AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE IN EARLY AMERICAN CHORAL MUSIC

JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN CHORAL FOUNDATION, INC.

VOLUME XVIII · NUMBER 4 · OCTOBER, 1976

AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW

THE AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW is published quarterly as the official journal of the Association of Choral Conductors sponsored by The American Choral Foundation, Inc. The Foundation also publishes a supplementary Research Memorandum Series and maintains a reference library of current publications of choral works.

Membership in the Association of Choral Conductors is available for an annual contribution of $20.00 and includes subscriptions to the AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW and the Research Memorandum Series and use of the Foundation's Advisory Services Division and reference library. All contributions are tax deductible.

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Indexed in MUSIC INDEX and MUSIC ARTICLE GUIDE

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Published as a special issue of the
AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW
Volume XVIII, Number 4
1976

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Preface

The compilation of these studies was prompted by Sterling E. Murray's essay "Performance Practice in Early American Psalmody." The questions the author raises had been dealt with before in the *American Choral Review:* It is of special interest to our readers to gather discussions concerned with the American heritage of choral music, above all with aspects of its performance practice. Thus it seemed appropriate to reissue a group of earlier articles, now long out of print, as companion pieces to the lead article.

Our warm appreciation goes to Irving Lowens, distinguished scholar of American music and a contributor to this journal for many years, whose introductory remarks grace this collection. Mr. Lowens signed his statement as president of the Sonneck Society[1], and it is indeed appropriate to honor the name of Oscar Sonneck on this occasion.

Sonneck, first Chief of the Music Division at the Library of Congress and first editor of *The Musical Quarterly,* was one of the great pioneers of musical scholarship in this country. It was under his influence that the music collection of the Library of Congress became one of the most important in the world, that the Society for the Publication of American Music was founded, and that the scholarly study of American music began.

In *The Musical Quarterly* Sonneck established a forum that has retained its importance for the discussions of American music. Charles Seeger's article on the shape-note hymns, published in 1940, was one of the outstanding contributions to the study of American choral history to appear there. It summarizes some of the strongest elements in the special choral heritage with which we are here concerned. Providing a training for the choral singer in solfège through the use of various shapes for the scale degrees, the shape-note system is in itself a characteristic component of early American performance practice; but the music presented by this quaint notation, and the tradition of improvisation suggested in it, seems to reach far beyond the teaching

[1]Incorporated in 1975 to carry out educational projects and to help disseminate accurate information and research dealing with all aspects of American music and music in America.

of the American singing school masters: "There is, then something about these three-voice shape-note settings that is not only centuries older than their day, but a good half or three-quarter of a century in advance of it."

The *American Choral Review* is indebted to both the editor of *The Musical Quarterly* and the author for permission to reprint this classic of studies in American choral music, and to Dr. Carleton Sprague Smith for suggesting its inclusion and offering greatly valued advice on the plan of this issue.

A.M.

Introduction

The serious study of music in our own country is only now coming to be recognized as a respectable scholarly exercise. As recently as twenty-five years ago, it was looked upon with high suspicion by musicologists, who often suspected (and not without reason) that those who exhibited more than a casual interest in American music did so because of their discomfort and unfamiliarity with foreign languages. But those ideas now have far less foundation in fact. Bicentennial or no, the last decade has seen a strong upsurge in interest among young academics, with the inevitable result that standards have been raised, respectable dissertations have been written, and first-rate papers have been published.

It is entirely fitting that the *American Choral Review* should devote an entire issue to matters American, since this journal, without really being aware of the fact, has acted as a pioneer in opening up what was previously wilderness country. Articles such as those by Hans Nathan, J. Murray Barbour, Helen Stewart Kaufman, and many others dotted the pages of early issues of the *Review,* and the *Review* was one of the few places to which those interested in performing choral music of the early American heritage could turn in order to obtain authentic, well-documented information about performance practices (which differed considerably on this side of the Atlantic from the other) and even on basic bibliographical and biographical information about our own creative musicians.

There will, I am convinced, be something of a counter-reaction to American music following the floods of material unloosed upon an unsuspecting public because of the Bicentennial celebration. As a practicing music critic, I have already seen too much grumbling at concerts featuring American music, too much walking out early because of unfamiliar music on the program, too many complaints about the raucous nature of the music we are creating today. Shortly, people will be sick to the death of "new" American music and will probably avoid concerts featuring world premieres like the plague.

But there are two ways of celebrating a country's birthday. We can celebrate it by asking our new composers to write a new piece in honor of the occasion, and that, by and large, has been the way that has been

taken by foundations and performing organizations. Little of this new music will survive a first performance—and good riddance. There is no point in belaboring the matter—those responsible for it will reap the whirlwind soon enough. But one can also celebrate a birthday by investigating the past history of the country, by trying to find out what *really* took place here during these past two hundred years, by serving, so to speak, as cultural archaeologists. Here too, there are traps. Just because something is old, it is not, *ipso facto,* good. Lots of things deserve to rest undisturbed in their graves. But there are also many discoveries to be made, many things that have been overlooked, many things, unfashionable then, that are important now. Without historical perspective to guide us, Charles Ives would have remained as dead to us today as he was to musicians (excepting always the perceptive few) in the dark years of the 1930's. How many unknown Charles Ives's are there to be brought to the attention of the larger public? How many William Billings's were writing tunes that stir the blood of twentieth-century Americans as they stirred the blood of our forefathers two centuries ago? We will never know until we look into our past with fresh insight, and forget the judgments of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians who viewed the history of music as something other than what we view it today. We are at long last aware, I think, of the fact that the correct term for our musical heritage is not "American *music*" but "American *musics*." Our peculiar national genius in music manifested itself in forms virtually unknown to contemporaneous Europe, and we have made the mistake of trying to measure it with a yardstick developed to measure the music of a different civilization.

Studies such as these will help us to realize the unique nature of our musical heritage, and to appreciate it for what it is worth, rather than to dismiss it unthinkingly as worthless. We have a world to gain, and I am grateful that the Bicentennial has given us the opportunity to rediscover that world for the American people, as I am grateful to the *American Choral Review* for focusing our attention (that is, the attention of professional musicians) upon it.

Irving Lowens
President, Sonneck Society

Performance Practice in Early American Psalmody

by Sterling E. Murray

The period from 1770 to 1810—thus from the birth of Beethoven to the birth of Chopin and Schumann—witnessed in American musical history a rich proliferation of choral psalmody composed by native musicians. This development was sparked by the New England singing school movement.[1] As a result of a conflict over proper singing in church, singing schools were established to promote better performance and understanding of church music. Interested students met with an itinerant singing master to learn the rudiments of music, and at the end of the instruction period (usually about three months), the "scholars" were given an opportunity to display their newly-acquired facility at a singing exhibition.[2] Music needed for practice during the instruction period and later for performance at the singing exhibition was collected in tunebooks. The typical eighteenth-century American tunebook was an oblong collection of music, either engraved or printed in type. Some were devoted to the music of one composer, but the majority contained a compilation of the more popular psalm tunes, hymn tunes, and anthems by British composers such as Aaron

[1]An excellent discussion of the singing schools of eighteenth-century New England is found in Allen C. Buechner, "Yankee Singing Schools and the Golden Age of Choral Music in New England, 1760-1880" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, School of Education, 1959).

[2]Usually the minister provided a lecture on the virtues of music before and after which the scholars would sing. A good contemporaneous description of such a singing lecture appears in the Rev. Ebenezer Parkman's diary: "Feb. 4, 1779. *A Singing Lecture* at ye request of ye singing school. Mr. Sumner preached. His text was Ps. 149.1. It was conducted thus. After dinner (at which besides Mr. Sumner & Col. Job Cushing . . .) where we first went into ye meeting House, an anthem was sung. Then Mr. Stone made a short prayer. After which I was appointed and read Ps. 149 which was sung without reading the lines by the Deacon [lining-out]. Then Mr. Sumner prayed after which we sung (*sic*) Ps. 113. Deacon reading as usual, & ye Sermon next followed. Mr. Sumner prayed again and we sung ye 5th Hymn without reading over ye whole. In Conclusion of the Exercise, I pronounced the Blessing. But then Mr. Babcock began an exercise of Singing—Anthems and Tunes—which was very graceful, and may God graciously condescend to accept ye Sacrifice!" *The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman, 1737 and 1778-1780* (Westborough: Westborough Historical Society, 1899), p. 96.

Williams (*ca.* 1731-1776), Joseph Stephenson (1723-1810), and William Tans'ur (1746-1800), as well as native American psalmodists like William Billings (1746-1800), Supply Belcher (1757-1836), Timothy Swan (1758-1842), Daniel Read (1757-1836), and many others. It is through these tunebooks, originally designed for the singing schools, that the music for our first American school of composers—the Yankee tunesmiths—has been preserved.

Since the 1930's a newly awakened interest in our country's musical heritage has prompted a keen curiosity about the music of the early American psalmodists. Scholarly concern—exhibited in books, articles, and musical editions—has given support to practical performance. In the wake of this new awareness has come an increased concern for authentic performance. As with any music separated in time and aesthetic orientation from contemporary practice, early American psalmody poses certain problems of performance practice. It is essential that the choral conductor be aware of the premises and traditions of performance, not expressed in the musical notation, that are characteristic of this literature. The tunebooks that preserve the music of this repertory also preserve its performance conventions. In approximately three-quarters of the American tunebooks surviving from the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century, the music is prefaced by a more or less elaborate explanation of the rudiments of music theory. Buried in these theoretical introductions is a wealth of information relating to proper performance.[3] Our discussion will deal with basic aspects of early American performance by drawing upon the statements of the compilers themselves, ranging from questions of scoring and quality of sound to those of tempo, ornamentation, and the use of instruments.[4]

All eighteenth-century American psalmody was printed in open score, with the melody normally placed in the tenor voice of a four-part texture.[5] The ranges of the four parts (treble, counter, tenor, and bass) correspond basically to modern soprano, alto, tenor, and bass,

[3]The most detailed study of these tunebook introductions is found in Allen P. Britton, *Theoretical Introductions in American Tune-Books to 1800*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1949 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1950). The present study has received its main incentive from Britton's dissertation. The reader is directed especially to Britton's discussion of "performance practice," pp. 302-13.

[4]In preparing this study the author consulted most primary sources; many of the tunebooks are available in microcard reproduction in the series: Charles Evans, *American Bibliography, 1639-1820, A.D.* (14 vols.; Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1903-59). When appropriate, the Evans numbers will be provided in footnote source references. An index of the musical items in the bibliography of Evans is also available: Donald L. Hixon, *Music in Early America: A Bibliography of Music in Evans* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1970).

[5]The practice of placing the principal melody in an inner part of the texture was found undesirable by reformers of psalmody in the late eighteenth century. Andrew Law was perhaps the first to recommend that the melody be placed in the highest voice according to modern and proper principles

although the counter part is written in the treble clef, an octave higher than it sounds, and, therefore, should be read in proper "tenor notation." The allotment of voices is described by Samuel Holyoke in his *Columbian Repository:*

> The *Bass staff* is assigned to the deepest men's voices, the *Tenor staff* to the highest men's voices, the *Counter staff* to the boys' and the lowest women's voices, the *Treble staff* to the highest women's voices.[6]

Theoretically, such was the case, but in actual practice natural use of range was a consideration that could not be disregarded in assigning parts. Daniel Read, writing in the *American Singing Book*, advised the following criteria for allotment and proportionment of the voices:

> Every singer should sing that part which is most suitable to his voice, in which case the learners should submit to the judgment of the masters. Care should be taken, in singing companies, to have the parts properly proportioned; one half the strength of the voices should be upon the bass, the other half divided upon the other parts.[7]

Read's suggested proportionment results in a bottom-heavy sound, which, unfortunately, is seldom adhered to in modern-day performances, where the sopranos tend to predominate. It is normally impractical in today's choral ensembles to follow Read's guidelines, as the bass section is seldom large enough. This occasionally presented problems for the early American singing master as well. A possible solution suggested by Oliver Holden was to double the basses with a bass viol if enough low voices could not be found.[8]

There is also evidence that occasionally the treble and tenor were doubled at the octave and sung by both men and women, drawing a rich six-part texture from the notated four voices:

> It is intended that both Men and Women sing those parts which we in this Country (whether properly or improperly, it may not be expedient to decide) commonly call Tenor and Treble: But when the word Tenor occurs, it applies to Men, and the

of musical composition (*Art of Singing, Part I,* Cheshire, 1793, p. 9). In the latter part of the century, three-voice tunes in the style of the then popular solo Hymnody of British composers, such as the Rev. Martin Madan, were included in many New England tunebooks. In these settings the principal melody is always placed in the treble voice.

[6]Samuel Holyoke, *The Columbian Repository of Sacred Music* (Exeter, New Hampshire: Henry Ranlet, [ca. 1802], p. [2]. Some notion of the relative size of singing groups is provided by the frontispiece to Oliver Brownson, *Select Harmony* (without place of publication, 1783), which pictures thirteen women and an equal number of men conducted by a singing master.

[7]Daniel Read, *The American Singing Book* (New Haven: Printed and Sold by the Author, 1785), p. 24, Evans 19213.

[8]Oliver Holden, *The Union Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), I, x, Evans 25619.

Women who performed on that part with them, are to be silent till some other term occurs, and then join: directly the reverse is meant when the word Treble is placed. Whenever the word Air is placed, it denotes that to be the leading part.

Where there are four parts some from each Treble may strike the Counter in the Tenor voice.[9]

In his typically verbose style, Billings describes the effect of octave doubling, which he finds even more pleasing than the full sound of the organ:

Master. When a piece of music is set in four parts, if a woman sings the upper part, it is called a *Treble,* because it is threefold, or the third octave from the Bass, but if a man sings it, it is called a *Medius,* or *Cantus,* because he sings it an octave below a Treble.

Scholar. Which is the best of these two?

Master. It is sometimes set so, as for one part to be the best, and sometimes the other, but in general they are best sung together, viz. if a man sings it as a Medius, and a woman as a Treble, it is then in effect two parts; so like-wise, if a man sing a Tenor with a masculine and a woman with a feminine voice, the Tenor is as full as two parts, and a tune so sung, (although it has but four parts) is in effect the same as six. Such a conjunction of masculine and feminine voices is beyond expression, sweet and ravishing, and is esteemed by all good judges to be vastly preferable to any instrument whatever, framed by human invention.[10]

It is noteworthy that the counter part was the only voice of the four not reinforced either by a larger complement of performers, as with the basses, or by octave doubling, as with the trebles and tenors. In general, the counter was considered the least important of the four voices. Oliver Holden recommends that so as not to "predominate," the counter should be sung softer than the others:

In singing the counter, great attention is necessary, that every note be touched soft, and smooth, otherwise the counter will predominate, which is very inconsistent with the principles of music.[11]

Early American composers wrote their music one part at a time beginning with the tenor (or the voice carrying the air) and concluding

[9]Isaac Lane, *An Anthem: Suitable to be Performed at An Ordination or at the Dedication of a Meetinghouse* (Northampton: Daniel Wright, 1797), p. [2], Evans 33977, as cited in Britton, *Theoretical Introductions,* p. 304.

[10]William Billings, *The Continental Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1794), p. xv, Evans 26673, as cited from a facsimile edition by Hans Nathan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961). Britton warns that the evidence of octave doubling "does not warrant stating that the practice was universal" (p. 303).

[11]Holden, *Union Harmony,* I, xiii.

with the counter. Evidence of this practice survives in the manuscript papers of Timothy Swan, a Connecticut tunesmith. Housed today in the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Massachusetts, the Swan Papers contain some manuscript music, including an untitled composition in which the composer notated fully all the parts with the exception of the counter, which is merely sketched in at important points. Since the counter was the last part to be composed, it frequently was allotted the least interesting line, normally characterized by a narrow range, repeated notes, and tedious rhythmic patterns. A casual perusal of any early American tunebook will immediately show the poverty of melodic invention in most counter parts.

Few compilers considered it necessary to include in their tunebooks instructions for producing a good vocal sound, presumably since such considerations were the province of the singing masters. One of the few exceptions is found in Simeon Jocelin's *The Chorister's Companion,* which recommends musical instruments as proper guides to sound quality:

> Let the voice be clear and smooth as possible, neither forcing the sound through the nose, nor blowing through the teeth with the mouth shut—a trembling in the voice, is also to be avoided—All high notes should be sounded soft, but not faint; low notes full, but not harsh,—and let all be done with ease and freedom, endeavoring to cultivate a musical voice; observing for imitation the sweet sound of the violin, the soft melody of the flute, and the tuneful notes of the nightingale.[12]

Judging from these directions, early American singers did not perform with the polish of a modern-day trained choir, and if the music of the Yankee psalmodists is to be recreated authentically, modern rendition should bear in mind the primitive flavor of the original performances. Although there is no single description of the voice quality of eighteenth-century singing-school scholars, we can learn much about the sound-ideal of early American psalmody from the mistakes that composers such as Jocelin sought to correct. On the basis of this information, it might be inferred that the tone production of a typical singing-school group was likely to be loud, husky, and nasal, with perhaps too much vibrato used on high notes and a forced sound in the bass register. Taken together, these qualities must have produced a raucous and uncontrolled sound akin to that of today's Sacred Harp Singers. Writing in 1842, the Rev. Samuel Gilman relates an amusing account—presumably remembered from his youth—of a typical choir

[12]Simeon Jocelin and Amos Doolittle, *The Chorister's Companion* (New Haven: Printed and Sold by Simeon Jocelin and Amos Doolittle, 1782), p. 13, Evans 17567.

of singers and the sound they produced. While dating from after the demise of Yankee psalmody in New England, this description gives witness of a heritage of village choir singing begun in the singing schools of the late eighteenth century:

> While some sang with great beauty of expression, and a nice adjustment to the sentiment of the happy modulations of a flexible voice, others made no more distinction between the different notes than did the printed singing book itself, or any lifeless instrument that gives out the tone required with the same strength and the same unvaried uniformity on all occasions. Nothing too could be rougher than the Stentorian voice of Mr. Broadbreast, and nothing more piercing than the continued shriek of the pale, but enthusiastic, Miss Sixfoot. I shall not disclose the name of the good man who annoyed us a little with his ultra-nasal twang, nor of another, who, whenever he took the true pitch, did so by a happy accident; nor of another, who had the ungainly trick of catching his breath violently at every third note; nor of several of both sexes whose pronunciation of many words, particularly of *how, now,* etc. was dreadfully rustic, and hardly to be expressed on paper. Jonathan Oxgood sang much too loud, but that could have been forgiven him, had he not perpetually forgotten what verses were directed by the minister to be omitted; a neglect, which before he discovered his error, often led him half through an interdicted verse, much to the annoyance of the singers, the vexation of the congregation, and the amusement and gratifictation of Jonathan's too goodnatured friends.[13]

The particular problem of keeping eager singers like Gilman's Jonathan Oxgood from overpowering their colleagues was a special concern for the early American singing masters, and near the end of the century admonitions against overindulgence and in favor of soft singing are continually encountered in tunebook introductions.[14]

Dynamic markings are rare in the tunebook repertory, but the Yankee composers were well aware of the need for dynamic contrasts in their music. The general assumption of the period was that when dynamic marks were not notated in the printed music, the repetition of a rhythmic pattern, phrase, or entire section of music should serve as an unwritten indication of increased dynamics. According to Oliver Brownson, "either tune or words repeated should be sounded somewhat louder so as to give fresh life to the music."[15]

The musical style of the anthem, which is based to a considerable extent on contrast, provides many opportunities for the juxtaposition of various dynamic levels. Not infrequently, passages in anthems will be indicated "solo," but according to the practice of the time this did not necessarily signal a reduction of performing forces, but rather a

[13]Rev. Samuel Gilman, *Memories of a New England Village Choir* (Boston: Crosby, Nicols & Company, 1829), pp. 32-33.

[14]See Read, *American Singing Book*, p. 23; Holden, *Union Harmony*, I, p. xii, and William Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant* (Boston: Printed by Draper and Folsom, [1778]), p. [15], Evans 15744.

[15]Brownson, *Select Harmony*, p. 4, Evans 17857.

change in dynamics. Normally such solo passages were performed by the entire section singing softer than in full chorus passages:

> A solo should generally be sung softer, and a chorus which follows a solo louder than the rest of the musick.[16]

Since it was difficult to begin with to get singers to sing softly enough, solo passages presented the singing masters with considerable additional problems. Jacob Kimball suggested an obvious solution:

> In a company of singers it would have a good effect for some of the performers on each part to be silent when passages marked *piano*, occur; the additional strength of their voices in the *forte*, which generally precedes or succeeds the *piano*, would mark the contrast more distinctly, and give peculiar force and energy to the performance.[17]

Fuging tunes called for a special awareness of dynamics. Just as the anthem was constructed on the principle of contrast, the fuging tune was based on imitation and repetition. The "fuge" itself was normally repeated and it frequently emphasized strongly reiterated rhythms, all of which suggested increased dynamics culminating in a forte conclusion. The anonymous editor of *Federal Harmony* echoed the sentiments of many of his colleagues when he wrote:

> In fuging musick the strength of the voices should increase as the parts fall in, and the pronunciation in such cases should be very distinct and emphatick.[18]

The last comment leads us to consideration of the verbal text and its role in the musical performance. Perhaps the single most perplexing problem for modern conductors, editors, and performers in dealing with the texts used in early American psalmody is that of text underlay. Early American printers were not careful in this respect, and sometimes indicated only a portion of the text, omitted the text entirely, or squeezed together the words in the most expedient manner, leaving it to the modern editor to sort out the words, placing syllables so that the scansion of the text best fits the meter of the music. Moreover, even when complete texts were furnished and text underlay is reasonably accurate, the poor quality of the engraved or printed plates sometimes hampers a clear reading of the words. In cases where the words are not included, only partially included, or illegible,

[16]*Federal Harmony* (Boston: John Norman, 1790), p. 17, Evans 22919. Evans mistakenly attributes this work to Swan.

[17]Jacob Kimball, *The Rural Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), p. xv, Evans 25695.

