, but it cannot be considered an authentic performance of either genre because the forces involved are so different. My students must understand that we are trying to bring the best elements of the genre to our performance. Choir directors should avoid mimicry and provide a respectful representation of what shape-note and bluegrass music might sound like when adapted to modern choral performance. Several characteristic elements of these styles are blended with choral music to benefit and enrich the learning experience.

Purists of both genres might see the literature's inclusion in the choral world as somehow diminishing the original genres. One professor I spoke with told me that bringing bluegrass into the choral classroom would be like mixing oil with water. He expressed a valid point when he claimed that choral musicians could not capture the authentic sound of bluegrass and I concur because adaptation is required to assimilate the genre into the classroom.[185] Rather than forgo completely the inclusion of these two valuable genres, I encourage choir directors to be pragmatic innovators. Choral directors should respectfully approach all music we encounter with thorough research and sensitivity to the respective music traditions. By selecting performance practices and traditions best suited to classroom incorporation, it is possible to reap the benefits bluegrass and shape-note bring to performance and study.

Bluegrass and shape-note music provide an important link to our musical past and I believe this link worthy of continued research. I will continue to program these genres in my classroom based on their educational benefits. It is my sincerest hope that these genres find a more permanent home in choral classrooms across the United States.

[185] Daniel Boner, e-mail message to author, November 15, 2018.

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APPENDIX A. SHAPE-NOTE CHORAL WORKS

TITLE	COMPOSER/ARRANGER	VOICING	PUBLISHER
Three Hymn Arrangements from *The Sacred Harp*	Bumgarner, B	SATB	GIA Publications
Idumea	Ananais Davisson, arr. Richard Bjella	SSATB, SSAA, TTBB	Alliance Music Publications, Inc.
Tis My Desire	Allen Hill	SATB	PAH Music
Wayfaring Stranger	Decormier	SA, SATB	Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
How Firm a Foundation	Shaffer, M.	SATB	Oxford University Press
I Would See Jesus	Shaffer, M.	SATB	Banks Music Publications
King of Peace	Shaffer, M.	SATB	Oxford University Press
Come Traveler Haste Away	Shaffer, M.	SATB	Oxford University Press
There's a Song in the Air	arr. Ken Berg	Unison	Hal Leonard Corporation
How Bright is the Day	Kyle Cothern	Unison	GIA Publications
Sweet Canaan	Elisha King/arr. Stan Pethel	SATB	Hal Leonard Corporation
On My Journey Home	arr. Jeffrey Douma	SATB	G. Schirmer, Inc.
Promised Land	Compton, M.	SATB	Augsburg Publishing Co
God Is Here	Kenneth Dake	SATB	Morning Star Music Publishers Southern Harmony
Wondrous Love	Rogers, W.	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes
Lord Whose Love in Humble Service	Davidson, R.	2-part mixed	Boosey & Hawkes
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness	arr. Barry L. Bobb	SATB	Concordia Publishing House
My Spirit Looks to God Alone	Derrick Fox	SATB, TTBB	G. Schirmer, Inc.
Wondrous Love	Bertaux, B.	SSA	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Saints Bound for Heaven	B. Suerte	SSCB, SSAB, SSC, SSA, SSAT, SACB	Cambiata Press
Morning Trumpet	Hommerding, A.	SATB	World Library Publications
Use Your Gifts	Lynn Shaw Bailey & Becki Slagle	Unison, 2-part	Mayo - Choristers Guild
I Love Thee, I Love Thee	arr. Mark Kellner Hope	SATB	Publishing Company Christian Harmony
Wondrous Love	Don Collins	SC, SA, CB, TB	Cambiata Press
Soar Away	A.M. Cagle/arr. Jacob Narverud	SSATTB	Alliance Music Publications, Inc.

