

# The SACRED HARP PUBLISHING COMPANY Newsletter

VOL. 2, NO. 1 Stories about singers and singings, our music and traditions, and Sacred Harp's present-day growth. MAR. 2013

## A Hollow Square in My Homeland: Bringing Camp Fasola to Poland

by Gosia Perycz, Warsaw, Poland | Photography by Ewan Paterson



Singers enjoyed sitting and socializing on the green next to the Winnersh Community Centre Hall, where the UK Convention was held.

### The United Kingdom Sacred Harp Convention

FRIDAY, September 14. I made it to England! London Luton Airport. Wizz Air, a cheap carrier, of course. I learned a new American slang word when a friend from the United States laughed at the airline's name when he first heard it. While I land alone I am met at the airport by possibly the furthest traveler to the UK Sacred Harp Convention, who has just arrived after his twenty-hour journey from Oregon.

Winnersh is so pretty. The singing venue is within walking distance of our inn, but we can also hop on the train and get off on the next stop. I look around—compact houses, small train station, trees, brisk air, sunny day. All this feels so relaxing to me, like this place was scaled for comfortable living, not for a race like the overgrown and crowded cities I had just left.

I enter the convention venue. Am I dreaming? Where am I? So many of these people I saw in the United States. Others I meet for the first time. Alabama! Really? Texas? These are the places where I would usually go to listen and learn! And now I can hear these voices on my home continent, and will soon in my home country!

I sing alto and really enjoy the accent I hear. I try to sit closer to the basses as I am delighted with the sound coming from their direction. I just spotted Dan Brittain! And Mike Hinton, who later got up to lead his uncle Howard Denson's "Homeward Bound" (p. 373)—what else could one do with such genes?

I can sense the air of friendship and kindness present at all Sacred Harp singing events. I feel so good seeing people I know and watching them find their way around the room, showing interest in others, strolling outside on the grass... Jesse sets

### Contents

#### Singing Reports

A Hollow Square in My Homeland: Bringing Camp Fasola to Poland Gosia Perycz	1
Celebrating Sacred Harp in Europe, September, 2012 Fynn Titford-Mock	5
Sacred Harp Down-Under: The First Australian All-Day Singing Steven Levine	9
My Soul Awoke: The Rocky Mountain Convention Robert McKay	12

#### Feature Story

Harmonious Union: How Sacred Harp Brings People Together Robert T. Kelley	13
--	----

#### Read the Old Paths

In Search of Silas Mercer Brown Rebecca Over	19
Picturing Song Leaders in Nineteenth-Century Americab Chris Brown	21

#### News

Information on the Lottery for Shares in the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Jesse P. Karlsberg	4
Behind A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing Lisa Grayson	23

## Introducing Vol. 2, No. 1 of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter

Jesse P. Karlsberg

I'm pleased to announce the publication of the third issue of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*.

This issue documents an important chapter in the continuing spread of Sacred Harp singing beyond North America, with singing reports by Gosia Perycz and Fynn Titford-Mock on three Sacred Harp singing events held in Europe last September (the seventeenth United Kingdom Sacred Harp Convention, Camp Fasola Europe, and the first Poland Sacred Harp Convention) and by Steven Levine on the first Australian All-Day Singing, held last October. An additional singing report by Robert McKay focuses on last year's Rocky Mountain Convention, but conveys something universal about the experience of attending a Sacred Harp convention for the first time.

Features in this issue of the *Newsletter* include Robert T. Kelley's examination of how aspects of Sacred Harp music promote the goals of harmony and unity through singing together and Lisa Grayson's account of the history of *A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing*, written to mark the release of the Guide as a free PDF download. Two additional features, though written by singers from the United Kingdom, relate new findings about Sacred Harp's history here in the United States. Rebecca Over, who celebrated her retirement with a trip to sing in Alabama and Georgia during the summer of 2012, describes how she discovered the identity of Silas Mercer Brown, composer of four songs in *The Sacred Harp*. Chris Brown relates his exciting discovery of an engraving in a words-only hymnal from 1824 which appears to depict a young boy leading a song in a manner consistent with present-day Sacred Harp practice.

Starting with this issue Nathan Rees has joined me on the *Newsletter's* editorial team. Buell Cobb also assisted with this issue as guest editor of Rebecca Over's contribution. As always, we invite you to write us and leave comments with your feedback. We welcome your ideas for future articles, as well as your questions and corrections. ■

### Editorial Information

**Date published:** March 2013

**Editor:** Jesse P. Karlsberg

**Associate Editor:** Nathan Rees

**Editorial email:** jesse@originalsacredharp.com

**Design:** Elaena Gardner

To comment on or suggest future subjects for the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*, please contact the Editor.

### Visit us online

This newsletter is first published on the Sacred Harp Publishing Company website. The online edition includes videos, audio recordings, additional images and allows readers to post comments on articles.