[18]*Federal Harmony*, p. 17.

the editor must go to the original printing of the poetry;[19] but adjusting text underlay is a more substantial task. In order to accomplish it, knowledge of proper eighteenth-century pronunciation is essential. Unfortunately, the sources are not particularly helpful here. One of the most detailed statements on the subject is found in the introduction to Oliver Holden's *Union Harmony:*

> Good pronunciation is one of the first and principal beauties of singing . . . . Many singers who read and speak tolerably well, are extremely erroneous in their manner of pronouncing some particular words, when they are set to music; for instance, the words *reason, hearken, token,* &c which have but one accent, are often sung *rea-zon, hear-ken, to-ken,* which is very disagreeable and improper. Words which end in *ple, ble,* &c are often falsely accented on the last syllable, which renders them thus, *pel, bel,* &c. Words ending in *y,* with few exceptions, should be pronounced as ending in *e,* or short *i.* The letter *l* should be silent in the words *walk, talk, calm,* &c. In fine, the best direction which can be given is this; let every word be sung distinctly, smoothly, and gracefully every way comformably to the best rules of speaking.[20]

Holden was one of the most musically literate of the Yankee composers, but in this passage he is apparently echoing the opinions of some of his less illustrious contemporaries. Writing about a decade earlier, Brownson claimed:

> The music should bend to the words and not the words to the music. Some words are not to be spoken as they are spelt; many words ending with *y* should be pronounced as ending with *e* or the short *i,* such as lofty, ethnity, etc., but not where it spoils the sense, as in sanctify, magnify, my, thy, etc.[21]

Generally, this type of information must be gleaned from other sources. In his history of American church music, the nineteenth-century historian Nathaniel Gould provides helpful information which may in part still claim the authority of first-hand information:

> Some words that we *now* pronounce as one syllable, *then* had two, and sometimes clashed with the accent of the tune; in words ending in *tion,* such as salvation, the last syllable was divided and pronounced, *si-on* or *shi-on.*[22]

[19]For the most part, the texts of early American psalmody fall into two broad categories: psalms and hymns (originally composed sacred poetry not drawn from the Scriptures). The most popular collection of psalms utilized by the Yankee tunesmiths was Isaac Watts's *Psalms of David Imitated* (London 1719), which was published in several American editions. Toward the end of the eighteenth century there was a general transition from psalmody to hymnody. Several different hymn collections were popular in the Colonies. For a complete discussion of the subject and a list of psalm and hymn collections, see Henry Wilder Foote, *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1961, first published in Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940).

[20]Holden, *Union Harmony,* I, x.

[21]Brownson, *Select Harmony,* p. 3.

[22]Nathaniel D. Gould, *History of Church Music in America* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1846), p. 47.

Psalms and hymns were written in poetic meters corresponding to the number of syllables in each verse, and the meter was usually identified along with the name of the tune. The majority of texts were cast in one of three meters: Long Meter, with double versicles of eight syllables each, 8.8.8.8.; Short Meter, 6.6.8.6.; and Common Meter, 8.8.6.6. Tunes not in one of these poetic arrangements were considered to be in a Particular Meter, identified by writing out the number of syllables per verse in numbers, or by referring to a well-known tune in that meter, such as in "the meter of New 50th." A special meter sometimes encountered in early American tunebooks was the so-called "Hallelujah Meter" (6.6.6.6.4.4.4.4.), which goes back to the psalter of Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins (*Whole Booke of Psalmes,* London, 1562, nicknamed the "Old Version") where it was used for Psalm 148. It also appeared in *Psalms of David* (London, 1696) by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, commonly referred to as the "New Version," as Psalm 136 and in Watts's *Psalms of David Imitated* as the meter of Psalm 84. It is sometimes identified in tunebooks of the eighteenth century by one of these psalm numbers.

The words of the psalm or hymn were of special concern to early American psalm singers, and composers were careful to recommend distinct and clear enunciation of the text:

> Every word should not only be pronounced according to the best rules of grammar, but spoken plain and distinct.[23]

Performance of Yankee psalmody, then, should strive for a clear and distinct pronunciation of the words coupled with an emphatic articulation of their underlying rhythms.

Tempo presents a particular problem in this repertory. None of the tunebooks published in the late eighteenth century in America included tempo indications. There was, consequently, little agreement on the subject among performers and composers. According to one tunesmith:

> Such is the diversity of opinion, concerning Time, that it is extremely difficult to say what shall be the standard; that is, how quick or slow we should move in the different Moods of Time. This, therefore, must be left to the judicious teacher or performer who will be dictated by the subject (of the text), and move in the different Moods of time according to the best of his judgment.[24]

The "moods of time" to which the author refers represent a relic of the

[23]Read, *American Singing Book,* p. 23.

[24]Timothy Swan, *The New England Harmony* (Northampton: Andrew Wright, 1801), p. viii.

Renaissance proportional notation system, whereby meter signatures indicated both the desired meter and a relative idea of the tempo.

Of course, the general mood of the text must also be considered in selecting a tempo, and, if in doubt, it seems that a slower tempo which would accommodate clear pronunciation (and perhaps embellishment) might be preferable:

> With respect to the manner of performing the Music, the Author wishes that the time in general might be slow, and the strains soft.... By hurrying a piece of Music, performers are more likely to sing harsh; in consequence of which, good pronunciation is lost. [25]

Melodic ornamentation was not unusual in the tunebook repertory. According to Britton, "psalm and hymn tunes used in colonial churches were undoubtedly sung in a highly ornamental fashion." [26] In tunebooks published in the late 1790's and the early part of the nineteenth century, one occasionally finds lists of ornaments, or "graces," to use the contemporaneous terminology, with explanations of their meaning and execution. Read's *Columbian Harmonist* serves as an example. In the introduction to this tunebook Read defines and provides examples for the trill, grace of transition, appoggiatura, mark of distinction, and swell.[27] Of these the most commonly encountered ornaments were the trill, or shake, and the grace of transition.[28]

According to contemporaneous practice, the trill began on the pitch above the notated pitch and lasted the entire duration of that note. Simeon Jocelin wrote in the 1782 first edition of *The Chorister's Companion* that one should trill "as long as the time allows, always beginning with the upper, and ending on the lower note." [29] One can well imagine that occasionally a novice singer had problems negotiating the trill and at the same time keeping track of his rhythm. To accommodate such situations some compilers provided easier alternatives to the regular trill. Daniel Read suggested two possible alternatives: a slow inverted mordent and a turn beginning on the written note:

[25] Oliver Holden, *American Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1792), p. [2], Evans 24403, as cited in Britton, *Theoretical Introductions*, p. 310.

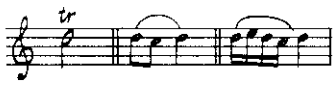
[26] Britton, *Theoretical Introductions*, p. 277.

[27] Daniel Read, *Columbian Harmonist* (New Haven: Printed and sold by the editor, [1793]), p. 8, Evans 26057.

[28] The appoggiatura, mark of distinction, and swell are found primarily in the more florid British style hymnody popular near the end of the century. The explanations they receive in tunebook introductions give the impression that these graces were not a regular part of the American idiom. For example, one author has the following to say of the appoggiatura: "a character of little use, and omitted in general by modern authors, as superfluous" (Solomon Howe, *Farmers Evening Entertainment*, Northampton: Andrew Wright, 1804, p. 5).

[29] Jocelin and Doolittle, *The Chorister's Companion*, p. 15.

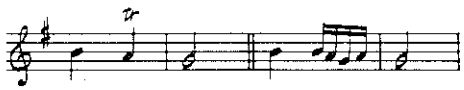
A Trill denotes that the note over which it stands is to be shaken in a[n] easy and graceful manner, something after the manner shewn in the examples, but unless it comes natural to the performer it had better be omitted than attempted.[30]



Billings refers to these two possible interpretations as a single and double trill respectively.[31] Although suggested for less adept singers, Read's alternative executions can also be used as a guide for the embellishment of psalmody in fast tempos (such as the fuging tunes).

Jacob Kimball advocated a similar figure beginning on the pitch above the written note, but cautiously recommends that such an interpretation should be reserved for special instances of rhythm and line:

This manner of performing a trill if the note be not a long one, and if the note succeeding it be descending, produces a very agreeable effect.[32]



The execution of the notated trill is of somewhat less interest to the present topic than the improvised application of the figure where it is not written in the music. The following statement encountered in *The Chorister's Companion* infers that in early American psalmody ornaments like the trill were sometimes supplied to the written music in performance according to the wishes of the performers:

The *trill character* has been omitted in the Psalm-tunes, and in most of the others; leaving it with the performer to grace the notes according to the given rules.[33]

The logical question is what were the rules and where should ornaments be added? The British psalmodist William Tans'ur, whose theoretical writings were quite influential in the American Colonies, offers some assistance in this regard:

[30]Read, *American Singing Book*, pp. 20-21. This citation and some of the following are also quoted in Britton, *Theoretical Introductions*, pp. 276-93.

[31]Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant*, p. [7].

[32]Kimball, *Rural Harmony*, p. viii.

[33]Jocelin and Doolittle, *The Chorister's Companion*, p. [3].

> The *Trilloe,* or *Shake,* may be used on all descending *Prick'd Notes,* and always before a *Close,* also on all descending *sharp'd Notes,* and on all descending *Semitones,* but none shorter than *Crotchets.*[34]

Sorting out the rules from Tans'ur's archaic terminology, one can assert that, according to the British theorist, trills could be applied: (1) on descending dotted rhythms, (2) at the final cadence, (3) on leading tones at internal cadences as long as the rhythmic value is not smaller than a quarter note. This covers most important structural points, and with such a *carte blanche* it is not difficult to imagine abuses stemming from excessive application, particularly as applied by inexperienced singers. Billings warns against such practices:

> Many ignorant Singers take great licence from these Trills, and without confining themselves to any rule, they shake all notes promiscuously, and they are apt to tear a note in pieces, which should be struck fair and plump, as any other. Let such persons be informed, that it is impossible to shake a note, without going off of it, which occasions horrid discords; to remedy which evil, they must not shake any note but what is marked with a Trill, and that according to rule, which may be easily learned, under a good master.[35]

Another improvised embellishment characteristic of early American psalmody was the "grace of transition." This ornament was a sort of measured portamento, consisting of melodically filling in leaps of a third or fourth with passing tones. Such ornaments were normally attached to dotted rhythms (such as ), and served not only to smooth out the line, but also to provide increased motion. It is axiomatic in music history that some of what was at one time part of an improvised tradition will eventually be incorporated into the notated style. The plain tune *Poland* by Timothy Swan is abundantly provided with passing tone figures attached to dotted rhythms, and may represent a notated relic of an improvised tradition.

A problem particular to the grace of transition was in performing the ornament so as not to destroy the rhythm of the notated music. In his *Continental Harmony* Billings warns singers of this pitfall:

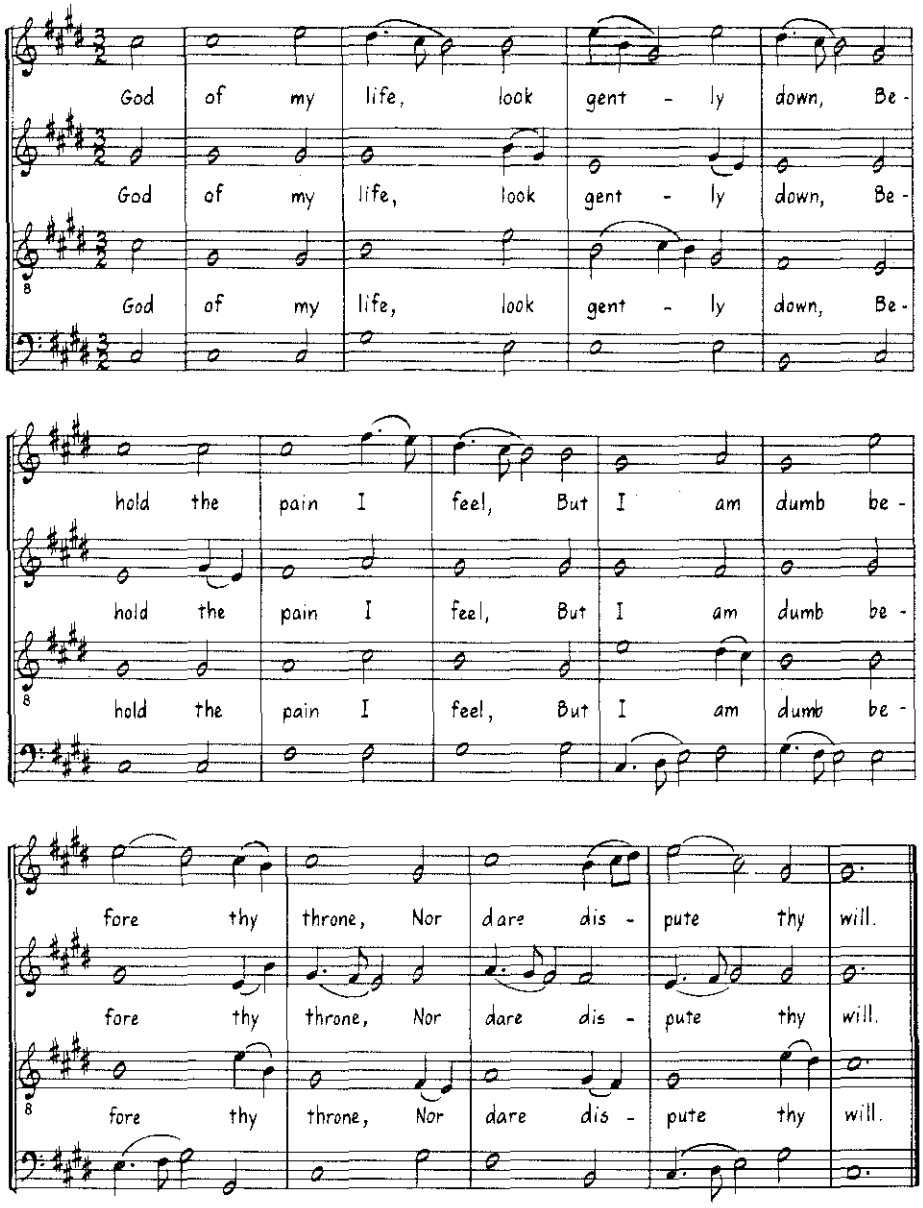
> Where the time of the notes will admit of it, I am very fond of the notes being graced by sounding the intermediate note, which serves for a stair for the performer to step up and down upon; but where the notes are but a half beat in length, you must

[34]Daniel Bayley (William Tans'ur), *American Harmony; or Royal Melody Compleat* (6th ed.; Newburyport: Daniel Bayley, 1771), p. 6, as cited in Britton, *Theoretical Introductions,* p. 280. Tans'ur's book was first published in London in 1755. Between 1767 and 1773 it was published in eleven editions in the Colonies. See Irving Lowens and Allen Britton, "Daniel Bayley's 'American Harmony'," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America.* XLIX (1955). 340-54.

[35]Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant,* p. 7.

not strike the intermediate note, because the two outside notes are so short, that if you spend any time upon the intermediate note, it makes them sound like notes tied together, in threes, which is very false, and entirely spoils the *air*; but where you meet with such notes, you must strike them as distinct and emphatic as if a mark of distinction was placed over their heads.[36]

Poland



[36] Billings, *Continental Harmony*, p. xxi.

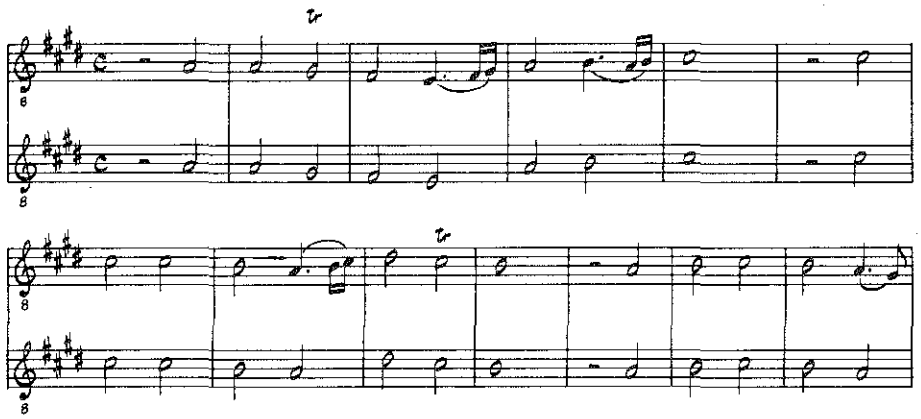
Some compilers recommended that the intervening notes of the grace of transition be stressed and others suggested singing them softer than the written notes which surround them:

> Strangers often disagree about the grace of transition, or sliding from one note to another, especially in turning thirds, for some will lean very hard upon the intermediate note, and some will not touch it at all, but will leap from one note to another as they would in a fourth, or any other distance.[37]

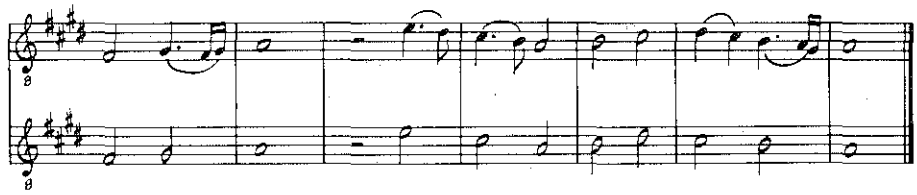
But one thing about which there is total agreement is that embellishments should be applied carefully, not over-used by any singer and generally avoided by beginners. In such admonitions the emphasis is placed upon achieving a natural and easy style, since, as Read points out, there is "nothing forced or unnatural in good music."[38]

An instructive example of ornamentation appears in John Arnold's *The Complete Psalmodist* (6th ed., London, 1769). Arnold's work was heavily drawn upon by the Yankee composers, and it is fair to assume that the type of ornamentation illustrated in his collection would apply equally well to the music in the compilations of his American cousins. As illustration of the grace of transition, Arnold supplies an ornamented setting of *Old Hundred*. The entire setting is quoted in Britton's study of tunebook introductions,[39] but it is sufficient here to quote only the tenor melody (which receives most, although not all, of the ornaments) in both its original and embellished forms.

Old Hundred, ornamented tenor from Arnold's *Complete Psalmodist*



[37]*Ibid.*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.
[38]Read, *American Singing Book*, p. 24.
[39]Britton, *Theoretical Introductions*, p. 283.



One of the most difficult aspects of performance for untrained singers—such as the singing-school "scholars"—is getting started and staying on pitch. Realizing this problem, early American psalmodists often began their tunes with a full-measure chord constructed of open fifths and octaves. This opening sonority acted as a kind of "tune-up chord," allowing singers to settle on their pitch and accommodate it to the sound of the ensenble. Some singing masters set the beginning note with a pitch pipe. Billings describes a pitch pipe in the introduction to his *Singing Master's Assistant* (Boston, 1778) that could alter the sounded pitch by a plunger which when pulled out lowered the pitch frequency.[40] The editor of *Federal Harmony* provided lengthy "directions for pitching a Tune by Concert Pitch-Pipe":

> Let the Key of the Tune, which is the last note of the Bass, or its Octave, which is generally the first, be sounded upon the Pipe by the leader, and let him give the Bass their sound first, then the rest of the parts in order to conform to it. Some masters or leaders say, the Tenor is the leading part, and consequently the first note of the Tenor ought to be [the] first sounded, and the Bass and other parts take their sounds in conformity to that; but that method is not from any authority, I confess that the Tenor is in one sense, the leading part, and in another it is not, for the Bass being the Foundation and Ground of Musick, certainly the other parts must conform to it; furthermore, when a Choir are [*sic*] singing, if the Bass moves either faster or slower than the true time, the other parts can not leave it, but must follow. Those Tunes which begin in G, C, D, and whose Tenors begin a fourth below the Key, in such cases, the Key-Note of the Tune, must be given to the Choir, and the Tenor, and all other parts, must take their sounds from the said Key-Note, that is, to fall a fourth, etc. from the said Key-Note thus given to the Choir. Again, when the Key is sounded first, the whole Choir will seem to be more properly struck, and affected with the air of the tune, than otherwise they would be, and it is in my esteem, as improper and contrary to all rule and authority to pitch a Tune anyway but by the Key of it as it would be to erect first the posts and roof of a building and then to place the Cills.[41]

Pitch-pipes, as helpful as they must have been to singing masters and choristers, had their limitations. It was hoped that they would start

[40]Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant*, p. 26. There are pictorial representations of eighteenth-century American pitch-pipes in William Billings, *Psalm-Singer's Amusement* (Boston: The Author, 1781), Evans 17104, also published in facsimile edition in the series, *Earlier American Music*, under the general editorship of H. Wiley Hitchcock, Vol. 20; also in Brownson's *Select Harmony* (1783).

[41]*Federal Harmony*, p. 16.

the singers on the correct pitches (providing each singer could remember his own pitch after the others were given), but there was no assurance that the performers could remain on pitch for the rest of the tune, or, for that matter, even sing the correct notes. Singing masters soon recognized the advantages musical instruments could provide by playing along with the singers, and in the second half of the eighteenth century string and wind instruments gradually replaced the pitch-pipes, first in singing schools and later in the churches. The first instrument to be admitted to the meetinghouse sessions was the "bass viol." Actually, the name is a misnomer; the instrument bore only a slight resemblance to instruments of the viol family and more closely approximated a modern-day cello, both in appearance and tone quality.[42]

After acceptance of the bass viol, which occurred about 1760, the next step was the introduction of the violin and other stringed instruments, followed by wind instruments such as the flute, clarinet, and bassoon. This came about during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Scattered references to ensembles of instruments in churches and singing schools earlier than this have survived.[43] Possibly the earliest reference was at Christ Church, Cambridge, at a service held there on the first day of 1776 attended by General George Washington and his officers:

> Unfortunately the organ could not be used. Some of the leaden pipes had been taken out to furnish ammunition for our men at fight in Charlestown last June, and it was quite out of order, but a bass viol and clarinet played by some musical soldiers led the singing which was very good.[44]

During the last decade of the eighteenth century the vogue for instruments to accompany singing in the meetinghouse and church forced even conservative congregations to accept their use. The Rev. William Bentley, a faithful and accurate observer of the Colonial music scene, recorded in his diary in 1795 the following informative reference to instrumental music in his church—East Church, Salem, Massachusetts:

[42]Buechner, "Yankee Singing Schools," p. 278. The Essex Institute of Salem, Massachusetts owns a collection of three early American bass viols.

[43]Organs were known in the Colonies in large churches since the first decade of the eighteenth century. The earliest reference to a church organ dates from 1703 and applies to the organ of the Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia. Other important church organs of eighteenth-century America include the "Brattle" organ of King's Chapel in Boston, the organ in Trinity Church in Newport, Rhode Island, and the organs in Old South and Old North Churches of Boston. For more detailed information on this subject see Orpha Ochse, *The History of the Organ in the United States* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975).

[44]Cited from Gardinar M. Day, *The Biography of a Church* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), p. 30.