APPENDIX B. BLUEGRASS CHORAL WORKS

TITLE	COMPOSER/ARRANGER	VOICING	PUBLISHER
Travelin' Thru	Dolly Parton/arr. Greg Gilpin	SATB, SAB, and TTB	Shawnee Press
Sun Is Gonna Shine	Steve Martin & Eddie Brickell/arr. Ed Lojeski	SATB, SAB, SSA	Hal Leonard Corporation
Poor Wayfaring Stranger	arr. Keith Christopher	SATB, SAB, and TTB	Hal Leonard Corporation
We Believe Jubilee	Stan Pethel	SATB	Fred Bock Music
I Want Jesus to Walk with Me	arr. Keith Christopher	SATB	Shawnee Press
Shady Grove	arr. Tom Shelton	SSAA	Walton Music
World Beloved	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Come Along Home to Jesus	Charles McCartha	SATB	Hal Leonard Corporation
Sail Away, Ladies	arr. Audrey Snyder	3 part mixed	Hal Leonard Corporation
Shady Grove	arr. Jerry Estes	TB	Shawnee Press
I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow	arr. Kirby Shaw	SATB and TTBB	Hal Leonard Corporation
Unclouded Day	arr. Shawn Kirchner	SSAATTBB TTBB	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Will the Circle Be Unbroken	arr. J. David Moore	SATB, SSAA, TTBB	Fresh Ayre Music
Gloria (From "A Bluegrass Mass")	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Mountain Music	arr. Mac Huff	SATB, SAB, 2 part mixed	Hal Leonard Corporation
Soldiers' Joy	Emily Crocker	SATB, 2 part mixed	Hal Leonard Corporation
My Jesus I Love Thee	Featherston/ Gordon	SATB, 2 part mixed	Jubilate Music Group, LLC
Sanctus (From "A Bluegrass Mass")	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Who You Gonna Take?	arr. Matthew Bumbach	SSA	Hal Leonard Corporation
Johnson Boys	arr. Cristi Cary Miller	3 part mixed	Hal Leonard Corporation
Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?	Sheldon Curry	SATB	Hal Leonard Corporation
Agnus Dei	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes, Inc
Orange Blossom Special	arr. Audrey Snyder	SATB, SAB, SSA, 2 part	Hal Leonard Corporation

Orange Blossom Special	arr. Robert Moore/ed. Darren Dailey	2 part	Hal Leonard Corporation
Banjo Pickin' Girl	Arr. Tim Sharp & Andrea Ramsey	SSA	Hal Leonard Corporation
Soldier's Joy	Arr. Emily Crocker	SATB and Two Part	Hal Leonard Corporation
The Cherry Tree	Arr. Paul Caldwell & Sean Ivory	SSA	e-print
Come Away to the Sky: A High Lonesome Mass	Tim Sharp and Wes Ramsay	SATB	Unpublished
Dear Appalachia	Timothy Michael Powell	SATB	MusicSpoke
Kyrie from The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes
The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass	Carol Barnett	SATB	Boosey & Hawkes
Who You Gonna Take	Steve Martin and Edie Brickell Arr. Matthew Bumbach	SSA	Hal Leonard Corporation

VITA

John Eric Rutherford, tenor, is currently serving as music professor at Pierce College in Lakewood, WA, and is the music director at Federal Way United Methodist Church. Between 2010 and 2018, he was Assistant Dean of Fine Arts at Independence Community College. In 2018, he was Artistic Director for the William Inge Theater Festival. He has the following degrees: a Bachelor of Music Education from Otterbein College and a Master of Music from Northwestern University. He has over 15 years of teaching experience in vocal and instrumental music at all levels.

Eric is an avid performer. He has appeared in Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte* as Ferrando, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* as Jenik, Piccinni's *La Bouna Figliuola* as Il Marchese, and Britten's *Midsummer Nights Dream* as Lysander. His concert works include performances of Schubert's *Mass in G*, Bach's *21st Cantata*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater,* Vivaldi's *Dixit Dominus,* Mozart's *C Minor Mass,* and Handel's *Joshua.* He has also been a featured soloist in many concerts and performances at a variety of venues including Door County Music Festival, Puget Sound Opera, Piccini Theatre in Bari Italy, Seattle Opera, Elmhurst Symphony, Columbus Opera Theatre and Tacoma Opera.