[originalsacredharp.com/newsletter](http://originalsacredharp.com/newsletter)



Michael Walker, of London, was the capable chair of the 2012 UK Convention.

his recorder up in the corner; Lauren displays her hand made jewelry. I am so warmly touched to see that she painted the Polish Sacred Harp Convention logo on her earrings and pendants—A moment later and one of her pendants is around my neck!

During the break for dinner, I discover Edwin's amazing baked salmon. I usually don't come back for seconds, but this time I had to make an exception! There is so much food that there was still a huge variety when I arrived at the tables even though I was one of the last people in line. Wow! I realize that I am getting stressed about what is going to happen next week in Warsaw, wondering whether we could ever assemble so much food ourselves!

I can't stay stressed for too long though, with so many friends and smiles all around. Michael Walker shares his "know-how" with me during dinner on the ground. And as we leave, David Ivey gives me some final instructions for the upcoming week: "Get some sleep, kid!" he says with a kind grin. This is my favorite comment!

A memorable part of the singing was the celebration lesson. A counterpart to the conventional memorial lesson held on Sunday, on Saturday the singers express gratitude for all the blessings of the previous year. The committee read a list of joyful occasions like birthdays, promotions, retirement, travel, and many other exciting events that singers wanted to celebrate.

I can't find the words to express how splendid this convention was. Thank you to all the officers, especially Michael Walker and his two right-hands: Steve Fletcher and Martin Williams.



## Camp Fasola

Still in high spirits after the UK Convention I landed in Gdansk, Poland. I was thrilled to finally be a host rather than a guest! I felt so glad that after all of the generosity I experienced abroad I could return the favor in some small way.

The guests were terrific. They showed up in a great number from far and near. Camp Fasola was held at Wichrowe Wzgórza, a beautiful retreat center overlooking a lake in the town of Chmielno. The venue owners were helpful and accommodating, and they even seemed to like the singing! I was delighted to welcome our fantastic teachers. Our gratitude to David Ivey for making the Camp happen could never be too great. I deeply hope he will be back soon with his wonder-team! The camp was perfectly tailored to our needs; teachers brought both academic and practical approaches, and taught with the sincere desire to help all of us, regardless of what level we were at. Most of all, there was lots, lots, and lots of music!

One of the lessons I enjoyed the most was given by Tim Eriksen. He told us that for him, the heart of the music was rhythm. We sang a scale repeating the first three notes twice: “fa sol la, fa sol la, fa sol la fa sol la mi fa”—and the accent appeared naturally. Now, he said, try to imagine, while you sing, that everyone else’s voices are also coming out through your own mouth. What a feeling! It gave me an intense experience of truly

singing together. The pulse was there, the harmony was there... I think everybody should try it.

Another excellent lesson I attended was David Ivey’s class on the “Ungreatest Hits.” He identified the songs that were sung the least during the past years and chose some of his favorite compositions for us to try—I couldn’t believe that “Infinite Delight” (p. 562) or “Kingwood” (p. 266) were among the least picked!

Other vivid memories include one Polish singer being deeply impressed by Dan Brittain: “He opened the book maybe three times during the whole singing!” Dan was one of the stars of the camp. He wrote a song, “Chmielno,” especially for this occasion. He shared with us was that his song “Novakoski” (p. 481) was initially meant to be sung as “Greenwich” (p. 183) is, with the first part slow and the second part fast. We all enjoyed singing it that way.

I sincerely appreciated the selection of topics for the camp, particularly the hints about how to organize and conduct a singing, the tips on arranging by Jesse, and the keying class by David. I regret that I wasn’t able to make it to all the classes I wanted to; I hope yet to hear Chris Brown discuss the English origins of Sacred Harp lyrics.

I have many fond recollections of our few days at camp: Sadhbh’s crazy invitation to swim at 6 am, or the Kashubian folk show when campers happily joined in, even to the extent of

taking snuff, resulting in sneezing for the next fifteen minutes. A particularly memorable moment was when the Kashubian speaker mentioned that the Kashubs were oppressed for some time and couldn’t use their language, but finally achieved the freedom to do so—at that point the listeners spontaneously applauded. For me this spoke volumes about the people who were there. Even though their ages ranged from eighteen to eighty and they came from countries as varied as the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland—I reflected on this variety and wondered where else one could gather people so different yet so bonded as Sacred Harp singers.

The last lesson of the camp was Karen Ivey’s. And yes, we cooked! We also learned how to wrap up food so it doesn’t get cold and how to pack it so it would take up the least possible space. She told us about making 20 dishes for a singing! I was a little worried since we were hosting this food expert in Warsaw in two days, and half of the Polish singers were still at the camp! “You know Gosia,” she told me, “when there are not too many cooks, it is okay to cater.” A sigh of relief welled up inside me, evoked by these kind words of support from a true dinner on the grounds authority. Luckily, as it turned out, we didn’t really have to cater at all.

cont ▶ page 4



Terry Barber of California leads a large class of singers at the UK Convention.