> Sent & purchased at Boston a Bass Viol for 21 dollars. The fondness for Instrumental music in Churches so increases, that the inclination is not to be resisted. I have applied to Mr. Gardner to assist the Counter with his German Flute.[45]

By the following spring, the Rev. Bentley's congregation was being assisted by a larger instrumental ensemble:

> The Violin for the first time was introduced last Sunday. We expect two German flutes, & a Tenor-Viol in addition to our present Bass Viol.[46]

Other isolated references to instruments in church services and meetinghouse gatherings dot the pages of Bentley's diary for the next few years, but for the most part large instrumental ensembles are mentioned in particular on special days of prayer, such as Thanksgiving Day celebrations. The following is the first of several references made by Bentley to the employment of instruments on this very important worship day:

> The Day of public Thanksgiving, clear, cold, & very windy. We had for the first time a band of instruments in our Choir. The members were from different parts of the Town & were kind enough to give us the first exhibition they have ever made in public & the first of the kind ever on a public religious solemnity in the Town. The scandalous indifference to vocal music has obliged us to have recourse to such expedients or our church music must have been lost. In all our societies the Bass viol has been used, having been introduced about two years since. A Violin & Clarionet followed in our worship. The number of these, with the Tenour viol, formed our Band on this solemnity.[47]

Not only were instruments used to double voice parts, as Mr. Gardner was called upon to do with his flute, but they also sometimes played the hymn or psalm tune through alone before the choir began to sing. Bentley mentions the latter situation in the entry from his diary cited above: "the order of service was, An Air—Hymn 73, the instruments going over the tune, before the vocal music joined."[48]

Separate parts for instruments or special annotations for the use of accompanying instruments do not occur in any of the tunebooks of the eighteenth century, but in the early years of the nineteenth century some collections bear such designations. *The Modern Collection of Sacred Music,* printed at Boston by Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews in November of 1800, included instrumental introductions for

[45]William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of East Church, Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905-1914), II, 163, October 28, 1795.
[46]*Ibid.*, II, 175, March 16, 1795.
[47]*Ibid.* II, 247-48, November 30, 1795.
[48]*Ibid.*

all of its one hundred and fourteen items, including tunes and anthems.[49] In 1806 Samuel Holyoke published the first of seven parts to his *Occasional Companion,* including a "Grand Finale Anthem" requiring two horns, two clarinets, viola, bassoon, cello, and organ to assist a tenor solo and chorus. Holyoke was probably one of the tune-smiths from the last generation of Yankee psalmodists who taught instrumental music as well as singing schools. His *Instrumental Assistant* (Exeter, [1800]). is one of the few instrumental instruction books from this period. The first volume of Holyoke's book provided instructions for playing the "Violin, German-Flute, Clarionett, Bass-Viol, and Hautboy," and the second volume, published seven years later, added further instructions for the "French-Horn and Bassoon," and included "minuets, airs, duettos, rondos, and marches" to practice upon.[50]

It is not difficult to imagine that musicians trained by singing masters like Holyoke eventually graduated into the "gallery orchestras" of early nineteenth-century rural New England churches. Eventually, these mixed string and wind ensembles became the norm and were replaced only very slowly in rural areas of New England by the more efficient, but expensive, organ. Some New England towns, like Sturbridge and Brimfield, Massachusetts, maintained gallery orchestras well into the decade preceding the Civil War.[51]

When recreating a performance of early music, it is often difficult to decide at what point historical commitment should bow to contemporary aesthetic appeal and necessity. Conductors and performers must make their own decisions in this respect. The purpose of this essay was to present some of the documentary statements on performance practice of early American psalmody in order to provide them with the information needed to weigh their opinions.

[49]According to Britton, "this work is often attributed to Oliver Holden and may well be his, since he was Thomas and Andrews's musical editor at the time" *(Theoretical Introductions,* p. 640).

[50]Evans 37643.

[51]Allen C. Buechner, "The New England Harmony, a Collection of Early American Choral Music," a booklet of program notes to accompany Folkways Recording FA 2377 (New York: Folkways Recordings, 1964), p. 7.

William Billings: *The Continental Harmony* (1794)

by Hans Nathan

In contrast to all other eighteenth-century American composers, most of them New Englanders, William Billings (1746-1800) has been remembered, if chiefly by name, up to our own time. During his life he was highly respected as the author of psalm tunes and anthems and as a singing-school teacher. And not only was he recognized for his musical inventiveness but also for his historical role as one of the earliest and most influential composers of American sacred music.[1]

In 1794 Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, the former well known for publishing ventures in a variety of fields including music, printed Billings's sixth and last tunebook, *The Continental Harmony*.

Like any other publication of its kind, it is divided into two parts: an exposition of musical theory, and the music itself, which consists of psalm tunes (some of them "fuges"), a few pieces in the same stylistic category but based on other than versified psalm texts, as well as several anthems. That all of these compositions were "Never Before Published," as the frontispiece claims, must be qualified. *Connection*,[2] printed at the opening of the book in the form of a circle but as a decorative feature unlisted in the index, appeared in the composer's *The Singing-Master's Assistant* of 1778 and *Music in Miniature* of 1779; from the later publication, too, come *Creation* and *Revelation*, though

[1] *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D.*, Salem, 1907, vol. 2, entry of September 28, 1800: "William Billings . . . may justly be considered as the father of our New England Music. Many who have imitated have excelled him, but none of them had better original powers." *The Worcester Collection of Sacred Music*, printed by Isaiah Thomas, Worcester, 1786. ("advertisement" at the beginning of the book): "*Mr. William Billings*, of Boston was the first person we know of that attempted to compose Church Musick, in the New-England States; his musick met with approbation . . Several adepts in musick followed Mr. Billings's example, and the New-England States can now boast of many authors of Church Musick, whose compositions do them honour."

[2] No author is mentioned for the three stanzas of *Connection*. Whoever wrote them, possibly Billings himself, borrowed the words "Great is the Lord our God" from the opening of Watts's text, which is associated with the 1778 edition of the music, and the words "Hail! Sacred Music" from the opening of the poem "On Musick" published in Billings's *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770).

both are expanded and the two upper parts of the first piece modified. Finally, the concluding section of the anthem *O Thou To Whom All Creatures Bow* stems from Billings's anthem *Peace* of about 1783.[3]

The eight Lessons date back to 1778; they are a verbatim reprint (except for minor changes) of the larger part of the introduction in *The Singing-Master's Assistant*, which, in its turn, borrows most sentences in its two chapters on "Characters" from *Royal Melody Compleat* by the English composer William Tans'ur.[4] Lesson II in *The Continental Harmony* derives from Thomas Walter's *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained* (Boston 1732, pp. 15-16).[5]

Billings reserves a great deal of space in his introduction (not merely in the Lessons but also in the appended Dialogue) for two topics: transposition and tonality. His ideas are quite simple, but they are couched in a terminology that needs explaining.

For the designation of the tones of our musical system he resorts to as many as three sets of symbols: (1) the traditional letters; (2) *fa, sol, la* (for *C, D, E* and again for *F, G, A*) and *mi* (for the remaining tone *B*); (3) occasionally, the hexachord names of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as *G sol re ut* and *F fa ut*. Two points must be kept in mind in reading Billings's statements: *mi, B* as well as *B-mi,* used interchangeably, constitute the seventh and frequently the "leading tone" in any major or minor scale and thus refer to a relative pitch; but, confusingly, *B* (or *B-mi*) also refers to a definite pitch, when it is, as the composer says, at its "native place." A sentence such as "Mi is in B, and now the question is, where is B?" (p. 24) sounds like a riddle, and yet it is merely eighteenth-century jargon for warning the singer that the last interval in the major scale (and often in the minor scale as well) is a minor second. For example, "if B be flat, mi [the "leading tone" in what is now F major] is in E" (p. 4).

Billings attaches paramount importance to an understanding of the major and minor scales (with C major and A minor representing the "two natural primitive keys") without which, he believes, "No tune can be formed rightly and truly" (p. 11). Again his terminology differs from ours: he speaks of the "sharp" and the "flat" key. Passing up an opportunity to make an etymological point in commenting on the

[3]Pointed out by Ralph Th. Daniel, *The Anthem in New England Before 1800*, doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1955, p. 190.

[4]From the 1767 Boston reprint of the 3rd London edition (see Irving Lowens, "The Origins Of The American Fuging Tune," *Journal Of The American Musicological Society*, VI, 1 [Spring 1953], 49). Billings forgot to add the heading "Lesson VII" in *The Continental Harmony*, p. 10, line 3.

[5]Also used in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, chap.I; the jingle in *The Continental Harmony*, p. 25, appears here for the first time.

interval of the third in each (p. 21), he merely characterizes the minor sixth in the flat key as "a flat and melancholy sound" and the major sixth in the sharp key as "very martial and sprightly" (p. 27). Obsessed by the function of B, he further states (p. 26) that if it is below the "key note" (tonic), it indicates a sharp key (B-C in C major); if above, a flat key (A-B in A minor). Obviously his previous reference to B as "the sharpest tone in the whole octave"[6] would have added only confusion to this sentence, and he wisely chooses not to repeat it. Since the flat key has a major seventh between its first and penultimate tone, though the latter is to be raised in cadences (p. 27), it is basically Aeolian—an archaic feature in the eighteenth century.

Sharp and flat keys, each unambiguous in psychological meaning, seem to him irreconcilable opposites. One is "sublime," "grand," "majestic"; the other "soft," "soothing," "pathetic" (p. 23), and he demands the strictest agreement between music and text, i.e., "flat keyed tunes (to be set) to melancholy words, and sharp keyed tunes to cheerful words" (p. 11); he regrets that he once made the mistake of composing a Hallelujah in a flat key (p. 22).[7]

Billings further makes distinctions between specific keys. He considers G minor as "more pensive and melancholy" than A minor, and he indeed confirms this in his scores, at least with an appropriate choice of texts. On the other hand, his conviction that D major is "much more sprightly and expresses a shout better" than C major remains pure theory (p. 26).

From the introduction to *The Continental Harmony* we obtain valuable information about performance. There are first of all the so-called "moods." They function not merely as time signatures but, still largely obedient to the principle of the Renaissance *tactus*, they also indicate tempo. From the composer's detailed remarks (Lesson VI), we can construct the following table:[8]

[6]This happened when he attempted to explain (or rather to make pedagogically attractive) the circle of fifths (p. 24). Fancifully he calls F "the flattest tone in the whole octave." The "next sharpest" tones are E, A, etc.; the next flattest C, G, etc. And then comes the catchy conclusion: "It is a maxim with musicians to flat the sharpest tones first, and sharp the flattest" (i.e., B flat in F major, E flat in B-flat major, etc.; F sharp in G major, C sharp in D major etc.)

[7]See the end of the anthem *Hear My Prayer O Lord* in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*. He should also have mentioned the Hallelujah and the preceding "cheerful" section in the anthem *Mourn, Mourn* in *The Continental Harmony*, pp. 149 to 151. It seems though that he merely forgot to add natural signs before *Be glad then America*, since the melodic cadence that uses an F sharp (p. 150, score 2, m.1, counter) is applied only to his C major pieces and the 6/4 type of the tenor melody in the Hallelujah (p. 151) always appears in C major also.

[8]Note Billings's consistent use of "minum" (half note) instead of "minim" (derived from "minima"). To judge by his previous publications, he knew better, but a few misprints in *The Singing-Master's Assistant* must have struck his fancy and persuaded him to indulge his sense of "originality" even in such a small detail as this one.

⊂	Adagio	♩ = MM. 6σ		3/8	♩. = MM. 53
¢	Largo	♩ = MM. 8o			
Þ	Allegro	𝅗𝅥 = MM. 6σ		6/4	𝅗𝅥. = MM. 8o
2/4		♩ = MM. 12σ			[MM. 6o in *The Singing-Master's Assistant*]
3/2		𝅗𝅥 = MM. 6σ			
3/4		♩ = MM. 8o		6/8	♩ = MM. 8o

Any one of these "moods" must be modified if a "quick, or slow term . . . [is] set over it," though this does not occur in *The Continental Harmony* except perhaps with such a marking as "affettuoso." Billings then wants the tempo "one fourth part quicker or slower" (pp. 20-21).

Not only were the "moods" known to earlier American composers and their English models (like Tans'ur) but also the specific hand motions with which the singers graphically described the metrical patterns and by which they learned them. Billings explains these motions in Lesson VI but does not consider them mere teaching aids. He demands an emphatically metrical rendition of his music (p. 28), with accents on 1 in triple time and on 1 and 3 in common time (even in fuging tunes, if the "air [apparently the accents of the initial motif] can be preserved"), and he believes he can reinforce the meter by appropriate manual gymnastics: "through the medium of the eye, as well as the ear . . . [the beating of time] conveys the accents into the minds of the audience, and serves to strike the passions in an extraordinary manner . . . ." (p. 19).[9]

From Billings's music alone one could not guess that it should be performed with precise note values and tempo and with strict vocal coordination (p. 19). Particularly the tempo in each "mood" had to be observed literally. The singers did this by guiding themselves by pendulums—home-made contraptions consisting of a "common thread well waxed" and a small, round piece of wood which had been rubbed over with "chalk, paint or white-wash, so that . . . [it] may be seen plainly by candle-light" (p. 7). Because of frequent tempo and meter changes in Billings's music, no doubt several pendulums—at least two for *The Continental Harmony*—had to be kept going at the same time.

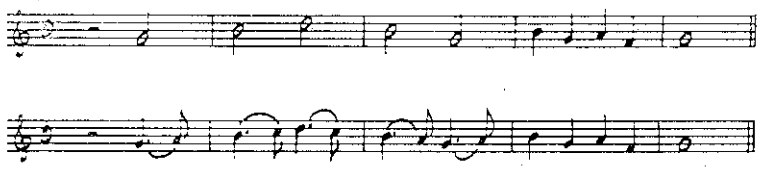
There are but few dynamic indications. They are suggested by the "cheerful" or "melancholy" character of the text and the appropriate key. Volume is always straight: at only two places does it call for a

[9]For example, Adagio: "I recommend crotchet beating in this mood, performed in the following manner, viz. first strike the ends of the fingers, secondly, the heel of the hand, then thirdly, raise your hand a little and shut it up, and fourthly, raise your hand still higher and throw it open at the same time."

"swell." Contrary to the concepts of polyphony, the entrance of each voice in fuging music is to be marked with increased strength (p. 28).[10]

Like his contemporaries, Billings uses ornamentation but limits himself to the "grace of transition" (pp. 21 and 27-28). While he previously applied it to thirds, fourths, and, in cadences, even to major seconds *(The New-England Psalm-Singer),* he now limits it mainly to thirds. The interval is to be filled in with a diatonic tone in the form of an eighth note, while a preceding half note becomes a dotted quarter. This he specifies in *The Singing-Master's Assistant* (Ex. 1), though in *The Continental Harmony* he merely says that the metric accents should not be obscured. For this reason, too, he fears that where the notes that constitute the third take up only a "half beat" (or, we may add, less than that), they, along with the grace, would sound like a triplet. In such cases and where the "mark of distinction" occurs (p. 7), the notes should be left unornamented and made to sound "distinct and emphatic."

Example 1
From: *The Singing-Master's Assistant* (p. 103)



Women normally sang the treble and the counter (the modern alto), while the rest of the setting was for male voices.[11] How many singers were assigned to each part Billings does not say, though in *The Singing-Master's Assistant* (pp. 14 and 15) he mentions a proportion of "three or four deep voices suitable for the Bass to one for the upper parts . . ." Solo passages in anthems (at least according to *The New-England Psalm-Singer,* p. 18) are to be sung by two or three voices, and to sound "as Soft as an Echo . . . ."

It seems that the enthusiastic lay-member of New England singing schools did not hesitate to choose any part that pleased him; he simply transferred it to a convenient register. Thus the tenor and counter were

[10]See also *The Singing-Master's Assistant,* lesson XI: "and in performing *Pieces* where your part is sometimes silent [in a note Billings especially refers to 'fuging Music'] . . . you must fall in with *spirit*; because that gives the Audience to understand another part is added, which perhaps they would not be so sensible of, if you struck in soft."

[11]In the facsimile edition it was stated that the counter was sung by men but this seems to be incorrect.

occasionally sung an octave higher and the treble an octave lower.[12] Systematizing these possibilities in his own way, Billings suggests that the female treble double the tenor and the male tenor double the treble, i.e., an octave higher and lower, respectively (pp. 15-16). This is preferably done simultaneously; otherwise, the second combination should be avoided.

The settings sound still fuller when Billings introduces "chusing notes" by dividing a voice part into two (p. 11). Either one may be sung but when both are heard "they add . . . to the variety." Appearing in the treble, the counter, and the bass (here usually at a distance of an octave, thus echoing the baroque effect of frequently doubled basses in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*), they often broaden a V-I cadence or lend sonority to a powerful image in the text. In passages for less than four voices or in "solos," it seems that their ad libitum character is no longer unrestricted.

Early American psalm tunes were always notated with double bars marking the end of each line of the text. This indicated a brief rest; it also gave the deacon or clerk time for "lining-out," i.e., for reciting the next line so that it could be sung by the congregation. The practice was imported from late sixteenth-century England into the colonies and persisted into the eighteenth century. Billings inserts double bars only into his earliest publication, stating, in 1778, that they are "but little esteemed among us."[13] In *The Continental Harmony* (pp. 17-18) we learn that "lining-out" still existed in some New England churches. Billings rejects it emphatically as being "destructive to harmony" and to "the sense of the psalm."

Whether or not instrumental accompaniment was intended to be used by Billings cannot be decided categorically. It no doubt existed but it was entirely optional.[14] In *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (chap. IX) Billings says: "Let all Parts close in a proper Key, and a full Organ . . ."; and in *The Continental Harmony* (p. 14) he mentions

[12] *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, p. 21: "Treble . . . adapted to Feminine Voices in either Sex" (repeated in *The Singing-Master's Assistant*, p. 27); but Billings dislikes the male falsetto: "A Man cannot sing a proper Treble without counterfeiting a Woman's Voice, which is very unnatural, and in the Ears of most Judges very Disagreeable . . ." (*The New-England Psalm-Singer*, chap. II). A report in the magazine *The Euterpiad* of Aug. 3, 1822 (quoted in Hamilton C. MacDougall, *Early New England Psalmody*, [Brattleboro, Vt., 1940], pp. 117 and 118), in mentioning anachronistic ways of singing in Massachusetts, refers to a female voice which doubles the counter in a high register (i.e., an octave higher).

[13] *The Singing-Master's Assistant*, p. 23.

[14] There are specific references to instruments in Billings's music in only two anthems. In *O Thou To Whom All Creatures Bow* in *The Continental Harmony*, the first of two textless passages is marked "Sym. to introduce B flat"; for this work, destined for ordination and therefore to be performed in church only, an organ was no doubt used. The other work which includes "symphonies" is *Peace*. Here the term is defined as "sounds without words intended for Instruments," but in *The Singing-Master's Assistant*, p. 27, it is "an air, which is played, or sang [*sic*] without words, before the song begins, and sometimes such airs are in the middle of a peice [*sic*], and at the end."

an occasion when vocal pitch has to "conform to an instrument . . . ." However, his reference to the use of the "universally known" pitchpipe (pp. 25 and 26)) suggests an *a cappella* rendition. This seems to be confirmed, particularly for *The Continental Harmony,* by Billings's enthusiasm about vocal music, whereas he considers instrumental music "but sound, and sound without sense,"[15] and especially by his reference to the mutual doubling of treble and tenor as "sweet and ravishing, and . . . vastly preferable to any instrument whatever, framed by human invention" (p. 15).

For purposes of performance it may be useful to mention the following technical points: sections in the music that are to be repeated are enclosed by :S:; repetition of words is often indicated by :II:; a tie sometimes combines as many as three or four notes into one; the G clef of the tenor is to be read an octave lower; "b key" (p. 86, meaning "flat key") stands in the place of natural signs and thus changes E major to E minor; "Sharp key" (p. 191) stands in the place of natural signs and changes G minor to G major.

Hardly any of Billings's ideas (or terminology) are novel. They are typical of their time. Nor can this be expected to be otherwise, as the purpose of the introduction was chiefly to set forth commonly recognized data. Moreover, all such introductions in American tunebooks are of an extraordinary similarity in their wording, since they freely quote from each other, usually without acknowledgment (this was the age of plagiarism on both sides of the Atlantic) and occasionally from Tans'ur. It must not be assumed though that Billings, a born dissenter, merely repeated what others said. He had indeed not only read but given thought to contemporary theory and its application as published by the American Thomas Walter, and by Englishmen like Tans'ur, John Arnold, Aaron Williams, and Joseph Stephenson.[16]

Already in *The Singing-Master's Assistant* he had not contented himself with strait-laced textbook material but had lightened it with more fanciful writing. In *The Continental Harmony* he did the same by casting the greater part of his introduction into the form of a lively dialogue between master and scholar, a unique occurrence in American tunebooks. Though it was probably suggested by *A New Musical Grammar* (first edition published in London in 1746) by William Tans'ur and *The Universal Psalmodist* (also published in

[15]This thought is even more forcibly expressed in an article "On Music" in *The American Magazine* (June 1788).

[16]Billings (p. 30) erroneously speaks of Walker. His reference without doubt was to Walter's *The Grounds and Rules of Musick,* p. 24: "A Fourth is by some accounted a Chord, by others a Discord; but I am inclined to think the former." The statement on p. 16, line 16, refers to Tans'ur's *The Royal Melody Compleat,* chap. II; lines 9 and 15, p. 17, are almost literal quotations from the same chapter.

London, first edition 1763) by Aaron Williams, it bears the unmistakable imprint of Billings's personality. In turn he appears as the self-assured teacher and critic, eager to inform and informing to the point of loquaciousness. He is the fervent and, in his own way, philosophizing preacher, and the chatty and clownish entertainer.[17] At his pleasure he resorts to any literary device at hand: solemn prose, jingling poetry, anecdotes, the homely phrase, and the contemporary catchword (in the form of military images). And he indulges in footnotes of every size and description, calling them "a glorious privilege, for which bad memories and dull authors cannot be too thankful" (p. 17). They also appear in the musical section of the book, several times to rectify what could have been decided before publication.[18] Thus the book (Billings admits to "broken hints and imperfect ideas" in his introduction) has a dashing informality about it which distinguishes it from kindred volumes of its time.

What made Billings's music so attractive to his contemporaries was chiefly its melodic idiom. There is freshness, a naive vigor, about it; and there is above all an admirable appropriateness to the needs of a laymen's choir that considered music a pastime and was fond of the physical exertion in performing it. Often shaped like a secular tune (except, of course, for basses in non-polyphonic settings), each voice part was easy to like and to cling to, and its spirited motion, especially in fuging pieces and anthems, kept everybody meaningfully busy. Moreover, the melodic style had popular appeal since it included familiar elements, while preserving a measure of uniqueness. Thus we hear reminiscences of Irish jigs, English and Scotch folk song, English tunes of fashion, eighteenth-century dance patterns,[19] and even elements of eighteenth-century art music. The 6/4 and 6/8 "moods," which Billings calls "very beautiful movements" (p. 8), inspired him to write cheerful and festive tunes—perhaps his best—that resemble English carols.

[17]The end in "An Ejaculation of Philo Fuging," p. 28, had better be explained to the modern reader. It reads: "... let all musical hostilities subside, and it is our royal will and pleasure, that your thirds and fourths, your sixths and tenths, be resolved into the unison and octave, the twelfth and fifteenth from the bass." Billings merely meant to say that the "hostilities" of rivaling voices will be resolved by an authentic cadence (see, for example, the two last chords in measures 4 and 5, score 1, p. 104, to which all of Billings's intervals apply, though he forgot to consider the lowest tone in the first chord).

[18]P. 42: The suggested transposition to a key in minor second lower is necessary, because the upper limit of the tenor range is exceeded. P. 117: The transposition "one note lower" (probably a major second) is necessary because the male counter rides too often on the C above middle C. The footnote on p. 48 refers chiefly to score 1, m. 4, which includes too many notes and faulty declamations of the words (the latter is common at this time); the passage can be rectified by shifting the second and third barlines in this score one beat (the time of one half note) to the right.

[19]See J. Murray Barbour, *The Church Music of William Billings* (East Lansing, Mich., 1960), chapter on "Melody."

Among the aspects of Billings's music that are most intriguing to the historian are its archaisms, which date back to the Renaissance or rather to the Renaissance heritage of English seventeenth-century music. In addition to the major scale, our author makes use both of the minor scale and the Aeolian mode within the same composition. Even in authentic cadences the seventh tone is by no means always raised, although, as we know, he favored it theoretically. The major scale is qualified by non-diatonic cadential progressions of voices that descend and ascend a minor second (for example, G-F sharp-G)—actually a typical feature of sixteenth-century music. In consequence we find F sharp in C major, C sharp in G major, B natural in F major, A sharp in E major, unsupported by a harmonic modulation. Interesting clashes (reminiscent of Purcell) occur when the natural and sharp version of a tone appear in two voices simultaneously; this is resolved (apparently following the composer's "set of rules which I have carved out for myself . . . ." p. 31), by contrary motion of the voices to adjacent tones (Ex. 2).[20] However, dissonances of this type are rare.

Other archaic elements in Billings's harmony are chords comprising only the fifth and the octave. Indeed, he calls the fifth "by far the sweetest" interval and "luscious and fulsome" (p. 31). Time and again he uses parallel fifths and octaves, even in the outer voices. Fully aware of this untraditional procedure (p. 31), he indulges it nevertheless and thus joins the non-conformists among New England composers. Moreover, he is not only unafraid of dissonances of a considerable acerbity (see Ex. 2), but, contrary to all of his fine distinctions between intervals, much attracted to them. Although he allows them chiefly on an unaccented beat at the very end of a measure (apparently the most inconspicuous place in his opinion),[21] they are clearly noticeable, partly because they are unexpected within their harmonic context, partly because they are hardly ever the same. A few times Billings goes even so far as to write two dissonances in succession (Exs. 3, 4, and 5).[22] He has also the distinction, it seems, of being the first composer to end a composition, cast in a major or minor tonality, with a key that strongly differs from the one of its opening.[23] Anticipating Charles Ives, another Yankee musician, he simply meant to have his way. "When fancy gets upon the wing," he says in full and

[20]P. 81, score 1, m. 3; see also p. 125, score 2, m. 11.

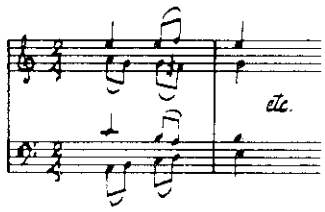
[21]A somewhat different interpretation was given in the facsimile edition. A dissonance on the second beat in duple time as on p. 87, score 2, m. 4 is rare. P. 83, score 1, m. 6, treble: At first glance there seems to be a dissonance on the first beat but, because of an insufficient number of notes, this is obviously a misprint; probably a C^2 should be added here. Measure 2, treble, also needs an additional note, apparently a G^1 on the first beat.

[22]P. 177, score 1, m. 8; p. 179, score 1, m. 4; p. 85, score 1, m. 6.

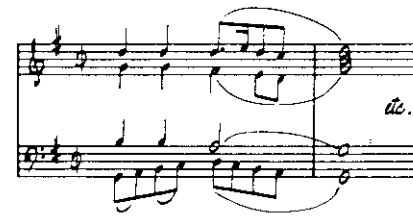
[23]See the anthem *O God Thou Hast Been Displeased,* called by Billings "Variety, without Method" to justify his attempts at modulation. It begins in G minor and ends in F major.

innocent trust in himself, "she seems to despise all form, and scorns to be confined or limited by any formal prescriptions whatsoever . . . ." (p. 31).

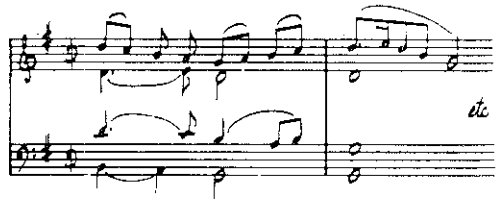
Example 2
I Am Come Into My Garden



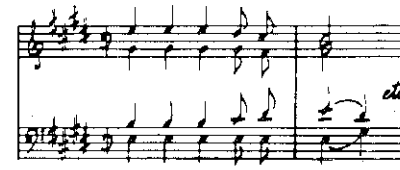
Example 3
O God My Heart



Example 4
O God My Heart



Example 5
We Have Heard



When the first and only edition[24] of *The Continental Harmony* appeared, interest in its type of music was waning. About a decade later, a compiler of sacred music[25] was proud to have chosen "none of those wild fugues [notice the "correct" spelling], and rapid and confused movements, which have so long been the disgrace of congregational psalmody . . . ." We have no reason to share his sentiments.[26]

[24]A variant copy (possibly one among others) owned by the Library of Congress must be from the earliest printing, since it shows errors corrected in other copies. These are: p. 198 instead of 168; p. 183, score 2, m. 5, the first two notes of the treble are D-C instead of C-D; also *Connection* is not included.

[25]Elias Mann, *The Massachusetts Collection of Sacred Harmony*, Boston, 1807, preface.

[26]For *St. John's*, the only composition in *The Continental Harmony* with an incomplete text, we publish the following stanza as it appears in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* by Isaac Watts, 22nd edition, Boston, 1769:

Where are the mourners (saith the Lord)
That wait and tremble at my word?
That walk in darkness all the day?
Come, make my name your trust and stay.

Billings and the Barline

by J. Murray Barbour

Although plenty of qualified people in our day have praised Billings and have honored him by reprinting his psalm tunes and anthems, others have roundly castigated certain technical aspects of his works, especially his primitive harmony and his limping rhythm. Even some of his admirers have apologized for his alleged shortcomings on the ground of his lack of formal training.

Actually, Billings's harmonic progressions are wholly sound; the carping can refer only to his addiction to parallel fifths and octaves, a practice shared by most of his contemporaries. As for his limping rhythm, the reader may well be puzzled by this criticism if he is already familiar with the sturdy tread of the Revolutionary hymn *Chester,* the simple pathos of *David's Lamentation,* and the exuberance of *Creation* and *The Rose of Sharon.* Their rhythms are strong, at times striking. Where, then, does the fault lie? The answer: not with the rhythms themselves, but occasionally with the way they are notated. Since the reader may easily encounter some of these difficult places, it is advisable to show just what they are, and how easily they may be corrected.

At least four different combinations of clefs were in common use in the open score notation in which Billings and his English and American contemporaries generally wrote their church music. Abraham Adams, for example, used three G clefs and an F clef, both the alto and tenor being written an octave higher than the actual pitch. John Arnold used a G clef, the alto and tenor C clefs, and an F clef. John Church used two G clefs, a tenor clef, and an F clef. William Tans'ur used a G clef, an alto clef, a G clef, and an F clef. So did Billings and the majority of the other American composers.

It must be strongly emphasized that, except for occasional solos, duets, and imitative passages, the principal melody was always in the tenor, the part printed just above the bass. A reviewer of my Billings

book in a prominent American quarterly asserted stoutly, but erroneously, that this part was actually the soprano part. It is true that in the early nineteenth century a practice arose of printing the soprano next to the bass, in order to facilitate an organ accompaniment. But this was never done in Billings's time.

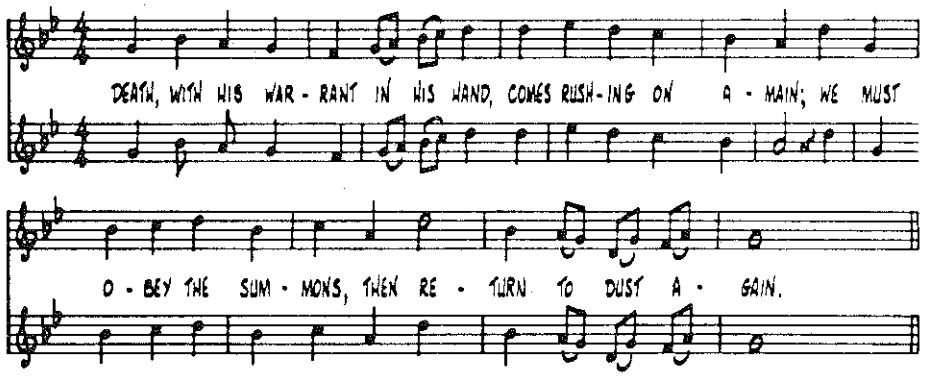
Some modern editors, Oliver Daniel, for example, have interchanged Billings's soprano and tenor parts. This is not reprehensible, in my opinion. But it is unnecessary. The balance is satisfactory if one or two sopranos follow the old New England custom of doubling the tenor part an octave higher; they drop out or join the other sopranos when the tenors engage in solo or imitative passages. An unobtrusive organ accompaniment, such as Clarence Dickinson has written, or the doubling of voice parts by orchestral instruments is also quite in the eighteenth-century tradition.

Save for the tenor melody, three-quarters of Billings's psalm tunes are precisely like the dignified, but cheerful, tunes sung in our Protestant churches every Sunday. Scores of them are nowise inferior to the eighteenth-century tunes that have survived to the present day. A mere quirk of music history might have made perhaps half a dozen of Billings's conventional tunes as familiar to us as Holden's *Coronation.* But these conventional tunes are not superior to those fate has chosen to endure, and there is no especial need to salvage them.

On the other hand, many of Billings's psalm tunes have a gay and folklike lilt that stamps them as unique. His Christmas carols especially, such as *Judea* ("A Virgin unspotted"), strike an authentic note of innocent adoration. Then, too, there are the more elaborate tunes, with responsive or fuguing treatment, such as the magnificent *Creation.*

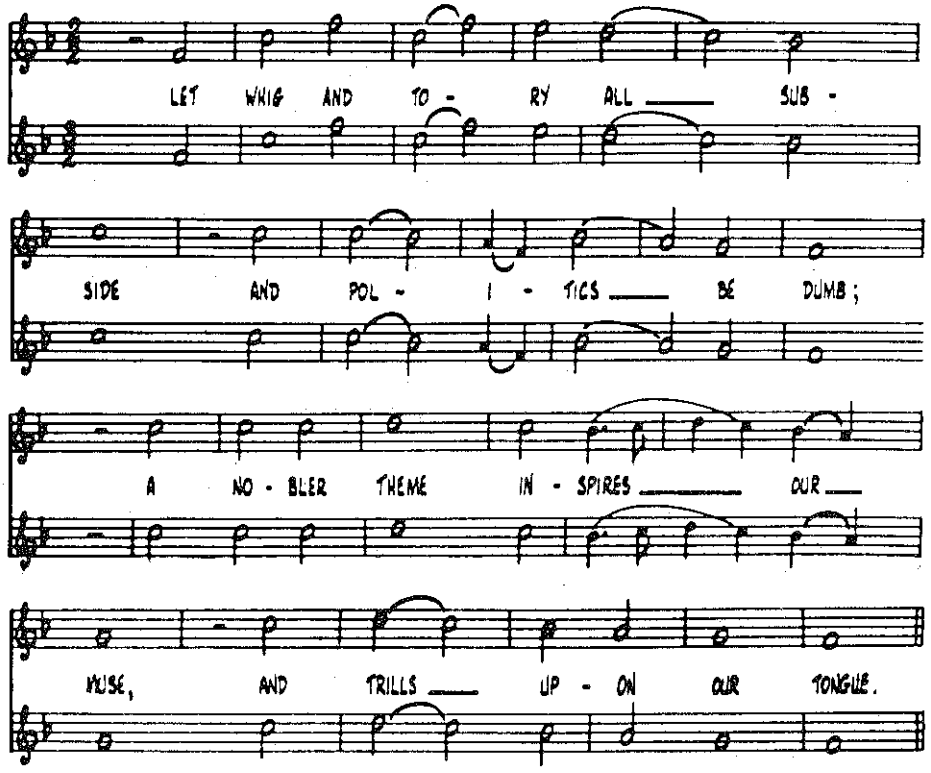
Billings published his first collection, *The New-England Psalm-Singer,* in 1770, at the age of 24. At this time he was unskilled in musical notation and was hindered rather than helped by his engraver. This was Paul Revere, the well-known silversmith and patriot, whose slovenly work accounts for the omission of practically all accidentals. But Billings himself was to blame for the shifted barline in the tune *Lebanon* (Ex. 1). Except for the fourth phrase, all of the accents occur on wrong beats. This was sheer ignorance on the composer's part. What he really intended is shown below the original notation—the second and third notes are now eighths, the last note of the second phrase has been shortened and the first note of the fourth phrase lengthened. In fact, the revised version is the precise way in which Billings himself notated the tune in his second collection, *The Singing-Master's Assistant.*

Example 1



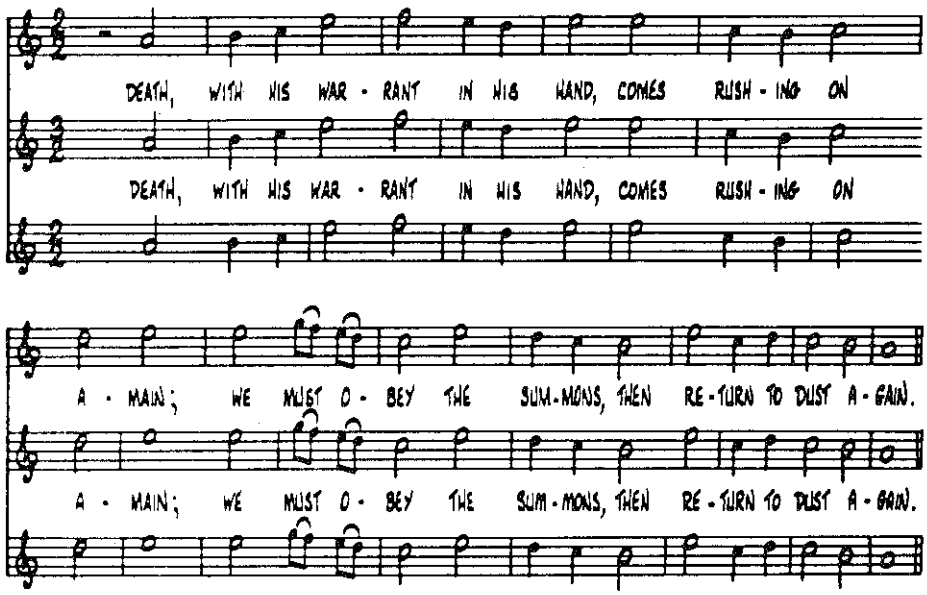
Europe is another poorly notated tune in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*. As printed with a 2/2 signature, many of its accents are wrong (Ex. 2). It actually is in triple meter, needing only the lengthening of the second note and the omission of two cadential rests to make the note values fit. The latter version, similarly shown below, is Billings's own emendation for this tune when it was printed in his third collection, *Music in Miniature*. The needed *b* natural was his also.

Example 2



Since only a few of the psalm tunes in *The New-England Psalm-Singer* were reprinted in Billings's later collections, other suspected metrical vagaries must be checked with the texts. This is an infallible guide, for Billings was not guilty of poor prosody—a charge often made, but unsubstantiated. When the tunes were printed without texts, as was true of a few of those in *The New-England Psalm-Singer,* the meter was indicated. Such a tune is *North River* (Ex. 3). Its rhythm would be puzzling indeed were the meter not stated to be Common Meter; that is, iambic, with an 8-6-8-6 stanza. The Common Meter text of Example 1 has been printed with this tune to show how poorly many of the accents fall with a duple meter.

Example 3

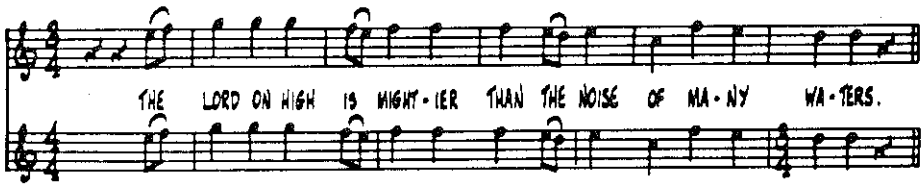


Billings probably intended triple meter for *North River,* which works perfectly when the cadential note of the second phrase is lengthened, as can be seen in the second version in Example 3. Now the primary accent in each bar falls upon the first of the paired quarters and the secondary accent upon the first of the paired halves. However, once the cadential *e* is made a whole note, it is possible to retain the 2/2 meter by shifting the barline one beat to the left for the first half of the tune, as shown in the third version in Example 3. Even with the shifted barline, one unaccented syllable in each phrase receives a musical accent, but it is the first rather than the fifth syllable—the first syllable often having a normal agogic accent. The pleasing metrical ambiguity arising from alternate pairs of quarters and halves was very common

in eighteenth-century psalmody. It occurs even more happily in Long Meter, where the pattern is unbroken throughout the four phrases.

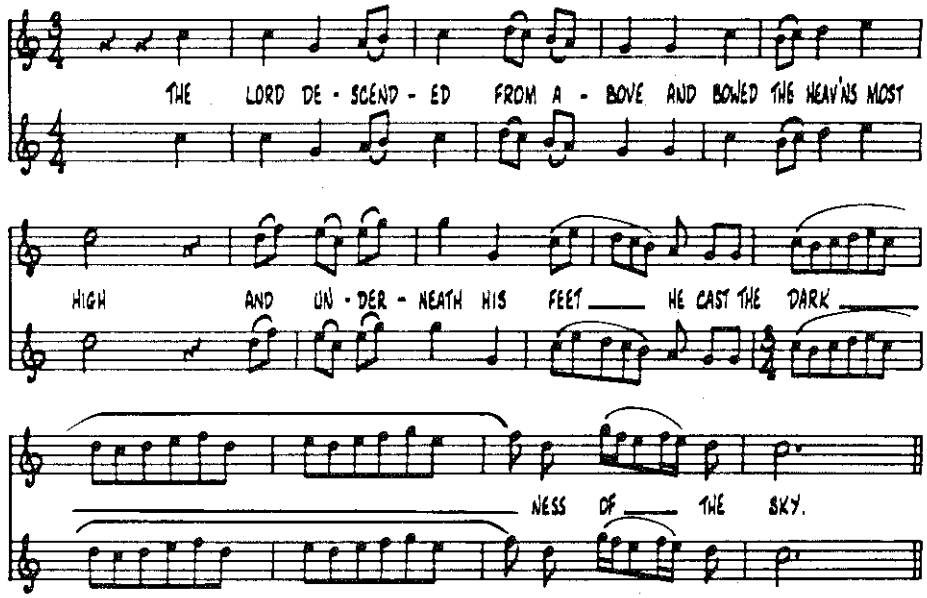
Billings and his contemporaries sometimes notated duple meter as triple meter, but less commonly than the reverse. In *The Lord is King,* the first anthem in the *New England Psalm Singer,* a section of twenty-five bars in 3/4 meter needs to be put into duple meter (Ex. 4). Bars 14-19 of this passage are shown. With four beats to the bar except at the cadence, the accents fall into place.

Example 4



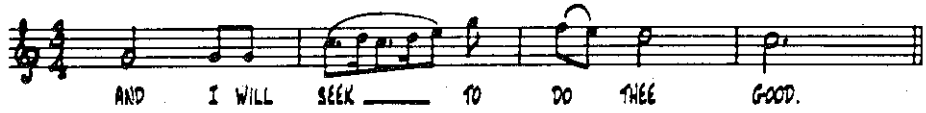
A very similar passage occurs in Billings's hymn anthem, *The Lord descended from above* (Ex. 5). The chief difference is that with the melisma on the word "darkness" the sequences point to triple accentuation for the remainder of the passage, broken slightly in the penultimate bar.

Example 5



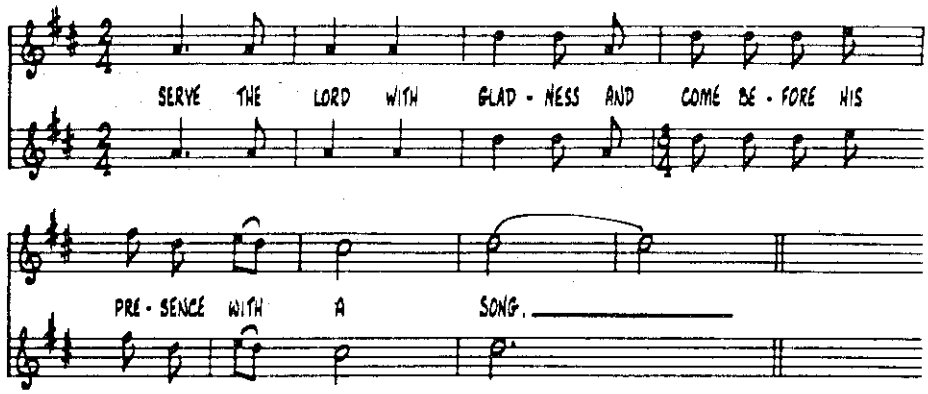
The implied shift from triple to duple meter at the very end of the previous example is similar to the rather common broadening of the rhythm in approaching a cadence. In triple meter this may be accomplished without violating the metrical signature, as in Aaron Williams's *Psalm 122,* where the unaccented word "thee" is lengthened, but is not stressed overmuch in its context (Ex. 6).