Those whose names are drawn will have the opportunity to purchase up to two shares in the Company at \$25.00/share. The Company will retain the list of additional names in the order they were drawn as a waiting list to be used if any future shares become available. As the Company is a non-profit organization, the value of these shares will remain fixed at \$25.00 and the shares will not pay dividends. This lottery system is a new process for enabling interested singers to purchase a share of stock. The Board of Directors believes this will be an equitable way to sell currently available shares and any future shares which become available. ■



## David Ivey and Poland Convention Organizers

## The First Poland Sacred Harp Convention

Our convention exceeded my wildest dreams. It is hard to put it into words.

Some people told me later that these two days were of true significance to them—and I felt exactly the same. It was wonderful to be able to host the people who were so important to us at the various stages of development of our singing group in Poland. Our first teachers, Tim Eriksen and Jesse Pearlman Karlsberg were there, along with others who came later, including Allison Schofield, Michael Walker, and Steve Helwig. We had a room full of people we adore and look up to, who also happen to be our very dear friends—it was wonderful! We did not have an established and well-known singing to offer to our guests—this was the first event of its kind in Warsaw, organized by a handful of people in a foreign country. We never expected such an outcome, such a sound, so many guests. We are infinitely grateful to all of you who traveled to be with us or supported us in any way! We were so well taken care of. We even received a gift of thirty loaner books from Joe Beasley Memorial Foundation, and the Sacred Harp Publishing Company subsidized the cost of shipping the books to Europe.

We also remembered those who wanted to be with us but couldn't—one of them being Magda Zapędowska-Eriksen, who was the first person that I know of to sing Sacred Harp in Poland. I am sure in the long singing life ahead of us, we will meet again sooner or later!

Finally, memories associated with two specific songs will stay with me for a very long time. David Ivey standing up, asking “Has anyone lead 86 yet?”—and the view of people springing up from their chairs after singing the notes to “Hallelujah” (p. 146), our closing song, to hug.

Thank you dear friends! Please come back soon! ■



## Singing Reports

## Celebrating Sacred Harp in Europe, September, 2012

by Fynn Tifford-Mock | Norwich, United Kingdom



Campers embraced the wide range of ages and backgrounds that are a key part of what defines the Sacred Harp community. Photograph by Ewan Paterson.

### The Seventeenth Annual United Kingdom Sacred Harp Convention, September 15–16

FOUR of us squeeze into a tiny car and set off from Norwich, cradling our precious food dishes in our laps. Stuck in traffic, the windows are wound down and we fill the September air with our croaky voices; no one in the queuing cars around us is left in any doubt that we're "Bound for Canaan."

So began more than a week of Sacred Harp singing in September.

We arrived at the hotel near the village of Winnersh, Berkshire on Friday afternoon, where over drinks and food we greeted old friends and visiting singers from overseas.

More than 140 singers registered for the 2012 UK Convention: a record turnout. Here Robert Wedgbury leads the class. Photograph by Ewan Paterson.

The next morning we made our various ways to the convention venue, Winnersh Community Centre Hall, a rather nondescript but large village hall, and one that suited its purpose. After teas, coffees, biscuits and plenty of hugs, it was high time we got down to some singing. And what singing! A record

turnout for any UK Convention, with over 140 singers registered, including singers from the United States, Ireland, Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Though the acoustics were nothing special, the number of singers and the quality of the singing more than made up for it, and few could deny that the sound was impressive. A special tradition of the UK Convention was its Celebrations Lesson. This counterpart the memorial lesson, held on Saturday, created a pleasant positive space to reflect on those things in life we should feel grateful for, and wish to congratulate one another on. At lunchtime we were well supplied (as always, perhaps too well supplied!) with a spread of delicious food, and the weather was fine enough to eat outside in the sunshine.

After the singing on Saturday, those of us who felt up for more stayed on to sing from alternative sources, using a booklet put together by Michael Walker. This booklet included several new compositions and a selection from the then forthcoming *Shenandoah Harmony*.

A number of singers stayed on after the Saturday session of the convention to sing from alternative sources. Sarah West