Example 6



In duple meter a similar broadening implies a change to triple meter, as in Daniel Read's *O be joyful in the Lord* (Ex. 7). Without words the passage is convincing as it stands. But the unimportant article "a" is given an almost ludicrous accentuation. If the trochaic "singing" is substituted for the iambic "a song," the accents are correct. But it is not necessary to emend the text. Simply change the meter to 3/4 at the beginning of the fourth bar, as shown in the second version, and the cadence becomes identical with that of Example 6.

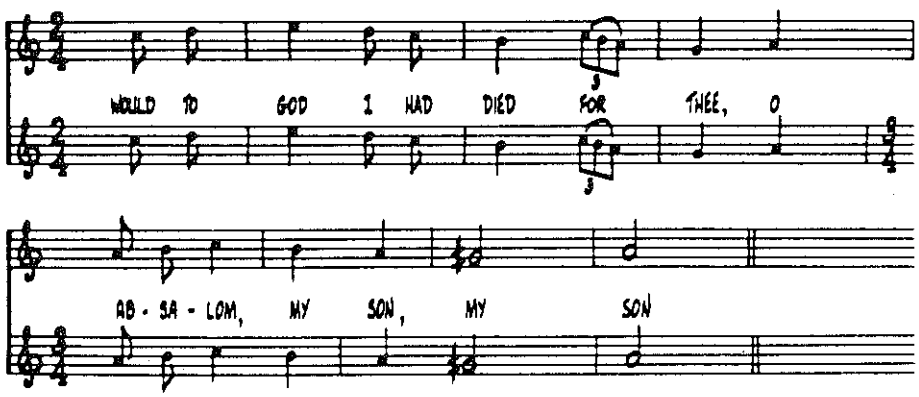
Example 7



At the end of Billings's well-known *David's Lamentation* there is the same sort of cadential broadening. But in the duple notation of this

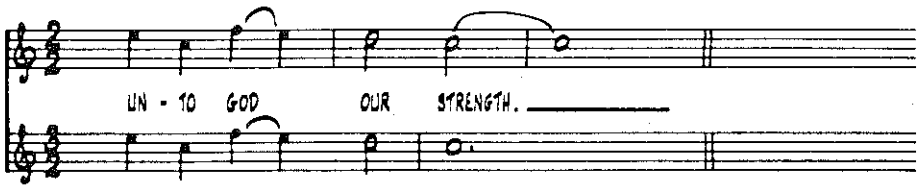
passage the word "my" twice usurps the accent that belongs to "son." Again, all that is necessary is to change to ternary meter just before this spot (Ex. 8).

Example 8



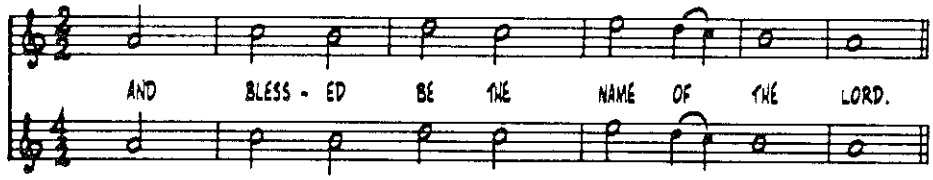
A slightly different rhythmic problem exists in Billings's *alla breve Sing ye merrily*. Without broadening, the passage would have fitted into the duple pattern, with quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, half. Since each of the last three words is lengthened, "our" receives an unnecessary accent, and the three bars of 2/2 need to be changed to two bars of 3/2 (Ex. 9).

Example 9



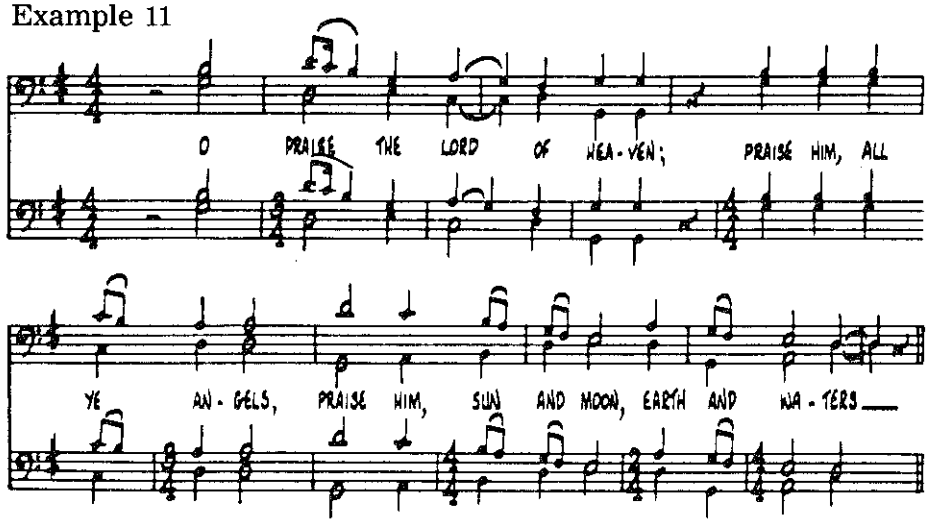
Billings's *Samuel the priest* is also in *alla breve* meter (Ex. 10). In the given passage the important words textually are "blessed," "name," and "Lord." The word "be" is less important, and "of" and "the" (twice) are not stressed at all. As the passage is barred, however, "be" gets a primary accent and so does the second "the." What is needed is a 4/2 signature at the beginning of the first full measure. Then "be" receives a satisfactory secondary accent, and even less stress falls on "the," now plainly affected by cadential broadening.

Example 10



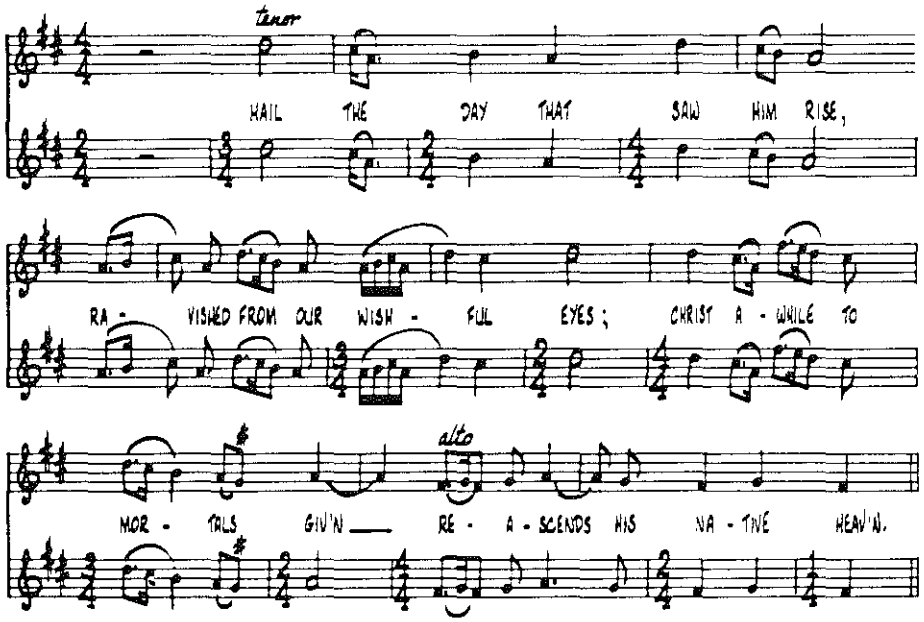
Not infrequently the eighteenth-century psalmodists expressed themselves in free meters. The Englishman William Tans'ur was more prone to do this than any other composer of the period, English or American. He never bothered, however, to change the metrical signatures. This could create some hazardous situations if the music were performed without proper regard for the text. An especially effective example of his free rhythm is found in a little duet for tenor and bass in his anthem *Psalm 148.* (Ex. 11). Here the duple and triple measures are well balanced, the triple predominating at the beginning and the duple toward the end. Correctly barred, there is a natural flow of melody which may pass unrecognized with the original adherence to 4/4 meter.

Example 11



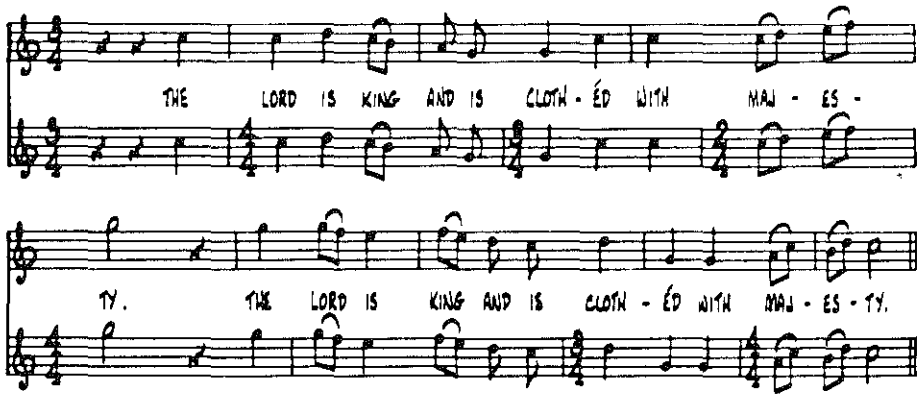
Another irregularly accented tune is *Barnstable,* printed by Daniel Read. It is a double-meter tune, and the second half of it fits the 4/4 signature perfectly. But in the first half, each of the first three phrases contains nine beats, divided thus: 3 2 4, 4 3 2, 4 3 2. (the fourth phrase might have had a 4 3 2 pattern also, if two more beats had been available in the final bar.) The tune is perhaps over-florid; but with its accents falling into place it too has genuine charm (Ex. 12).

Example 12



Unlike his contemporaries, Billings was usually careful about notating free rhythms, especially in his anthems. He slipped, however, in a tenor solo in *The Lord Is King,* where, in both phrases of the balanced period, the real meter is chiefly duple, with one bar of 3/4 imposed (Ex. 13).

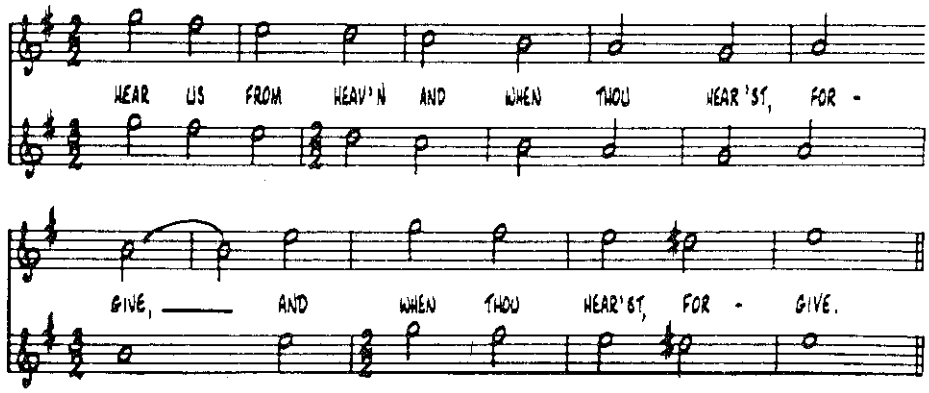
Example 13



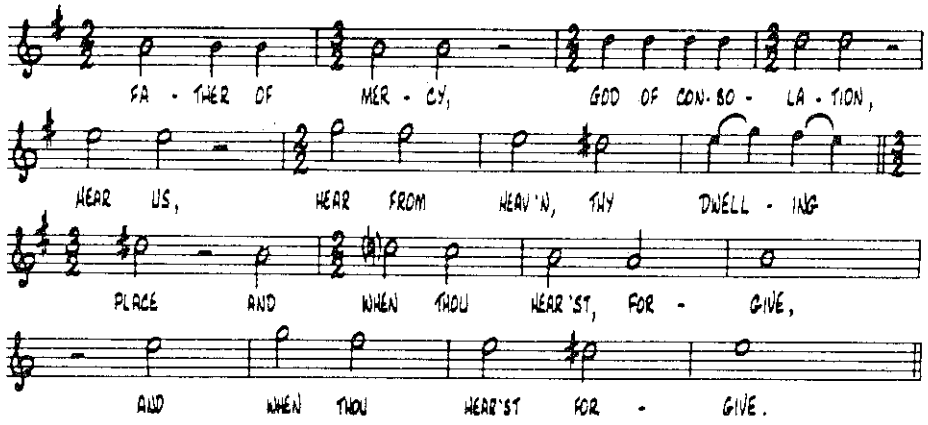
In his anthem *We have heard with our ears,* Billings has a passage in which the free rhythm is at first barred incorrectly. The rhythm is predominatingly duple, but a bar of 3/4 is needed at the very

beginning without which the next four accents are wrong. (Ex. 14a). Another implied 3/4 sets things straight. In the expansion of this lovely passage Billings has changed the metrical signature six times to fit the changing accents (Ex. 14b).

Example 14a

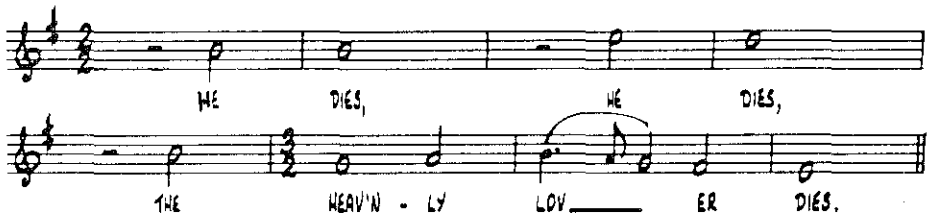


Example 14b

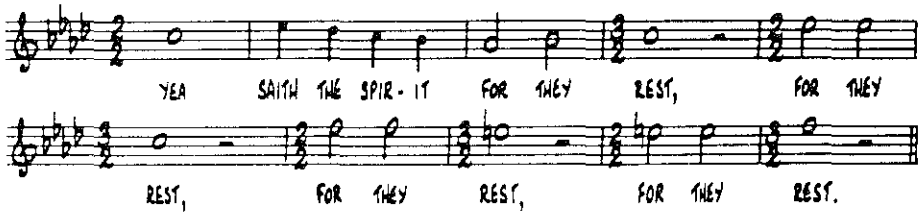


In the second part of the previous example, all of the changes to triple meter were occasioned by the addition of a beat's rest to punctuate the text. This was an important use of changing meters for Billings. For example, in his psalm tune *Berlin,* Billings repeats and punctuates the opening words *"He dies"*; thus he uses duple meter for the first five bars only (Ex. 15). Billings's Funeral Anthem *I heard a great voice* contains an impressive instance of punctuation that gives rise to four bars of quintuple meter, which Billings notates correctly as 2/2 plus 3/2 (Ex. 16).

Example 15

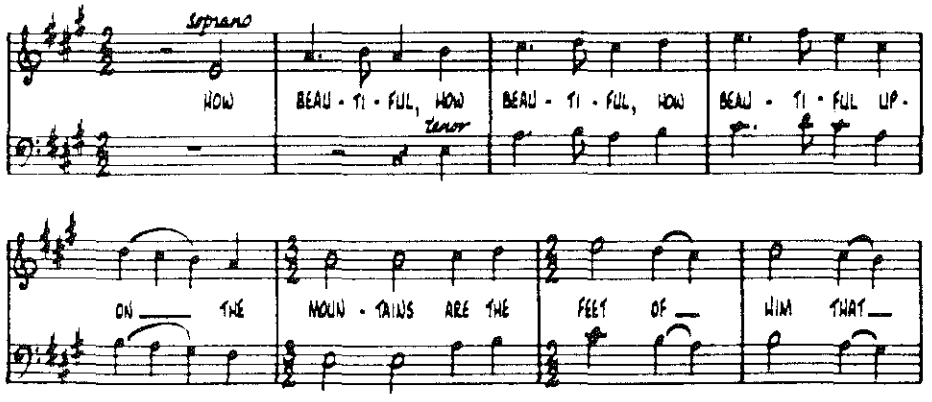


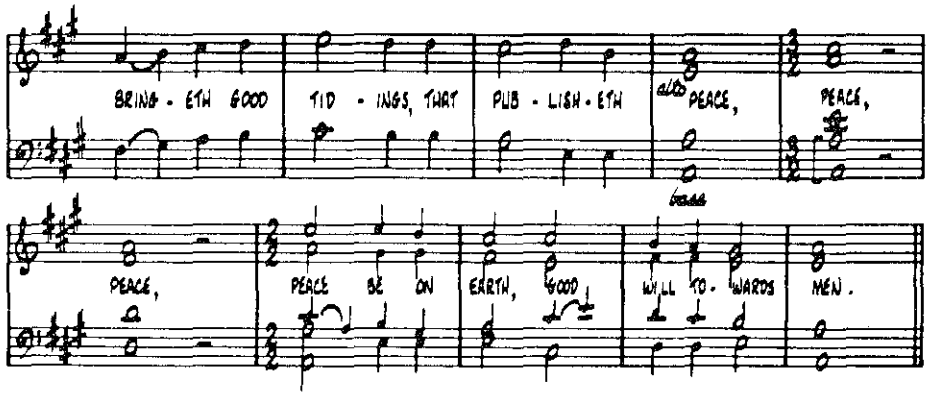
Example 16



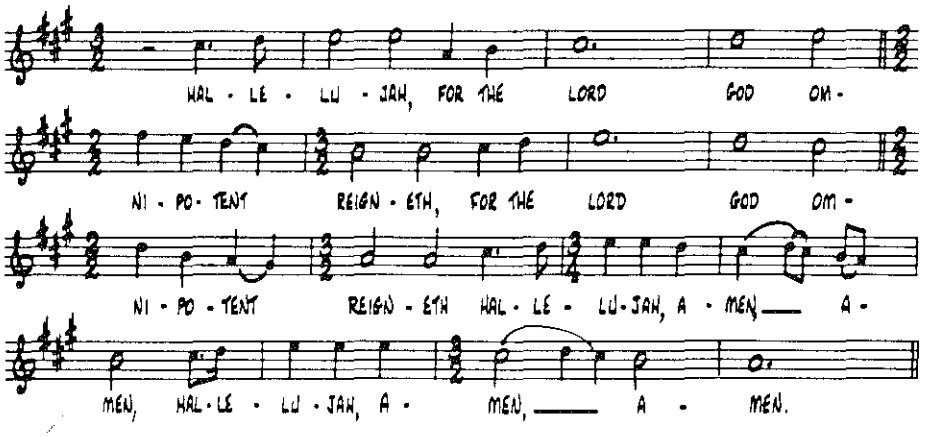
Our final example contains several of Billings's rhythmic nuances, all correctly barred. The example is taken from the end of his early anthem *Was not the day dark and dreary!* The passage begins with a duet for soprano and tenor in which one bar of 3/2 occurs normally. Then, to aid in punctuating the word "peace," two more bars of 3/2 are needed. The text here juxtaposes in quodibet fashion verses from the fifty-second chapter of *Isaiah* and the second chapter of *St. Luke* (Ex. 17a). In the homophonic *Hallelujah* that follows there is a different sort of rhythmic change. In the eighteenth century, a 3/2 meter implied, in theory at least, quarter note = ca. M.M. 120; but 3/4, quarter note = *ca.* M.M. 180. So the tempo speeds up by half at the 3/4 and the 3/2 at the end takes the place of the retard that was never indicated in words (Ex. 17b).

Example 17a





Example 17b



Both Examples 16 and 17 were taken from *The Singing-Master's Assistant* of 1778. And so Billings is shown to have become master of the barline as early as his second collection, published when he was 32. It is true that Examples 7 and 8, culled from the same work, show cadential broadening without signature change. Such a practice, however, might even be followed today, since the accents are sufficiently obvious.

Unfortunately, Billings's later works show many lapses in the placing of metrical signatures. Example 14, which notates free rhythms correctly only in part, was taken from his last collection, *The Continental Harmony,* published twenty-four years later than *The New-England Psalm-Singer.* In *The Continental Harmony,* there also had appeared the fuguing tune *Great Plain,* in which the prevailing 3/2 meter is broken only twice by three bars of 2/2 not indicated by signature change, and where the fugal entry in the soprano is shifted by a beat and the tenor entry by two beats.

Of *Great Plains* Billings naively says in a footnote: "Part of this tune is very badly bar'd, but I will leave it for the observation of the reader." Billings's remark may well be taken as a warning that is applicable to all of his work. His music is beautiful, his rhythms are infectious; and after the publication of *The New-England Psalm-Singer,* his notation is in general impeccable. But there is always the possibility that some passage may not give a good effect because the barring fails to express the composer's full intent. Remember, then, that Billings has thrown himself upon your mercy; with confidence he has entrusted the detection of his errors to the "observation of the reader."

John Cole's *Rudiments of Music:* Performance Practice in Early American Church Music

by Helen Stewart Kaufmann

The method of performance of early music remains one of the knottiest problems of music history. When we realize how many variant readings exist even of a Brahms symphony, which is in our traditional repertoire, it can readily be seen how thorny the problem becomes when we try to reconstruct the performance practice of previous centuries.

With respect to earlier music in general, one important point must constantly be kept in mind. There was not necessarily one "correct" version of a composition, nor was there one "correct" performance of a work. The further back in time we go, the more variants of performance exist, since it was the musical concept that mattered and not the means of its realization. All we can hope to know is the nature of the problem and some of the more acceptable solutions to it that seem to be indicated by a study of contemporary sources. John Cole's *The Rudiments of Music* (1810) fortunately gives us an insight into some of the practices employed in the performance of his music and that of his contemporaries, and therefore provides documentary evidence of some of the problems that he, as a practical musician, had to face.

John Cole was born in Tewkesbury, England in 1774.[1] At an early age he emigrated to America and settled in Baltimore, Maryland, the seat of all his later musical activities until his death on August 17, 1855. Despite his early training, reputedly received from contact with the singing schools of Andrew Law, Andrew Adgate, and others, Cole considered himself basically a self-taught musician. At first a printer and bookseller as well as a band musician, he eventually concentrated

[1]The author is greatly indebted to Mr. A.T. Gaydon, assistant Archivist of Gloucestershire, England, for statistical information concerning the Cole family.

his work on the composition and editing of sacred music. Much of this music was intended for the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America—one of the earliest instances in this country of music composed for a particular denomination.

A survey of Cole's publications reveals his significant position as a transitional figure between native American composers like Billings and Holden and advocates of the "better music" movement like Mason and Hastings, who in their zeal for "taste" turned away from the native tradition and toward importations. Cole started out in the traditional way, teaching in singing schools and writing tunes that incorporated many features associated with the composers of "fuging tunes." His growing interest in European music led him to scorn the "village authors of the past century"[2] and to advocate the adoption of musical practices going back to Ravenscroft and other psalmodists and extending to Beethoven, Mozart, Handel, Bach, and to lesser composers, mainly those representing England in the late eighteenth century. He admired especially the German tradition of the chorale, which he felt should be emulated by American composers. Cole's later works reflect his concern with spreading the "newer" taste. Among these are several of a sentimental, "genteel" nature, a few adapted from secular pieces, and others that show a derivative acquaintance with the works of Handel and his followers. In his better compositions, however, Cole incorporates some of the vitality of the earlier American tradition he remembered throughout his life. He even goes back to the "shape-note" or "patent-note" tradition in his *Union Harmony* of 1829, decrying his previous prejudices against this system.

The dichotomy between old and new is seen clearly in the pages of *The Rudiments of Music*. This thirty-two page booklet contains the kind of theoretical training that was promulgated in the singing schools of the day, and may even have been used by Cole in his own classes.[3] It begins with a quotation from Jonathan Edwards (1707-1758), the American philosopher and Puritan theologian, one of the great intellects of pre-Revolutionary America:

> The praises of God may be sung privately in the family but chiefly in the house of God, and should be attended to with reverence, sincerity, joy, gratitude, and with the *understanding*. Those, therefore, where there is no natural inability, who neglect to learn to sing, live in sin . . . .

Cole's own observation on this statement reads as follows: "We leave

[2]John Cole, *The Seraph* . . . (2nd ed., Baltimore, 1822), p. i (Preface).

[3]Such a usage is implied in the full title of the work: *The/Rudiments of Music,/or/An Introduction/To The/Art of Singing/Compiled For The Use of Schools/* by John Cole. Baltimore—Printed by G. Dobbin and Murphy, 10, Baltimore Street. A copy of this work can be found at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

those who are wilfully dumb in God's house to consider this pointed remark."

The Rudiments of Music is divided into a series of lessons dealing with all aspects of introductory theory:

Lesson I "The Gamut, or General Scale," that is, the grand staff and the various "cliffs" necessary to read it.

Lesson II "Of the Notes and Rests."

Lesson III "Of the Other Characters Used in Music," such as sharps, flats, naturals, slurs, pauses (holds), triplets, etc.

Lesson IV "Of the Marks of Time," a discussion of simple and compound time.

Lesson V "Of the Appogiature of Leading Notes." This is followed by a short discussion "Of the Trill, or Shake."

Lesson VI "Of the Key Note." Key is used here in two ways. Its first meaning corresponds to our use of the term "tonic." It is also used in the sense of "mode," as in the expressions "Major or Sharp Key" and "Minor or Flat Key." The terms "sharp" and "flat" also have two usages, one in the sense of accidental, and the other as a substitute for mode.

Lesson VII "Of Sol Fa ing." Cole uses the Lancashire system with the syllables: *fa sol la fa sol la mi fa,* corresponding to our major scale. It is a moveable system which was shortly to be supplanted by the tonic Sol-fa with the syllables: *do re mi fa sol la si do.*

Lesson VIII "Of Beating Time."

Two "Lessons for Tuning the Voice" offer a practical demonstration of some of the basic principles taught up to this point. This is followed by a fascinating essay entitled "Of Graceful Singing," which gives a great deal of information about performance practice and which will be discussed in detail below. "A Dictionary of Musical Terms," a series of "Progressive Lessons," and a "Musical Catechism, being a Recapitulation of the Foregoing Lessons" complete this valuable pamphlet.

Cole begins his discussion "Of Graceful Singing" with the following directions:

> 1. Let your jesture [*sic*] be decent and manly; avoid putting your hand before your mouth, or any other action that may hurt your voice, or offend your hearers.

The problem of behavior seems to be a universal one with church choirs. An amusing illustration of the international problem of choir behavior can be seen in a seventeenth-century treatise by Christian Bernhard, a pupil of Heinrich Schütz. In his *Von der Singe-Kunst oder Manier* he speaks out strongly against gesturing while singing. "Nothing is more vexing," he says, "than singers who allow

themselves to be seen rather than heard."[4]

Apparently, the members of Cole's choirs were given to frequent gesturing during their performances since he speaks against "shaking of the head, or holding it on one side" as "unpardonable faults." He advises his singers to "Imitate the Orator rather than the Clown." In another work, he suggests that the number of the tune to be sung be written on a slate; "this will prevent all unnecessary conversation, where all should be order and decorum." [5]

2. Take care to have your voice as clear as may be; open your mouth and throat freely, but not wide; equally avoid gaping, and singing through the teeth.

The desired tone quality was obviously quite similar to that which is considered ideal today: Gaping, or singing with a wide open mouth, produces a harsh and strident tone, whereas "singing through the teeth" has the effect of limiting the volume and quality of sound. This recommendation was extended to the congregation, whom he admonished "should not destroy by loud vociferation the harmony of the choir."[6]

3. Chuse (*sic*) the part that best suits you, and remember which part you are performing. The Treble requires delicacy, without tameness; The Counter a peculiar sweetness; The Tenor a medium between effeminate softness and masculine robustness; and the Bass gravity, pomp, solidity of voice and bold expression.

The question of the distribution of voice parts was a constant concern of John Cole.The older custom had been to assign the "air" to the tenor part, which was then sung by both men and women. The treble part was likewise sung both by men and women so that a pseudo-polyphony of six-part texture arose in the actual performance. The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also relied on an extradordinarily heavy bass line. Several singing masters specified that half the number of voices should sing bass, whereas the rest of the voices ought to be distributed more or less equally among the other parts,[7] but this situation soon changed.

Cole was attracted more to the "modern" concept of placing the "air" in the treble, sung only by women's voices, but it was a concept for which he, as a transitional figure in American music history, had to

[4]Joseph Müller-Blattau, *Die Kompositionslehre Heinrich Schützens in der Fassung seins Schülers Chr. Bernhard* (Leipzig, 1936) p. 37.

[5]John Cole, *Songs of Zion* (Baltimore, 1818), p. xv. The custom of suspending tablets in church to show the number of the tune to be sung was instituted by Louis Bourgeois. Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York, 1954), p. 360.

[6]Cole, *Songs of Zion*, p. iii.

[7]Irving Lowens, arr., *Hartford Harmony* (Hartford, Conn., 1953), p.v (Notes on the Music).

struggle against the accepted practice and against the prejudices of those who resented any change. Even as late as the *Union Harmony* of 1829 he was still speaking of "the almost exploded mode of putting the Tenor voices on the Air—a practice that cannot be defended by any rule of analogy or reason." An examination of Cole's tunebooks will show the gradual emergence of the newer concept. In earlier works, the physical arrangement of parts on the printed page is the conventional one of the eighteenth century, but notes advising the newer practice are constantly inserted in the prefaces of these same books. In *Devotional Harmony,* for example. the order of parts starting from the top of the page is as follows: Tenor, second Treble, Air, and Bass. In the description of these parts in the preface, Cole states that the Tenor line must not be sung by Treble voices, or played on a Treble instrument. The second line which, in his words, contained the essential harmony, was the second treble part. This part had apparently been sung by the countertenor voice which in Cole's day was becoming obsolete. He seemed to prefer to keep this part for women's voices, although the use of men's voices "sung in Alto" is allowed, or the use of boys' voices "due to the great scarcity of Counter-Tenor." The "principle Air" was to be sung by Treble voices only.

On this latter point Cole waxes particularly eloquent:

> Owing to the general deficiency in musical science, which characterizes American masters, and to the almost total want of refinement in the public ear, the ancient practice of giving the Air to the tenor, and casting the treble voices into the shade, still prevails. Male performers resist the improvement with a zeal similar to that with which they would resist an invasion of their natural or political rights . . .

In practice, there was probably a greater number of women's voices in proportion to men's voices, in contrast to the situation in the previous century. For this reason, as well as due to the acuteness of the treble voice, their use on the melody part would have the effect of making it more prominent.

By 1829, Cole had definitely adopted the present-day method of writing parts. In *Union Harmony* he writes:

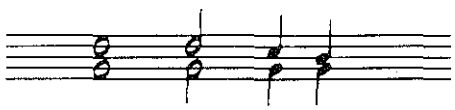
> I have in this work throughout, placed the Air or principal Melody on the top—this should be sung exclusively by ladies and young children.

Since this was an instruction book intended for a singing-school teacher, he admits that "the teacher or leader of course will have to accompany them until they acquire sufficient confidence to sing alone," but the desideratum was the treble sonority. In passages marked *piano,* especially, "no Tenor voice, not even the Leader or Teacher should be heard in conjunction with the Trebles."

4. Consider the compass of your Voice; never attempt to sing those notes that will either force you to squeaking above, or grumbling below; but if you meet with any such, soften them which will make them both easier and more agreeable. When you sing without Instruments, take care how you pitch your tune for much depends on this. Pitch-Pipes or Tuning-Forks, which are well-known instruments, will be very useful to direct you.

The question of range is closely connected with the problem of the type of voice on each part. Cole furthers his pleas for the modern concepts of *tessitura* by clear indications of the vocal "scoring" he had in mind. The *Union Harmony* not only places the chief melody on the top, but follows it with the Alto or Second Treble. This part he indicates also as "proper for Boys who cannot reach the full extent of the Staff." Next comes the Tenor, for men who can sing as high as F. All who are unable to reach that compass should sing Bass.

Later in the same work, in the section on Rudiments, Cole describes the "Compass of the Different Voices." The highest voices of women he calls Treble, Canto, or Soprano. Boys' voices and the lowest women's voices are the Second Treble, Alto, or Mezzo Soprano. The highest men's voices, "transposed to the Treble Clef," are the Tenor, Alto, or Counter Tenor, and the lowest voices are assigned to the "Bass." Cole introduces another common concept related to range of voices under the term "Choosing Notes." These refer to those notes that "are placed in a direct line, one above the other, either of which or both may be sung."



The employment of instruments in the performance of psalm tunes and hymns is merely suggested here. There is, indeed, supporting evidence of the use of instruments both in the custom of performance of the previous century and in scattered remarks in Cole's own works.

The heavy bass line in the nineteenth-century psalm and hymn tune settings was often reinforced with a "bass viol," especially when there were insufficient basses at hand. Because of its association with the performance of sacred music, this instrument was often referred to as "God's fiddle."[8] Cole does not speak of this instrument specifically, although he probably followed the custom, especially in his early works. He does, however, take instrumental usage for granted when he warns that the tenor part of a piece should not be sung by treble voices,

[8]Lowens, *op. cit.*, p.v.

nor played on a treble instrument.[9] Also in speaking of the scarcity of countertenor voice, he has indicated that the Alto part be performed by boys and "ladies with deep voices" which, at the same time, furnished "a part for a second violin or clarinet if wanted . . . ."[10] The most valuable reference, however, can be found in the Preface to the *ca.* 1821 edition of *The Seraph* (p. ii), where Cole inserts a note on the propriety of using instruments in church. According to him, only the National Church of Scotland after the Reformation rejected instruments. He also cites the common objections that instruments were not used by the Apostles and Primitive Christians, and that the New Testament is silent on the subject. Cole retorts that it is also silent on the subject of women taking Communion, and infant baptism, and he goes on to ask, "whence the authority for the use of a Church Bell or Clock, For Velvet Cushions and Curtains . . . ?" Later in the same work (p. iii) he states that the violin, hautboy, and flute also imitate the treble voice.

It is the organ, however, that is indicated most often and most carefully in the works of Cole. This is especially true of the collection of *Thirty Four Psalm Tunes, chiefly of German origin,* of 1820 in which he appeals "to those who have listened with attention to the solemn psalmody of the Germans, accompanied by an organ . . . ." (p. 3).

This collection is significant for the careful indication of the organ registration for the chants associated with the liturgy of the Protestant Episcopal Church, which show that Cole had a three-manual organ at his disposal and that he chose a much greater variety of sonorities than are common today.

Indications for the performance of organ interludes between verses of a chant are particularly interesting, since this was a practice that was dying out and looked upon with disfavor. Cole himself later states that the organist should feel what he plays, and not allow "the too active finger, either during the chant, or after it is ended, to give unmeaning flourishes and imaginary graces" which are "incompatible with devotion and the true nature of chanting."[11]

5. Pay a particular attention to your Subject. A Man who does not feel, or at least seem to feel, what he is performing, has no reason to expect a By-Stander will. Engage therefore in nothing where your heart dares not join your voice, and you will be in the way to imitate their elegance and simplicity, whose Music is as perfect as the blessedness in which they dwell. Yet with your earnestness be sure to shun anything like a whine, or snarling tone, a shaking of the head, or holding it on one side, for these are unpardonable faults; and are generally the effect of Fanaticism.

[9]Cole, *Devotional Harmony,* p. iii.
[10]Cole, *The Seraph* (3rd ed., Baltimore, 1827), p. III (Preface).
[11]Cole, *Laudate Dominum* (Baltimore, 1842), p. 4.

"Let the *Chanter* pay constant regard to the . . . words," states Cole, and like the organist, feel what he chants, keeping . . . his mind steadfastly fixed upon the subject before him . . . ."[12] In the second edition of *The Seraph* (1827), p.v., the subject matter of psalmody is discussed in some detail. Cole writes:

> . . . care has been taken to avoid everything which might lead to an improper association of ideas; . . . The Rev. George Whitefield once observed in playful mood, "that it was a pity to let the devil have all the pretty tunes," and this is often quoted as an apology for introducing song tunes even of the worst kind, into public worship: there are those, however, who question the propriety of robbing even the Devil, especially of articles only fit for the use of his friends.[13]

The stern Rev. Whitefield is unconsciously reiterating the maxim of the severe Savanarola of Renaissance Florence, just as Cole is unknowingly adopting the precepts of the Council of Trent in its attitude towards music. The result is, of course, the "elegance and simplicity" that was becoming the norm for the church music preferred by the nineteenth century, although in the process much of the vitality of American Colonial masters was lost in the homage paid to importations.

> 6. Express your words with all the politeness possible, without affectation, imitate the Orator rather than the Clown. Especially avoid the harsh sound of Y in the terminations *cy, ly, ry, ty, & c.* An error almost universal amongst Psalm-singers, yet as odious as it is common.

Careful diction was a constant concern with Cole, especially in the matter of the proper performance of chants. In his *Thirty-Four Psalm Tunes* (Baltimore, 1820) he states:

> The words have been adapted to the Chants with a more than usual attention to Rhetorical accent—a subject which has of late claimed the attention of several eminent professors . . . .

The third edition of *Laudate Dominum* is an extremely valuable source of information about the more common faults current in the chanting procedure of Cole's day. Amont the points he lists are the following:

a) Avoid too hasty pronunciation. This does not mean that the chant should be slow, but there should be no pauses between the verses, and the whole thing should be done with spirit.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] George Whitefield (1714-1770), at first a follower of Charles Wesley, later adopted Calvinistic views and founded a dissident group of Calvinist Methodists. He compiled a hymn book in 1753, and published many sermons and writings which were widely circulated. Paul Harvey, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2nd ed., New York, 1937), p. 843.

b) Avoid a dead stop at the end of the "recitation" note; thus, the following is incorrect: "O come let us sing un — — to the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the — — — strength of our salvation."

c) Avoid dwelling upon and dragging out the words sung at the "mediation" and "cadence" of the chant.

Cole feels that these words should be more prolonged and emphatic than the words sung to the reciting note, especially since this emphasis will cause the harmonized part to fall together in the right way, but they should not be stressed to the disadvantage of the rest of the text.

> . . . judging from their performance, some chanters seem to think that the words sung to the *reciting* note are of no consequence at all; they gabble over them as fast as possible; then stop to take breath, then bring out the remaining syllables as if *they only* ought to be heard.

These admonitions are by no means invalid even today!

> 7. Be careful where you lay your accent. And here observe, that in Common Time the first and third part of your Bar should be Accented, and the second and last Unaccented. In Triple Time the principle (*sic*) Accent must be on the first part, the third often requires an inferior one, though some totally disregard it. It is to be lamented that ignorant composers pay no attention to this, and so mislead the performer.

The question of meter and accent plagued the early nineteenth century which had inherited the currents and countercurrents of the eighteenth century. The method of accentuation described above is in agreement with the later, more "progressive" conception that finally dominated the thinking on this matter. A detailed description of time-beating in accordance with the above principles is given on page xiv of Cole's *Union Harmony* (1829):

> There are various ways of beating Time, the most approved method for Common Time is as follows:
>
> First: Let the fingers of the right hand fall on the desk or table. Second: Raise the fingers and bring them about three inches to the left. Third: Move them as much farther to the right. Fourth: Bring them to the first position. In beating Triple Time, omit the third motion.

A discussion of the more intricate aspects of Tempo will be given at No. 11 below.

> 8. Always notice the parts marked "Forte" or "Piano" or loud and soft; as also all the words you meet with of that nature, whether they respect the tune or time; as much of the effect of a piece often depends on a strict regard to these.

Hymn tunes marked "forte" or "piano" with the additional reminders to sing "suave" or "dolce" may seem strange to perusers of modern hymnals, but they were the commonplace of early-nineteenth-century collections. In a sense these dynamic marks are a sign of

incipient Romanticism. A style of a high emotional nature had emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century in the *Empfindsamkeit* of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and the lyric cantabile of Mozart; the works of both of these composers were known to Cole. However, another generation had to pass before their characteristics were absorbed into the bloodstream of musical tradition and finally emerged in the new style of musical rendition that dominated the nineteenth century. This new style was concerned almost solely with the emotional effect of a musical work, so that the scores which evolved bore careful indication of tempo, dynamics, expression, and other nuances for the guidance of the performer.

Most hymns of today are written in four-part harmony throughout, but Cole's psalm and hymn tunes often consisted of short sections marked "duo" or "trio," or even "solo" with organ accompaniment, which offered constant contrasts of loud and soft, smoothly bound together by means of *crescendo* and *decrescendo.* It seems likely that single voices only were used on the softer parts since the choirs under his direction did not assume large proportions. The list of subscribers to his *Devotional Harmony* of 1814, for example, shows that the choirs of both St. Paul's Church and Christ Church needed only twelve copies each. Even if these choirs did unite for concerts of sacred music, they could not join during the regular Sunday services of their respective churches, so that the personnel was relatively small, insofar as ordinary performances were concerned. It may be for this reason that Cole so admired antiphonal singing, since, as he says, the division of the choir in two parts and singing by turns "has many advantages over that which generally prevails in our Churches; a small Choir can produce a more striking effect thanif divided into four sections . . . ." He even suggests that "if the choir is small, let all voices sing in unison, the Organ filling up the harmony." This considerable concern about a small choir seems to reflect a basic problem that Cole had to face.

Forte and *piano* are indicated in two other places in the 1842 edition of *Laudate Dominum,* one directly and the other indirectly. The Te Deum, because of its festive character, is recommended to be sung in full harmony, but alternating *forte* and *piano* to produce an antiphonal effect. The opening verse of the Venite, on the other hand, is sung alone by the minister, after which the remaining verses are sung alternately by the tenors and sopranos, thus producing a similar effect as in the Te Deum.

9. Endeavor to accommodate your Style of Singing to the general subject of your words. How disgusting would it be to hear a Man roar out "Thy words are sweeter to my mouth than honey?" Or another whine, with all the tenderness of the Affettuoso style, "Let the Sea roar and the Floods clap their hands?"

"In vocal Music," says Cole, "the words if properly adapted will be the best guide both as to the Style and Time of performance." Concentration on text with the resultant emphasis on an emotional interpretation in musical terms of its literary implications is one of the facets of the Romantic movement. It seems strange, at first, to label a composer so close to the Colonial singing-school tradition as a Romantic, but it must not be forgotten that Cole was of English origin, and, as a publisher, in close contact with the literature both of England and America. England, too, had a particularly rich and influential pre-romanticism that resulted in works charged with individuality and emotionalism, and Cole may have been reacting to this influence. He did, after all, publish *The Minstrel* a few years after the book on rudiments, and the Romantic implications of the former are obvious. The difference in viewpoint becomes even more apparent if we examine a set of "rules" similar to those of Cole in Samuel Holyoke's *Columbian Repository* of 1802, antedating Cole's *Rudiments* by only eight years. Of Holyoke's twenty-eight "necessary rules to be observed in vocal music," the majority deal with purely musical admonitions, many of which were reiterated in Cole, but hardly any seem to concern themselves so strikingly with matters of text and literary interpretation.

10. Never sing your self out of breath, as there cannot be any just occasion for it. Where there are no pauses, you gain breath by performing the Notes more distinct. As for the old Psalm Tunes, many wear out their breath by drawing them full as slow again as they were originally intended.

Cole advises moderation in all things. "Let the *Chanter* pay constant regard to the . . . words . . .," he states, "minding well the stops that most deserve attention, and avoiding all unnecessary hurry . . . ." But then he goes on to say that one of the chief faults is a too hasty pronunciation of chant, which nevertheless ought not to be done too slowly. Perhaps his recommendation that "the thing should be done with spirit" is the best clue to the subjective nature of the speed he had in mind. In another place he states clearly that the speed of a piece depends more on the meaning of the text than on any purely musical factor. For this reason, clarity of diction and distinct performance of the notes will in many cases take care of the breathing problem. Apparently the performance of psalm tunes of a traditional nature seemed to be carried out too slowly to suit Cole, for he speaks out against a dragging performance of these well-known melodies not only above but in other works. The clearest statement of the abuse and the typical Cole remedy are found in *The Seraph* (1827), p. ii, where he writes: " . . . the old psalm tunes are generally sung too slow . . . the subject of the words is the best guide."

11. Remember your Time. Congregations which have no Organ, are very apt, by dragging out the Minim to the length of the Semibreve, to bring Triple into Common Time, which has a very bad effect. Some Performers also are apt to mistake a *Siciliano* for a Jig, which leads them to perform that Music in a merry Style which requires a slow and affecting one. Another error common among learners is, they suppose quick notes, as quavers, semi-quavers, &c, must always be performed quick, whereas the slowest music is often put into these Notes; which is to be known either by some word affixed, or else by the subject of the Piece.

Nowhere does Cole show the dichotomy in this theoretical training more than in the matter of Tempo. Two opposing concepts, one looking backward and the other forward, are promulgated in the pages of this short book on rudiments.