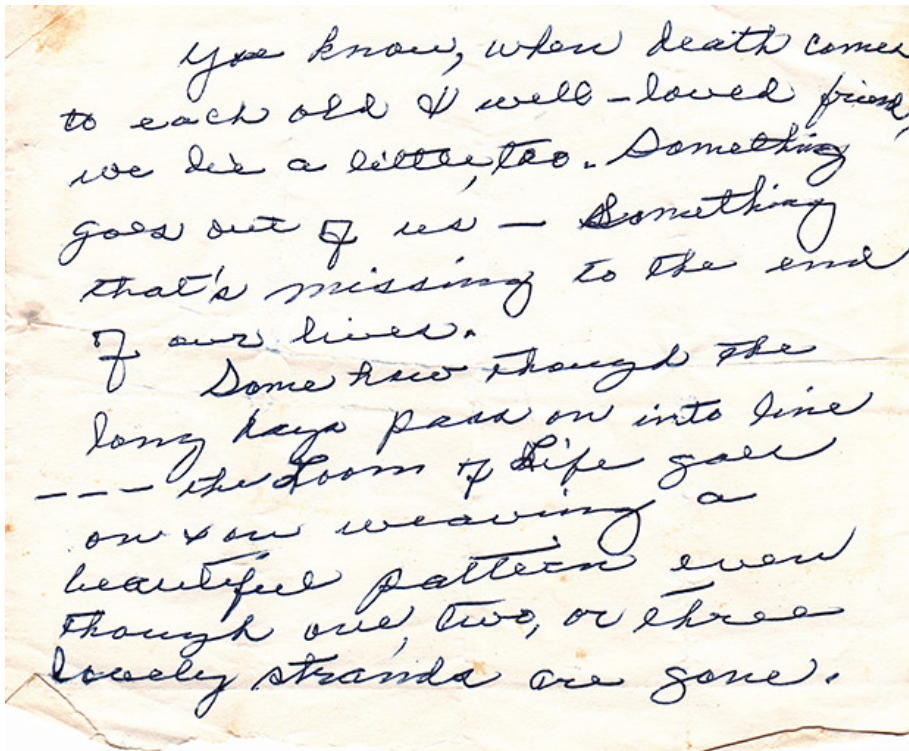
leads a selection from a packet prepared for the session by Michael Walker. Photograph by Ewan Paterson.

In the evening, after supper, many of us returned to the Convention venue where we were treated to an informal recital by two fellow Sacred Harp singers. Áine Uí Cheallaigh sang haunting Irish ballads, interspersed with jaunty hornpipes, chorus songs and ditties from English folksinger and concertina player Dave Townsend (the line-up was to have included Cath and Phil Tyler, but sadly they could not make it due to ill health).

Singing continued late into the night, which may have contributed to Sunday's singing sounding a little subdued at first, but we soon warmed up to sound just as good as we had on Saturday.

Sunday's memorial lesson was one that will stick in my mind for some time. Mike Hinton read some beautiful and evocative lines written by his aunt, Sacred Harp composer Ruth Denson Edwards:

*You know, when death comes to each old  
and well loved friend, we die a little too.  
Something goes out of us—something  
that's missing to the end of our lives.*



**Left:** Handwritten note by Ruth Denson Edwards found tucked into her bible, containing the text of a memorial lesson she gave. Image courtesy of Mike Hinton.

**Top right:** The Poland Convention was held in a hall in the Geography department of Warsaw University. Photograph by Jesse P. Karlsberg.

**Bottom right:** Camper and freelance journalist Kate Mossman records a song led by P. Dan Brittain at an evening singing for a short broadcast on the BBC World Service. Photograph by Ewan Paterson.



*Somehow though the long days pass on into line—the Loom of Life goes on and on weaving a beautiful pattern even though one, two, or three lovely strands are gone.*

All in all, it was a fantastic weekend, and thanks are due to the organizers, Steve Fletcher, Michael Walker, Martin Williams, and John Baldini in the kitchen, aided by an army of volunteers.

We are already looking forward to the eighteenth UK Sacred Harp Convention, which will be held in Durham (the most northerly location yet), at Framwellgate School, September 14–15, 2013. If the recent increase in singings across the country is anything to go by, next year should be bigger and louder still!

### **Camp Fasola Europe, September 17–21**

In the spring, when I first considered attending Europe's first ever Camp Fasola, it seemed like a distant fantasy,

and I had dismissed it as being too expensive. But a large part of its success was due to a few very generous souls who donated funds, both by official and informal means, to enable many singers (including myself) to help cover the cost of attending. We are privileged to be a part of such a kind-hearted, generous community.

I did not know what to expect of Camp, but I was very excited by the prospect of spending several days singing and learning. Most of the Camp participants had attended the UK Convention, and traveled together to Poland. Arriving at the airport on Monday morning, we were greeted by a bright pink Wizz Air plane to Gdansk. Polish singer Kuba Choinski met us with a coach to take us to the Camp venue. The journey took us through the picturesque Kashubian hills, villages, forests, and lakes to the town of Chmielno. The venue, Wichrowe Wzgórze (translated as "Wuthering

Heights"), was far beyond what we were expecting for accommodation—it felt almost like a luxury hotel, with its idyllic location overlooking Lake Kłodno. There was time for a few of us to run down for a quick (and chilly) dip in the lake before Camp got underway.

The food at Camp was very good, mainly consisting of traditional regional Polish dishes (though at first there were a few teething problems with the European comprehension of the term "vegetarian").

Lessons at Camp center on approaching singing from The Sacred Harp from the beginning—literally, "the Rudiments." With basic and advanced classes, we looked at the fundamentals of the music, through the departments of time, tune and accent—including how to beat time, hints and exercises for learning the shape-note syllables, choosing the right key for a song, how to convey your intentions when leading, and striving for a good emphatic driving





**Top:** More than 140 singers registered for the 2012 UK Convention: a record turnout. Here Robert Wedgbury leads the class.

**Bottom:** A number of singers stayed on after the Saturday session of the convention to sing from alternative sources. Sarah West leads a selection from a packet prepared for the session by Michael Walker. Photographs by Ewan Paterson.

accent—all demonstrated practically through singing.

It's difficult to highlight any specific favorite moments at Camp, as it was all excellent. One of the lessons I enjoyed a lot was "The Best of The Ungreatest Hits." We sang songs from the bottom 20—that is, the pieces that have been least used, according to the minutes; I have never heard "The Bride's Farewell" (p. 359) sounding so good! A few of us got together for a "Team Tunesmith" exercise: after choosing a text to set,

each participant wrote a tenor part, then passed it on to the next person, who wrote the bass, and so on again to the treble and alto parts, so that in the end we had four communally-composed songs. The "Keying Music" lesson was also very interesting, as it is something I am working on at the moment in the singings in Norwich. It was also great fun (though tiring!) to sing as many anthems and odes in one lesson as we could.

Some of our Thursday evening singing

was recorded by Camp participant and freelance journalist Kate Mossman for a short broadcast on the BBC World Service. Kate also interviewed some of us for the program and published two articles about Sacred Harp featuring Camp Fasola Europe, one in *The Times* and another more recently in *Songlines* world music magazine.

For anyone who might think they couldn't possibly cope with a whole week of singing—well, there were plenty of things to do that didn't (necessarily)



**Left:** Singers take a quick (and chilly) dip in the lake at Wichrowe Wzgórze before orientation. Photograph by Lauren Bock.



**Right:** Campers took a ride around Chmielno in a haycart. Photograph by Ewan Paterson.

involve singing (having said that, I did almost lose my voice during the week). We could go boating and swimming in the lake, try our hand at making some traditional Kashubian pottery, ride in a haycart, and try Nordic walking or cycling. In addition, some of the electives were opportunities to rest tired voices, such as learning about arranging at a convention, or discussing how to prepare suitable food for a convention—we even made a dessert! We also had a chance to see some traditional Kashubian folk dancing and singing, and enjoyed an evening recital by Camp instructor Tim Eriksen.

I think it is very important for anyone who loves and regularly sings the music of *The Sacred Harp* to experience Camp Fasola. This is the closest thing today to the singing schools which kept the Sacred Harp singing tradition alive during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Not only will you learn an awful lot, but you will have a lot of fun doing so, and return home having made lots of new friends.

Camp is not intended just for new and young singers, and this was really evident in Poland. A few of us had been singing for a matter of weeks, others for twenty years; some for about three years, and others since childhood. Campers embraced the wide range of ages and backgrounds that are a key part of what defines the Sacred Harp community.

Our thanks must go not only to the Polish Sacred Harp singers who helped organize Camp, but to all the teachers/leaders, who gave us the benefit of their

wisdom, humor, and experience. And of course to all the participants—I am proud to call you my friends, and hope that we will sing again as soon as possible

### **First Poland Sacred Harp Convention, September 22–23**

On Friday, most of us set off by coach from Chmielno to Warsaw. The long journey soon turned into a traveling Sacred Harp convention (complete with officers and minutes), though there was rather less singing than stopping for lunch and catching up on sleep.

When we arrived, we were taken to our various hosts dotted around Warsaw. The next morning I was among the first to get to the venue, a hall in the Geography Department of Warsaw University, so amidst setting up I took the opportunity to write a welcome message on the blackboards. More hugs for visiting singers, and the singing got underway. The room was a good size with a wooden floor, though perhaps the high ceiling swallowed up some of the sound, making us work harder. And even though many of us were far from being in good voice after singing all week, I think it wouldn't be exaggerating to say atmosphere was electric. To have over 120 people—American, British, Irish, Polish and German—all singing together from *The Sacred Harp* is something that would have been unimaginable even five years ago.

The evening social events were also very special. We walked through Warsaw's romantic Old Town to a small

community hall to hear a traditional Polish female singing group, and then across the city to the old Krasiński Library, a building deserted after the war, but which has now been taken over by artists and musicians who regularly hold concerts and events there. Some really excellent Polish folk musicians were playing, and we soon started dancing around in the candlelight. The mysterious, gloomy ambience and the cathedral-like acoustics meant that once the dancing was over we soon had our books out (despite the limited visibility) and were singing our hearts out.