The older viewpoint was based on a generally accepted standard tempo as a basic norm. All other tempi were proportionally derived from this standard.[14] Almost all earlier centuries preferred the idea of a regular normal beat usually based on some physiological rhythm such as the regular pulse or the regular stride of a man. This standard beat was the well-known *tactus*, but since the physiological descriptions are indeterminate, only an approximate "normal" beat can be indicated. Thus Apel establishes the *tactus* at M.M. 50-60, while Sachs suggests that the value of the *tactus* lies between M.M. 60 and M.M. 80.[15]

In Lesson IV of the *Rudiments,* Cole adheres to this older viewpoint. He gives the following time-signatures of "Moods" for Common Time: C, 2/2, 2/4, and describes tham as "a slow movement . . . a quicker movement . . . " and "a still quicker movement." In other words, the tempo markings in themselves indicated a norm of movement and its proportional derivatives, although the norm itself is by no means clear, since the expression "a slow Movement" is unfortunately not defined absolutely.

Triple time is also described only by the time signatures: 3/2 3/4 3/8, but these do not seem to have any indications of relative speed. As a matter of fact, Cole adds the following note after his discussion of time:

N.B. When a piece of Music is marked with either of the above signs (i.e., Common or Triple) it indicates only the number of parts, or divisions in a Bar, and the consequent mode of accenting; but how *quick* or how *slow,* the piece is to be performed must be determined from the nature of the subject, or from the signification of the technical terms prefixed to the piece.

In the course of one brief page, Cole has switched from the old concept of tempo to the new one. Now the pace of a composition is no longer

[14] Curt Sachs, *Rhythm and Tempo* (New York, 1953), p. 311.

[15] Willi Apel, *The Notation of Polyphonic Music* (4th ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 147, and Sachs, *op. cit.,* p. 203.

implicit in the notation itself, but needs "the signification of technical terms" prefixed to the piece (such as *adagio, largo, allegro,* etc.). As a result, the note values themselves are not a clue to speed, since the tempo markings permit a wide range of variations. Yet the "error" of assuming that shorter note values mean speed, and longer ones slowness, could only be made by people upon the older proportional concept of time.

The same dichotomy appears when Cole is explaining methods of beating time. In the chapter "Of Beating Time," he shows the vacillation between the two concepts clearly.

> Time, in Music, is quicker or slower, according to the nature of a piece, or the design of its Author, its velocity, and the division of it into even and uneven quantities, are known by the Moods, which have been explained already. But here observe that the quickness or slowness of modern pieces, is often known, rather by the subject, or some word affixed . . . than by the Moods themselves . . . .

The method of beating time also reflects the two approaches to tempo. The older one is shown in the following:

> In beating the first Mood of Common Time, remember you are always to move your Hand twice down and twice up in each Bar; in the second and third Moods, once down and up is sufficient.

Contrast this with "the most approved method for Common Time" quoted from *Union Harmony* above, which agrees for the most part with the method of today.

A few other remarks on time-beating are rather revealing. It was possible to beat time with the foot, which Cole hoped would be accomplished without "stamping":

> All that is commonly attended to in beating time with the foot is that it go down at the beginning and rise at the middle of a Bar of Common Time; and that it go down at the first and rise at the third part in Triple Time.

He also recommends the use of a "Time-beater," i.e., a small tight roll of paper or parchment, "but if this be done louder than is needful . . . , it is always disagreeable, and often ridiculous." This method was especially useful in concert performances, but was not recommended for use in church.

> 12. In long sounds, the swell and Diminish (VV) though seldom marked should be often introduced; that is, you should begin very soft, increase to the middle, and then diminish to the end. This if done with delicacy has a fine effect, especially with a Shake or Trill.

This practice is so common that it needs little comment. It is only necessary to state that this custom emerges as one of the important

characteristics of the orchestra of the early eighteenth century (although the practice did not originate then), and it has remained an important interpretive detail ever since.

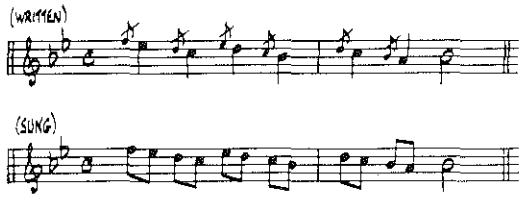
13. Touch all your Graces with taste; better omit than spoil them. The Apogiatura (*sic*) is a principal one, and if set before the plain Note, generally requires the accent. The design of it is, that, by leaning here, you may come at the principal more gracefully. The Slur must have great smoothness. Staccato marks must express a good deal of life and spirit, but if Dots are marked, instead of Strokes you must sing soft as well as distinct. The Trill should be done distinct and firm. In practising this begin very slow and increase gradually.

Cole has provided us with rather concise descriptions of these "graces." It is significant to note that he allows them to be omitted, since the elaborated improvisatory practice of the eighteenth century on which they were founded gradually declined in importance as the nineteenth century progressed. An instance of his awareness of this decline appears in the third edition of *The Seraph* (1827) when he speaks of the change that has taken place in the style of music "within a few years": (Preface, i, III)

> Instead of the constant cry for new and lively tunes, we now find that singers are becoming satisfied with simple melodies, without fugues, long slurs, divisions, and vain and often ridiculous repetitions.

The graces were still fairly common in 1810, however, the year in which Cole wrote his book on rudiments of music, and his examples help to clarify some matters associated with an interpretation of these ornaments.

a) The Appoggiatura. These ornaments are also known as Leading Notes. Cole mentions two types, the greater and the less, but only the former is clearly explained. The greater appoggiatura is most frequent in slow movements, and "at the end of strains" which are probably accompanied by a ritard. That leaves the lesser appoggiatura for faster movements. Before a dotted note, the ornament takes two-thirds of the total time-value, and before an undotted note, only one-half. Cole gives the following example of the written form, and its interpretation in performance:



b) The Slur. This is also known as the "Tye," and indicates that the notes over or under it (⌒) are to be sung to one syllable "in a smooth

and gliding manner." Cole is quite adamant about a different practice associated with the slur:

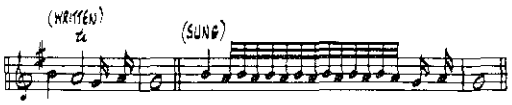
> I must here enter my protest against a contrary practice, which has lately been introduced, of singing Tyed Notes as though they were all marked with a *Staccato.* The effect produced by this new method is truly ridiculous; and such passages . . . would convey an idea that the performers were laughing instead of singing. Let the singer rather imitate a fine performance on the violin, who makes all such passages with one motion of the bow, distinguishing the several Notes only by the removal of his fingers.

c) The Staccato. The Staccato is defined as "very distinct and pointed," but from the description above, there must have been two different types. The first, marked with "strokes," probably resembled our present-day practice. The use of dots over notes, which resembled our staccato, carried the additional admonition that they were to be sung softly.

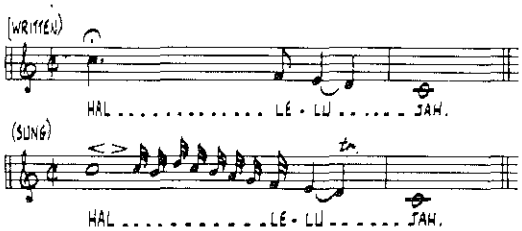
In the catechism which comes at the end of *The Rudiments,* the question, "How are Staccato Notes performed?" is answered: "They should be sung with quick articulation similar to the manner in which the word 'hark!' is pronounced."

d) The Trill, or Shake: This ornament is defined in the following terms:

> A simple shake is only the articulate sound of two notes put into equal motion. A perfect shake is composed of three diatonic notes; the first is called the preparative note, and the two last its resolution. This is a grace of peculiar nicety, and is either a natural gift, or acquired by great industry.



14. Lastly, the cantabile, which is an extempore Cadence made by the principal performer, while the rest stop, may be introduced where a hold is placed for that purpose: but this requires so much taste and judgment, that few, even of those who make Music their profession, can execute it with credit to themselves or the performance. The Shake, however, with the Swell and Diminish, mentioned above, may be used instead of it, with sometimes a few judicious Notes of taste, leading to the following passage.



The only other comment on this practice appears in the "Musical Catechism":

> Q. What is the rule of continuing the length of the Pause or Hold?
> A. There is no definite rule; in a Solo, it depends on the taste of the performer—in a Chorus, it is determined by the leader, or principal singer.

This variety of performance possibilities shows that definitive answers to many problems of early-nineteenth-century church music practice may not be possible, but the search for such answers inspires a healthy regard for a lively and stimulating tradition. In attempting to reconstruct this tradition, we gain a clearer and more vivid insight into the spirit and temper of that century, and thereby bring that age into more meaningful rapport with our own.

Contrapuntal Style in the Three-Voice Shape-Note Hymns[1]

by Charles Seeger

George Pullen Jackson[2] has traced for us the bonds between the tunes of many shape-note hymns and the secular folk tunes of America. The question at once presents itself: what do the extraordinary settings of these hymns owe to printed sources and what to predominantly oral tradition?[3]

I shall consider here only the three-voice choral settings of the type published during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century in such famous collections as *Southern Harmony, Sacred Harp, Kentucky Harmony, Harp of Columbia, Missouri Harmony, Social Harp,* and the like.

These collections present a distinctive style of choral composition. It is not, in any orthodox sense, a harmonic style. The tones sung by the various voices upon any given beat are not conceived of as being fundamentally a unit—a chord. Instead, each voice added to the tune is related to it independently of the relation between the tune and the other added voice. Thus these pieces may be said to show a definitely contrapuntal style.

The melody is given to the tenor or middle voice, and the relation between each of the two added voices is separately considered. John G.

[1]This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Folklore Society, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 4, 1939.

[2]Jackson, G.P., *Spiritual Folk-Songs of Early America,* New York, 1937. See also the same author's *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands,* Chapel Hill, N.C., 1933. In his article "Buckwheat Notes," published in the October 1933 issue of *The Musical Quarterly,* Dr. Jackson described the nature of the shape-note systems.

[3]I have asked Dr. Jackson if anyone is investigating this phase of the field in which he is the principal authority, and he tells me that he knows of no one besides myself who has expressed an interest in it. I am, unfortunately, in a position that allows me neither time nor opportunity in which to undertake the necessary research. I am broaching the question here simply because I feel that it is an important one. If, then, as a result of the brief exposition I shall make, some competent student should investigate it, my present objective will have been gained.

McCurry, editor of the *Social Harp*,[4] has explained the process thus:

> After you have written your tenor, then commence your bass by placing your notes a proper distance from the tenor, and be careful always not to place any note within one degree of the corresponding note in the other part, or within seven degrees, it being within one degree of the octave. Also avoid ninths, as they have the same effect as seconds and sevenths. Any two notes of the same name will make an agreeable sound, you may place notes in unison if you see proper. The intervals that produce harmony (when sounded together) are thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths and eighths, or unison. Those that produce a disagreeable sound are seconds, sevenths and ninths . . . After having written the bass and tenor, commence the treble by observing both parts already written; be careful not to place any note on the next sound to the notes in either part that are already located . . . .

The "vertical tonal units sometimes form conventional triads, Often, however, one or even two of the three constituents are absent. Or, they take the shape of chords built in fourths or fifths instead of thirds (with resulting intervals that contradict the rules). This is especially noticeable (see Example 1 below) at cadences and semi-cadences, where the final chords tend to dyadic rather than triadic character, omitting a third and often the fifth also.

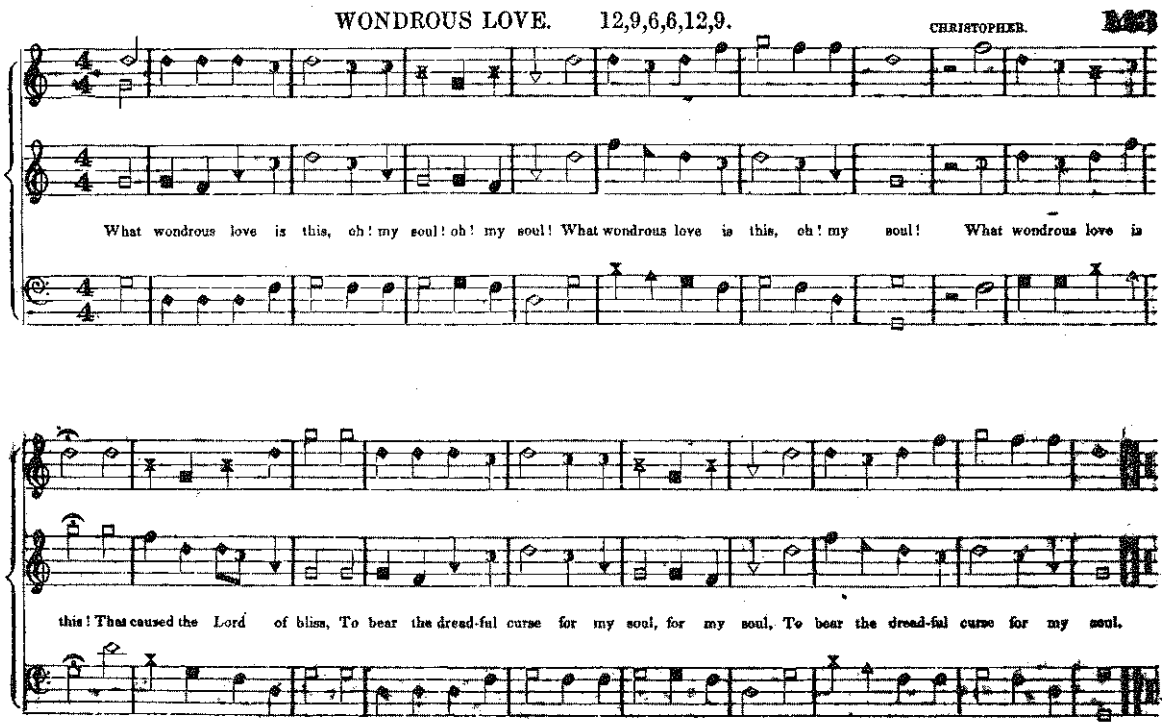
As might be expected, these tonal units do not function as do chords in ordinary harmonic writing. The process preparation-dissonance-resolution is conspicuously absent. Add to this the fact that women customarily sing any tenor or bass part an octave higher and that men sometimes sing the "tribble" an octave lower, and it will be seen that results which seem very unconventional to us may be achieved.

The employment of only three voices, the setting of the tune in the middle voice, and the strong "horizontal" line of the melodic writing need not, of necessity, produce anything unusual in the way of style. Entirely orthodox music can be written within these limitations. But the style of the three-voice shape-note settings of which I speak are outrageously heterodox, violating such basic and centuries-old prohibitions as those against:

1. parallel fifths, octaves, and unisons
2. parallel fourths between outer voices or between upper voices without a third in the bass
3. unprepared and unresolved dissonances
4. cadences on $\frac{8}{4}$
5. crossing of voices

Were these violations only occasional, one might easily pass them by. But they are so frequent that they clearly constitute essential elements in the style.

[4] *Social Harp*, Published by S.C. Collins for the proprietor John G. McCurry, Philadelphia, 1868.



Wondrous Love as it appears in the *Harp of Columbia*
(Knoxville, Tennessee, 1849)

I shall give three examples of this practice. The first is the widely known *Wondrous Love*. Jackson quotes the tune as given in *Southern Harmony, Good Old Songs, Primitive Baptist Hymnal,* and *Olive Leaf.* I give a facsimile of it, opposite this page, as it appears in *Harp of Columbia*,[5] in seven "shapes." A signature of two flats is to be understood, since the rectangular note "law" which concludes the bass part is placed upon G. The E-flat in the tenor in measures 6 and 18 is, however, sung as an E-natural. Jackson reports this *musica ficta* as current practice. The Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress has at least two records showing it—one from Virginia, the other from Alabama. I have seen this setting in several different systems of "shapes," but never any other setting of the tune. The editor's directions assure us that the metronome may be set at about ♩ = 96.

If my blue pencil, rusty these many years, serves me aright, there are here twenty-five parallel fifths, fifteen parallel octaves, and two parallel unisons. When sung with the characteristic nasal voices of the Southern singers and with the numerous but inimitable little slides, trembles, catches, and other ornaments that cannot very well be written down in our system of notation, the effect is one of highly-stylized but admirable performance.

Another good example is *Romish Lady*. Jackson quotes the tune from the *Hesperian Harp*. I give it in facsimile as it is printed in *Southern Harmony*,[6] in four-shape notation. It appears in other collections—always, in my experience, in the same setting, though in different shapes. The metronome should be set at about 𝅗𝅥 =60.

Plentifully supplied with parallel fifths and octaves, this setting is especially to be marked for its emphasis upon the interval of the fourth. The parallels in measures 1 and 2, 6 and 7, 16 and 17, and in the fourth-chord (C-sharp, F-sharp, B) in measures 2, 7, and 17, give it a peculiar character. The astonishing coincidence of two parallel octaves and two parallel unisons in measures 14 and 15—at a semi-cadence—is not by any means rare.

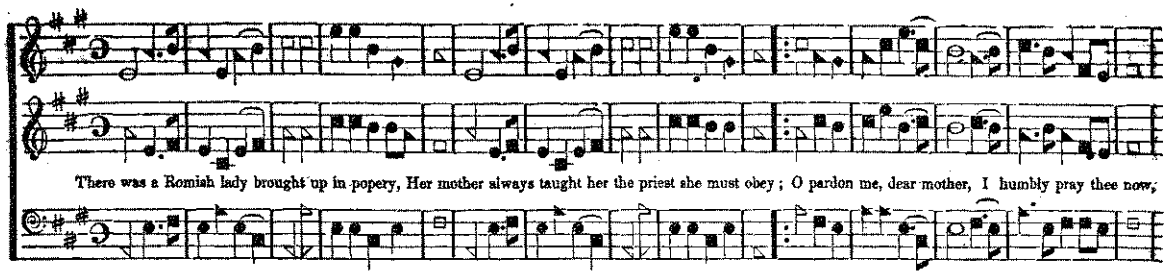
My third example is *Parting Friends* from McCurry's *Social Harp*. The metronome should be set at about ♩ = 96.

Also well supplied with parallel octaves, fifths, and fourths, this setting exhibits the not rare cadence on $\frac{8}{4}$, and consecutive $\frac{8}{4}$ chords in measures 3 and 17.

[5]*Harp of Columbia*, edited by M.L. Swan, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1849. There is a facsimile reprint of the edition of 1867 called the *New Harp of Columbia*, Nashville, Tennessee, 1921 (procurable from L.D. Schultz, 1126 Eleanor St., Knoxville, Tenn.).

[6]*Southern Harmony*, edited by William Walker, Philadelphia *ca.* 1847. There is a facsimile reprint of the edition of 1854 by the Federal Writers Project, Works Progress Administration, New York, 1939.

82 THE ROMISH LADY. 7, 6.

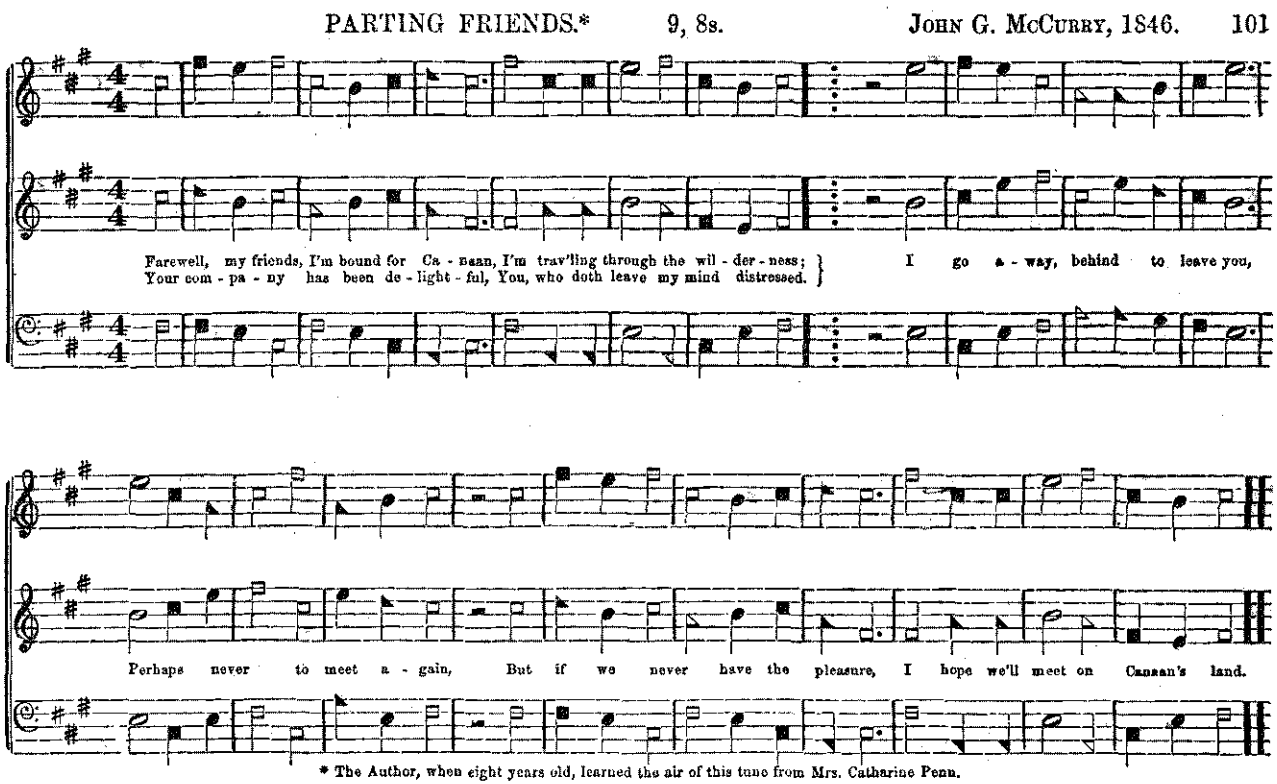


2 Assisted by her handmaid, a Bible she conceal'd,
And there she gain'd instruction, till God his love reveal'd ;
No more she prostrates herself to pictures deck'd with gold,
But soon she was betray d, and her Bible from her sto

3 I'll bow to my dear Jesus, I'll worship God unseen,
I'll live by faith for ever, the works of men are vain ;
I cannot worship angels, nor pictures made by men ;
Dear mother, use your pleasure, but pardon if you can.
4 With grief and great vexation, her mother straight did go
T' inform the Roman clergy the cause of all her wo :
The priests were soon assembled, and for the maid did call,
And forced her in the dungeon, to fright her soul withal.
5 The more they strove to fright her, the more she did endure,
Although her age was tender, her faith was strong and sure.
The chains of gold so costly they from this lady took,
And she with all her spirits, the pride of life forsook.
6 Before the pope they brought her, in hopes of her return,
And there she was condemned in horrid flames to burn.
Before the place of torment they brought her speedily,
With lifted hands to heaven. she then agreed to die.
7 There being many ladies assembled at the place,
She raised her eyes to heaven, and begg'd supplying grace

Weep not, ye tender ladies, shed not a tear for me—
While my poor body's burning, my soul the Lord shall see.
8 Yourselves you need to pity, and Zion's deep decay ;
Dear ladies, turn to Jesus, no longer make delay.
In comes her raving mother, her daughter to behold,
And in her hand she brought her pictures deck'd with gold.
9 O take from me these idols, remove them from my sight ;
Restore to me my Bible, wherein I take delight.
Alas, my aged mother, why on my ruin bent ?
'Twas you that did betray me, but I am innocent.
10 Tormentors, use your pleasure, and do as you think best—
I hope my blessed Jesus will take my soul to rest.
Soon as these words were spoken, up steps the man of death,
And kindled up the fire to stop her mortal breath.
11 Instead of golden bracelets, with chains they bound her fast ;
She cried, "My God give power—now must I die at last ?
With Jesus and his angels for ever I shall dwell,
God pardon priest and people, and so I bid farewell !"