UK singer Colin Higgins took some great videos of both the Poland and UK Conventions, which can be seen on Youtube. As the first ever Sacred Harp convention in mainland Europe, the Poland Convention was a resounding success. Thanks must go to the Poland Sacred Harp singers, Kuba Choinski, Justyna Orlikowska, Bogna Różyczka, Jacek Borkowicz, Gosia Perycz, and many more for organizing such a fantastic convention. ■



## Singing Reports

# Sacred Harp Down-Under: The First Australian All-Day Singing

by Steven Levine, Minneapolis, Minnesota | Photography by Dianne Porter, Canberra, Australia



Sydney bluegrass musician James Daley leads a song at the first Australian All Day Singing.

THE question is: How did Sacred Harp singing find its way to Australia? Did Australians visiting the United States come across Sacred Harp singing and start a group on their return home? Did an Australian musician come across a recording, feel the power therein, and gather his friends together to sing this music themselves? Did the tradition, having taken root in England, then spread out to the colonies, like custard tarts or the Dave Clark 5? The answer is all of the above, and these various paths converged in Sydney on October 6, 2012 for the first Australian All Day Singing.

About ten years ago Melbournites Natalie Sims and Shawn Whelan spent a period of time living and studying in the United States. Towards the end of their stay they encountered Sacred Harp singing in New England and loved what they heard, particularly at the end of their trip when they attended the

Young People's Convention in Leyden, Massachusetts. When they arrived back in Australia, as Natalie puts it, "There was no group, so we had no choice but to start one if we ever wanted to sing shape-note music again. And we did!" They purchased books and recordings and established a small singing in Melbourne, which over the years has welcomed several overseas visitors, including me. One of their earliest visitors was the late Bob Meek who told them that if they were to organize a big singing then people would come. At the singing on October 6 we remembered Bob for his prescience.

Much more recently, Sydney bluegrass musician James Daley, who has a strong interest in American traditional music, came across some older field recordings of Sacred Harp music, which intrigued him so much that he started gathering his friends to sing.

Enter the ebullient Eimear Cradock,

recently arrived in Sydney from Ireland. Eimear had started singing Sacred Harp in Cork, where she had attended the first convention there in March of 2011. The experience of meeting and singing with the singers from all over Europe and the United States touched something in her, and as she puts it, "From then on the experience of this music became richer with every singing/meeting/roadtrip/shape-note singing adventure, to the point where I found myself on the other side of the world, book in hand, not knowing if I would find anyone who sang this beautiful music here."

Eimear soon found Natalie and Shawn, who put her in touch with James, and because of her experience at the convention in Cork she was determined to gather all the singers in Australia together, to introduce the newer singers in Sydney to the joys and possibilities of the music. In her grand passion and enthusiasm, she set the



Ben Daley leads a sizable class of singers at the first Australia All Day Singing.

organizational wheels in motion and less than a year later there we all were, on a beautiful October Saturday in a fine Sydney suburb, singing at Australia's very first all-day singing.

I had been to Australia before. I love the country, and I have many friends who live there. Besides this, my company has branches in Brisbane and Melbourne where some of my colleagues work, colleagues whom I've long wanted to meet face-to-face. I've been saving for and planning another trip to Australia for several years. When I saw that this singing was going to happen, I knew this was my perfect opportunity.

And oh, the singing was going to be in Sydney! Flights from the United States tend to arrive in Sydney at dawn, and as you approach Botany Bay you can look out of the airplane window and see the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House, right at Circular Quay in the heart of the city. This is a view you have probably seen

many times in pictures or on film, but to realize that this is the real thing sets your heart beating with excitement. Sydney Harbour is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Sydney itself is a wonderful city, architecturally rich, bustling and cozy both. It is somehow familiar yet somehow strange, which makes for a feeling that you have indeed landed in Oz.

I arrived a day early for the singing, during which I just relaxed as I walked around this city I love. I sat at Sydney Harbour and gazed at the water, considering the rich history of that very spot. I went to dinner with my local hosts, friends I met during my first trip to Australia, and yes there was kangaroo steak on the menu so of course I had to order it. It was delicious.

On day two in the land down under I was ready for the singing. I took a bus to the inner suburb of Annandale, an area that was quite grand during Victorian times and still offers some wonderful

walking on an early spring October day, with the trees coming into bloom. I was very far indeed from the rural U.S. South, where I have often traveled to sing, but in its own way it was as sweet and beautiful as you could want.

The singing was held in a former church building that is now a community center. I arrived, and there was Eimear, welcoming all, figuring everything out, excited at the culmination of a lot of work and planning. Visitors from Melbourne came early, with boxes of loaner books and willing arms to help set everything up. There were visitors from Canberra, and even New Zealand. I, myself, was on edge with excitement. I was so very very far from home—farther from home than I've been when I've gone to Alabama or Georgia or even England, far from my home and even farther from the home of this music you might say—but here we were, putting together a hollow square.