The Romish Lady as it appears in *Southern Harmony*
(Philadelphia, *ca.* 1847)

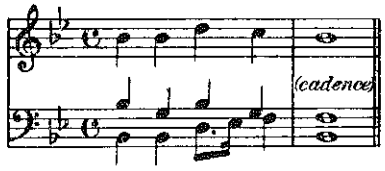


Parting Friends as it appears in McCurry's *Social Harp*
(Philadelphia, 1868)

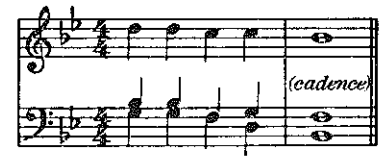
The following excerpts will serve to illustrate some of the other devices employed:

Example 1

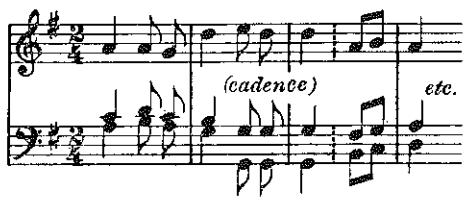
Southern Harmony (1854)
Faithful Soldier (p. 122)



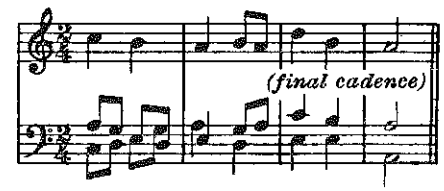
Sacred Harp (1844)
Bound for Canaan (p. 82)



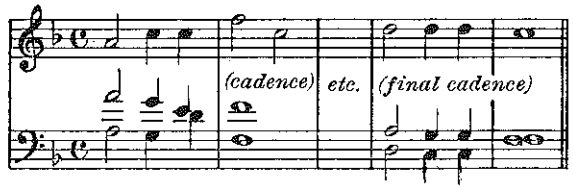
Missouri Harmony (1838)
Morality (p. 54)



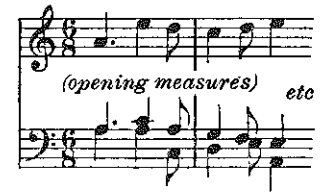
Missouri Harmony (1838)
Jefferson (p. 55)



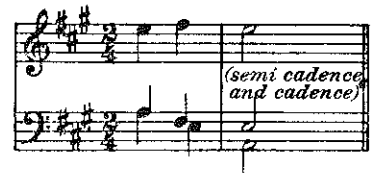
Missouri Harmony (1838)
New Salem (p. 65)



Missouri Harmony (1838)
The Leprous Jew (p. 60)

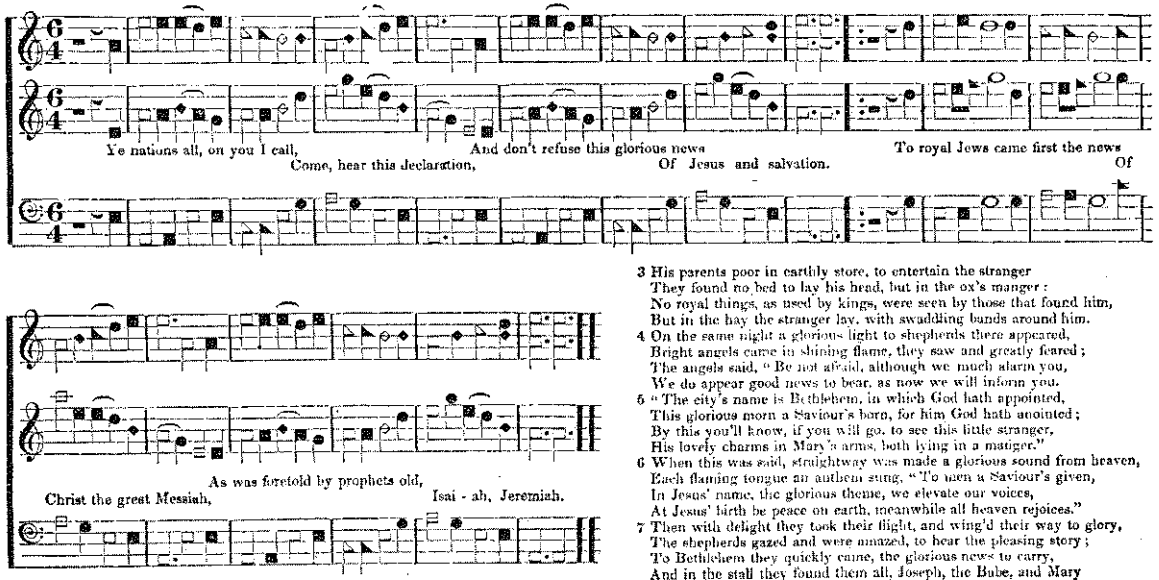


Social Harp (1868)
Heavenly King (p. 20)



There are those among us, I regret to say, who evidently regard practice of this type as the work of ignorance, error, or, perhaps, lack of musical feeling. It is true, there are typographical errors in the shape-note books. The musical skill and editorial capacity of their compilers varied greatly. Sometimes it was fairly considerable. However, there are, full of academic "mistakes," collections which do

78 THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM. 8, 7. *Wm. Walker.*



2 To Abraham the promise came, and to his seed for ever,
A light to shine in Isaac's line, by Scripture we discover;
Hail, promised morn! the Saviour's born, the glorious Mediator—
God's blessed Word made flesh and blood, assumed the human nature.

3 His parents poor in earthly store, to entertain the stranger
They found no bed to lay his head, but in the ox's manger:
No royal things, as used by kings, were seen by those that found him,
But in the hay the stranger lay, with swaddling bands around him.

4 On the same night a glorious light to shepherds there appeared,
Bright angels came in shining flame, they saw and greatly feared;
The angels said, "Be not afraid, although we much alarm you,
We do appear good news to bear, as now we will inform you.

5 "The city's name is Bethlehem, in which God hath appointed,
This glorious morn a Saviour's born, for him God hath anointed;
By this you'll know, if you will go, to see this little stranger,
His lovely charms in Mary's arms, both lying in a manger."

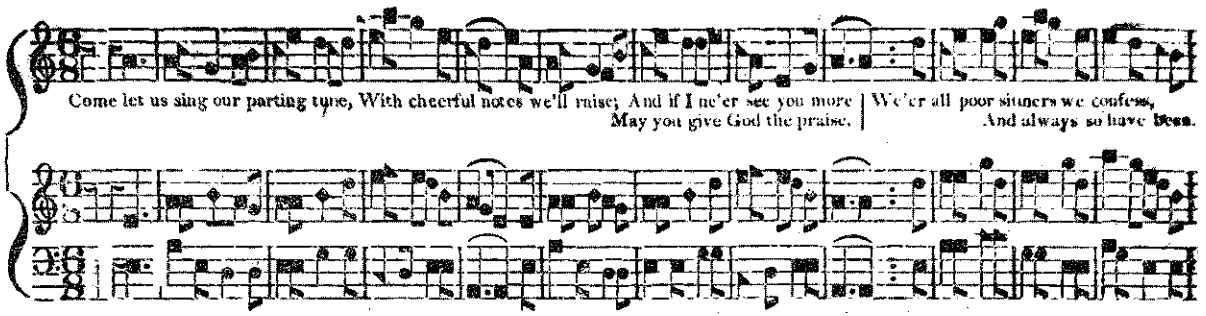
6 When this was said, straightway was made a glorious sound from heaven,
Each flaming tongue an anthem sung, "To men a Saviour's given,
In Jesus' name, the glorious theme, we elevate our voices,
At Jesus' birth be peace on earth, meanwhile all heaven rejoices."

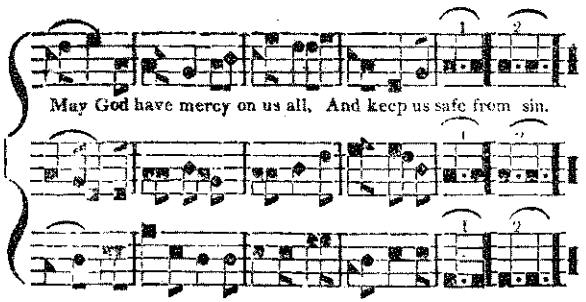
7 Then with delight they took their flight, and wing'd their way to glory,
The shepherds gazed and were amazed, to hear the pleasing story;
To Bethlehem they quickly came, the glorious news to carry,
And in the stall they found them all, Joseph, the Babe, and Mary

8 The shepherds then return'd again to their own habitation,
With joy of heart they did depart, now they have found salvation
Glory, they cry, to God on high, who sent his Son to save us
This glorious morn the Saviour's born, his name it is Christ Jesus

The Babe of Bethlehem as it appears in ***Southern Harmony***
(Philadelphia, *ca.* 1847)

84 MILTON, C. M.—FIRST KEY OF F. JACKSON.





2 Now let us sing our parting verse,
Farewell to all my friends;
This is a time of parting too
For now our school must end.
3 Live till the Lord in glory come,
And wait his heaven to share,
He now is fitting up your home:
Go on we'll meet you there.

Milton as it appears in *Southern Harmony*
(Pumpkintown, Tennessee, 1838)

not achieve the style of the above quotations. Compare for instance, the two settings reproduced. The first, *The Babe of Bethlehem* from *Southern Harmony*, maintains the high level of craftsmanship for which the collection is justly famous. The second, *Milton*, is from the little-known *Knoxville Harmony*,[7] which, as most of its pages show, was not of the grand style.

It may be we are unable to say in many cases whether it was by design or accident that a particular departure from academic procedure has been made. The fact, however, that these settings (excepting, of course, those of the type of *Milton*) and others like them appear practically unchanged in edition after edition and are still sung letter-perfect in many localities today, must lead us to accept the printed page as faithfully representing the intentions of the composers and the appreciation of the millions of singers who have sung these songs for a century or more.

Curiously enough, in some books the prefaces (containing "full expositions of the rudiments of music") give the rules forbidding parallel fifths and octaves. The same books contain *Wondrous Love* and other settings like it. With our own experience in music-teaching practice in mind, we should, I presume, find it not difficult to account for this seeming paradox.

It is further to be noted that in modern re-editions—even of the most admired originals—the three-voice settings have in most part given way to four-voice treatments. Often as not, this is done by the simple device of adding an alto. According to Jackson, one editor, S.M. Denson, announces[8] that he has composed 327 alto parts, presumably to improve the old songs and give them additional life.

Other more sophisticated musicians have, strangely enough (for they protest admiration for traditional lore), abandoned entirely the old settings and substituted new voices in the manner of Brahms or Vaughan Williams.

Personally, I would as soon change the tunes as change the settings. For here is true style! There is a rigorous, spare, disciplined beauty in the choral writing that is all the more to be prized for having been conceived in the "backwoods" for which many professional musicians have such scorn, and in the face of the determined opposition of sophisticated zealots in no small number, from Lowell Mason down to those of this very day.

Would it not seem to be a matter of interest, not only to scholars concerned with the study of American culture but also to musicians

[7]*Knoxville Harmony*, Pumpkintown, Tennessee, 1838.

[8]*Original Sacred Harp* (Denson Revision), Haleyville, Alabama, 1936. This is NOT the original *Sacred Harp* but a revision of it.

concerned with the development of the art of music in the New World, to inquire into the origin of this curious musical style, how it developed, and what was and is its function in the total field of music in America?

Obviously, our forefathers brought with them to this continent a fair cross-section of the cultures of their motherlands, including the idioms of art music, popular music, and folk music. There is ample historical evidence that in early days practice of the fine art of music was necessarily curtailed in the colonies, and that the popular art did not flourish extensively. But immigration was continuous, and professional musicians and amateurs of art music and popular music arrived in steadily increasing numbers. It is known that some continuity in the teaching and performance of both art music and popular music existed from early in the eighteenth century. It may not be too much to say that until very recently—say, up to the first World War—this had the character of being imposed from without in emulation of envied European fashions rather than of being developed from within upon the existing premises of New World culture. However, four-voice hymn-singing, with the melody in the highest voice and orthodox harmonic (chordal) writing, was well known before 1800 and has increasingly dominated the field of written music.

Historical references to folk music, on the other hand, are slight. Transfer from oral to written tradition (as in the early "songsters") has not been enough investigated to have provided us with much year-to-year evidence of the state of folk music in the New World. However, from evidence of survival in our own day of over a hundred ancient British ballads and of a wealth of related folk music materials, and the development of some new, apparently local, forms, it would appear that folk music has functioned healthily throughout our three centuries of Anglo-American culture. Other—minority—European language groups (German, in the middle Atlantic States; French in the north-east, down the Mississippi, and along the Gulf; Spanish along the southwestern border and in Florida) have defined some regional variations.

Cultivation of these folk arts, almost entirely through oral rather than written tradition, would seem to be a development from within the fabric of New World culture. While we must, of course, look to European hymnody for ancestors of our shape-note style (some "round-note" hymnals, as far back as 1800, be it said, also exhibit it), does it not seem possible that we may discover more than a little of its nature and hence its ancestry from the living descendants of our largely unknown folk history?

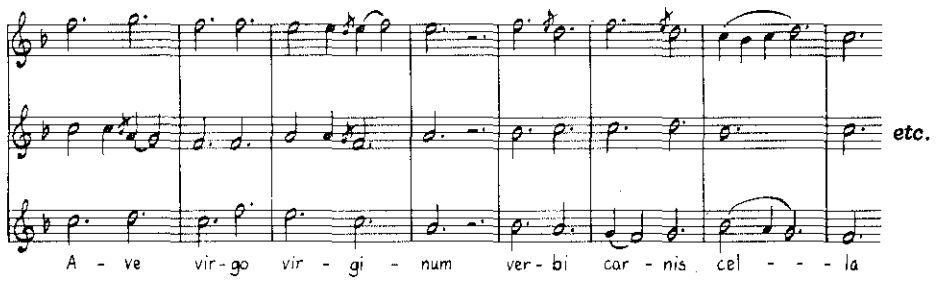
In our culture as a whole, an initial simplification, enforced by the

conditions of pioneer and colonial life, gave way to a consequent elaboration. Current notions of "evolution" have dubbed this "progress" and its reverse—complex to simple—"regress." Owing to the fact that the more archaic music appeared to have attained a special importance in some cultural "islands" such as the northern woods and the southern mountains, some observers have been tempted to associate folk music, oral tradition, and such phenomena as shape-note singing, with the moribund elements of culture and so with regress.

Our present knowledge lends considerable support to this view. For example, a very large number of shape-note tunes, of the related but unprinted revival hymns and other materials of strictly oral tradition, and, indeed, of American folk music in general, is pentatonic. If Yasser[9] is correct in his theory that pentatonic tonal systems represent a more primitive development in the evolution of musical art than do heptatonic, the problem would to a large extent be solved almost mechanically.

Certainly, the resemblance of the shape-note settings to some thirteenth-century music—especially the *Conductus*—is striking. Compare, for example, the following "Ballade Style Conductus" (*ca.* 1200) given to me by Dr. Leonard Ellinwood:[10]

Example 2



The old singing-school teachers had not, of course, the historical knowledge which could rationalize a revolt against orthodox four-voice harmonic writing in such a form as that of the three-voice shape-note style. The explanation might very well be that, along with the borrowing of secular folk tunes (which practice Jackson has shown to have been common), borrowing of a prevailing convention in the polyphonic performance of these tunes may have taken place. We would expect to find, however, traces of such practice in present-day

[9]Yasser, Joseph, "A Theory of Evolving Tonality," New York, 1932.
[10]Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS. Pluteus 29.1, folio 240.

secular folk music and in the branch of religious singing that functions along lines of oral rather than written tradition.

Interestingly enough, this is just what happens. Both white and negro spiritual-singing in two and three voices is common; in four voices, rare. Current "hill-billy" singing also shows two-voice and three-voice improvisation. The interval of a fourth is very prominent, occurring often upon long-held tones, on accented beats, where urban conventions, both of "art" singing and popular singing, would call for a sixth or a third. Parallel fourths are common, parallel fifths and octaves also. Especially to be noted are the sudden and, to sophisticated ears, unaccountable unisons and octaves in places where a full harmony would be expected. The tendency to close upon chordal structures of fifth and octave only is also often encountered.[11]

The fact that similar material is to be found on commercial recordings should attest, to some degree, to its being a wide-spread convention and not merely a rare discovery of seekers after the quaint or antique.

To have pursued the matter thus far, even without adequate documentation, broadens the problem beyond the scope of the present effort. For if, as I feel it is, the contrapuntal style of the three-voice shape-note hymns is part and parcel of the general Anglo-American folk music idiom of the New World, the question still remains: how did it all get that way? While something may be said for the theory of cultural regress, it is too mechanical and contains too many untenable implications to rest with. On the one hand, we cannot accept invariable harnessing of the notion of "progress" with movement simple to complex, nor of "regress" with its opposite. On the other, we cannot accommodate a view that our widespread and dearly-loved popular music—from blues, swing, and boogie-woogie to hill-billy (all largely of folk extraction)—is regressive, with the view, which all accept *as if* true, that the culture of the New World (and particularly of the United States) is essentially progressive in character. Is it not possible that cultures sometimes get somewhat bogged down in complexity and have to simplify in order to maintain their feeling that they are going ahead? May this not hold true of certain strands in a culture, whether or not the culture as a whole acts in the same way?

[11]See, for instance, the following discs in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress: No. 188B2 *God Moves on the Water* and No. 502B *Dig my Grave*, both about to appear in transcription in John and Alan Lomax's forthcoming *Our Singing Country;* also, Resettlement Administration recordings deposited in the Archive, No. 239B2 (10 in.) *I wouldn't mind dyin' if dyin' was all*, 3241A1 *Little Marg'et*, 3193B2, *The Angels Drooped they Wings*, and 3192A2 *Dry Bones*. In *Little Marg'et* the singer, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, tunes his banjo in three fourths and one second, giving rise to some unusually good opportunities for parallel fourths in the accompaniment. I have been told upon good authority that this is a usual tuning for the five-string banjo in the low country of South Carolina.

It would seem that history rarely presents to us such a simple set of data as the one-way theory of cultural regress might attempt to account for *in toto*. It is true that by 1800 (or, for that matter, still in 1900) musical learning and practice in America presented no development comparable with that of Europe at the time. Immigrant traditions had become stilted and garbled, *re*-productive rather than productive.

Be it said to the credit of the people, dissatisfaction with the "state of singing in our churches" was chronic from before the Revolution. One senses a conflict between the state of singing and the state of learning. People were continually popping up with "new methods" by which either or both could be improved. "New methods" were in the air. A new method of government and social organization was in process of being tried out. A new religious revival was evolving. Curiously enough, our first musical rebel, Billings, announced about this time a declaration of independence from traditional limitations in music.[12] Indeed, the patent-, character-, or shape-notes themselves were invented about 1800 in a similar spirit in the field of music teaching—an effort to free the ordinary man from bondage to the high priests of the musical profession and their difficult notation. Did this innovation create the style of the three-voice hymns, or did it serve to organize, for wider distribution, a *fait accompli* frowned upon by the "cultured" but supported strongly enough by the multitude to enable it to persist in spite of this?

Now, it is a curious but significant fact that European art music since before 1900 has employed increasingly a number of devices, including parallel intervals, which characterize the hymns I have been considering. The restrained melodic line and the spare tonal fabric have been gaining more and more adherents. Harmonic (chordal)writing is not so strongly dominant as it was fifty years ago. If one likes to play with the theory of cultural regress, how about its opposite "cultural advance-guard"?

The old singing-school teachers—Ananias Davisson, B.F. White, William Walker, W.H. and M.L. Swan, John G. McCurry, William Hauser, and the rest—had no small hand in the making of America. Their books have sold in the tens of millions of copies. Often, a single book served (and sometimes still serves) as the sole written music source of a dozen or more intensely musical people over many years. During their heyday, European art-music was undergoing the heavy upholstery work of Wagner and Brahms. Though we have no reason to believe the American shape-note composers knew of the work of the

[12]Billings, William, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, Boston, 1770, pp. 19-20 ("To all musical Practitioners").

Germans, they nevertheless mark the first turn away from the then prevailing trend of late romantic music.

It was not until the 1890's that Erik Satie (probably ignorant of the shape-note hymns) made, within the framework of "art"-music, the first determined turn towards the spare and austere fabric, though foretokens of it are to be found in both Berlioz and Mussorgsky. The music puritanism of Satie and the "neo-classicists" is, of course, a very different kind of thing from the music puritanism of the American hymn-writers. But the technical function is very like.

There is, then, something about these three-voice shape-note settings that is not only centuries older than their day, but a good half or three-quarters of a century in advance of it. May we not hope that some time in the near future adequate study will be made, not only of the technical processes they exhibit but also of the socio-historical processes of which they were a part?

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The article by Hans Nathan, Professor of Music at Michigan State University, is a revised version of the introduction to the author's facsimile edition of *The Continental Harmony* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), as first published by permission in Vol. V, No. 4 of the *American Choral Review* (July, 1963).

J. Murray Barbour's article appeared originally in Vol. V, No. 2 of the *American Choral Review* (January, 1963). The author, who had been Professor of Music at Michigan State University and President of the American Musicological Society, died in 1970.

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In honor of Charles Seeger's ninetieth birthday, a special conference has been planned in conjunction with the Congress of the International Musicological Society at Berkeley, California, September, 1977.

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