I know you want to hear about the



all-day singing itself, which was the purpose of the visit and the event to which all of this leads. And there are some things I can tell you. I can tell you that there were over fifty-two singers from six countries present. I can tell you that we sang fifty-two songs. I can tell you that the singing was organized as a traditional singing, with dinner on the grounds and a memorial lesson. But on the whole, once you start singing you start singing, and you are lost in that world and it is a singing like any other. There is a universe in a day, a power in each lesson. The specifics merge not just into the day itself, but into all of the singings you ever attended. When you consider that I was in Australia, that most of the singers were relatively if not completely new, that's saying something.

There were some differences from the conventions I've attended in the United States, however. In particular, since most of the singers were new, they wanted to go through the shapes several times, to get the songs down before launching into them. But everybody was eager to sing, to sing the songs right. This may not have been strictly traditional, for a convention, but it was absolutely in service to the ultimate goal of why we are gathering to sing. I particularly loved the fact that the people wanted to sing the shapes—they understood their importance and significance. We took more time than is standard to make sure we could all participate as much as possible. At the core the singers in Australia seemed to appreciate everything that many of us love about this music and tradition. And that, as far as I'm concerned, is what makes for a good singing. Because this was a good singing. There were moments of joy, and feelings of community, and a sense of a group of people from around the country of Australia getting together to share time with each other through this music.

The day passed too fast to catch everything and yet slow enough to enjoy everything. We sang all day, and we closed with the "Parting Hand" (p. 62). Could that be it? Not quite. Many of us went up the road to have some refreshments together, to talk with each

other a bit more. And we were all invited next door that evening for the Sydney Bluegrass & Old Time Music Get-together.

This was not, technically, a two-day singing, but the next day happened to be the regular time block for the Sydney singing, so all who could stay in town returned to sing again, in a smaller group and a more intimate square. It was a sweet, comfortable time, a little bit less formal and more relaxed than Saturday but people still wanted to sing as much as possible. The general consensus among those who could come for this extra singing was that it was even nicer and more powerful than the previous day's singing.

James Daley, the local musician who had started the Sydney singing, plays in a bluegrass/old-timey band, along with his brother Ben, and their band just happened to be playing in a "hotel" (which we could call a pub or bar) just up the road. At the singing's end those of us who did not have to catch planes went over to have a beer and watch them (they were great!) and we were all bursting with pleasure and goodwill after our weekend singing with each other. Eventually we lost a few more people to travel and those of us remaining went to the Thai restaurant next door to end our weekend with a fine meal.

It wasn't until the following morning, when I was thinking about that most delightful of afternoons, that it hit me hard that until that weekend I hadn't known a single one of the people I was with at the pub and restaurant. I thought no, that couldn't be. Because honestly, it was like a happy reunion with old friends. It was, for me, a time of perfection.

Sacred Harp singing is an amazing way to connect deliciously with people, to share a day of music and passion, singing on to exhaustion, even with brand new friends who live on the other

The first Australia All Day Singing and the regular monthly singing the next day were held at the Annandale Creative Arts Centre, a former Baptist Church in a suburb of Sydney.





Natalie Sims and Shawn Whelan, who encountered Sacred Harp singing more than a decade ago in the United States, lead at the first Australia All Day Singing.

side of the world. There are now many more people in my life. They are just beginning to develop a Sacred Harp singing community in Australia, most of the singers are just beginning to explore the book, but they already feel and enjoy this music and this tradition as much as those of us who have been singing for decades.

I was honored and amazed to be part of the first all-day Sacred Harp singing in Australia. I hope anybody who can will consider making the trip of a lifetime, around the world and across the equator, to join the Australian singers for this wonderful event when it happens again." ■

## Singing Reports

# My Soul Awoke: The Rocky Mountain Convention

by Robert McKay | Albuquerque, New Mexico

ON the fourth Sunday and the Saturday before in September of 2012 I was able to be part of my first Sacred Harp convention—the Rocky Mountain Convention.

How do you compress two days of *volume*, of the high fierce notes that for me are so characteristic of this music, into a few paragraphs? Sacred Harp singing, I've learned, is one of those things that, in the ungrammatical phrase, "you hadda been there" to really get the full impact of. This Convention wasn't an exception—no matter how high my expectations, it exceeded them. And I'm not sure that I can adequately put into words the impact the Convention had on me—I'm not sure anyone could.

Certain things stand out.

**There's the experience of leading.** We all know just how important standing in the hollow square is to really hearing sacred harp singing. It sounds great from back in your section, whatever it may be. It sounds even better on the front bench. But the focus of all that sound isn't the third row, or even the front bench—it's the center of the square. There's a reason leaders will often bring a novice up with them—once you've heard the music from that spot you can never be the same. Some of us who sing are religious and some aren't. I am, and for me leading, with the exposure to that "original surround sound," is a religious experience. Over the weekend I was able to lead four times, twice each day, and I worshipped my God as surely during those times as I ever have in church. And even if I weren't at all religious, there's still something about 40 voices all singing—and, being sacred harp singers, singing loudly—that transcends mere singing, and becomes something much more than the notes on the page and the methods of singing and leading.

**There's the experience of hearing.**

Two songs in particular struck me. One was "Clamanda" (p. 42). I've loved that one since I first heard it on disc two of *Awake, My Soul*. But to sit on the tenor at a convention, and actually be part of the driving beat, so reminiscent of an army marching into combat, is something else entirely. Hitting the accents in the chorus—"WELL ARMED with HELmet, SWORD, and SHIELD"—almost made the walls shake, and we were singing in a building with adobe walls two or three feet thick. At that point we had, as I like to put it, blown the roof off and were well on the way to blowing the walls out.

And the second is "Consecration" (p. 448t). This is one of those songs that there's just not enough of. You want to keep singing it, and keep singing it, because it just lends itself to singing. I had planned to call it, but someone beat me to it, and led it almost exactly as I would have. This is another song with strong accents, accents that demand that you hit them, and hit them hard, producing a pounding beat that defies anyone to stop the singing. Especially in the second section, where the time switches to three over four, it's easy to understand what Richard Ivey means in—I'm mentioning it again—*Awake, My Soul*. He says that when he's singing it feels like the ground's shaking under him, and it feels like the shaking will lift him off his feet with its power. And though I wanted to keep singing, when the leader finished, and we stopped, I was breathless from the beauty and joy of the music. I didn't actually feel the ground shake—but *something* shook, and I'll remember it for a long time.

**And then there's the memorial lesson.** From years in church I've learned that "family" can mean more than just



your relatives. And Sacred Harp singers are a family—and though that’s a cliché, it’s the truth. I don’t know whether they were saying it in 1844 when B. F. White first published *The Sacred Harp*, but if they weren’t, it can’t have been very long afterward when singers began seeing themselves that way. I had the honor and privilege of conducting this year’s memorial lesson, and to my surprise I found myself almost choking up as I began. I didn’t recognize any of the names on either list—but it didn’t matter. Those singers—whether deceased or shut in—are *family*, and without ever meeting them I missed them, and wished that they could have been with us to sing.

When I come to die, years from now as I hope, or tomorrow as it may be, I have no doubt that Sacred Harp music will be in my heart. I’ve listened to different kinds of music for decades now. But though I haven’t even sung Sacred Harp two years yet, I’ve *sung* it. It’s all well and good to listen to CDs. It’s wonderful that I can watch DVDs of singings. But there is nothing in the world like *singing* sacred harp music. Our music, by its very nature, demands that you get involved; its sound is not merely an invitation, but an insistence on participation.

My voice is individual, just as were those voices around me in my section and in the other sections of the hollow square. And on certain notes my voice might have momentarily stood out distinct from the whole. But the reason I was there was not to sing by myself for others to admire. I was there to be part of the class, to lend my voice with its distinctive qualities to the entire class. And when I sang at the Convention, what I sang was more than just my voice—it was something far greater than any one person. All our voices together were something far greater than the sum of our individual voices.

And when I sang at the Convention, my soul awoke. ■

## Feature Story

# Harmonious Union: How Sacred Harp Brings People Together

by Robert T. Kelley | Greenwood, South Carolina



The western concert hall.

I recently gave a talk at Camp Fasola about the community-building aspects of the Sacred Harp tradition, and I would like to share my ideas again here. Shape-note singers, of course, already know very well the fellowship and bonding that comes from singing together, so I know that I am “preaching to the choir” so to speak. I would like nevertheless to examine Sacred Harp traditions more closely and explore some specific new ideas that I have that support our shared belief in the power of fasola. Namely, let us explore why Sacred Harp is a more useful music-making endeavor than most other American and European musical traditions. We shall see if we can discover how each of the Departments of Music in the rudiments and the organizational structures governing an all-day singing support and promote the goals of harmony and unity through singing together.

Christopher Small, in his book *Musicking*, contrasts the type of traditional music making in most non-Western cultures with Western art music’s most

elevated form, the symphony concert. Small laments that in the concert hall

*[w]e are prepared to laugh, to weep, to shudder, to be excited, or to be moved to the depth of our being, all in the company of people the majority of whom we have never seen before, to whom we shall probably address not a word or a gesture, and whom we shall in all probability never see again. What we accept as the norm is, in fact, the exception among the human race as a whole.*<sup>1</sup>

Westernized industrialized nations all have “concert music,” but this is the only culture in the world that forces audiences into internalized individual responses to music rather than social participatory community music making.

## Reasons for Making Music

We may actually have some difficulty pinning down what the purpose of the symphony concert is for those involved. We can likely come to consensus that it has something to do with eliciting an aesthetic or emotional reaction

## Every person possesses creative capacity, whether they think of themselves as creative or not.

from the listeners, and that there is also a social purpose, most closely akin to “conspicuous consumption,” or an opportunity to “see and be seen.” If we look at community-oriented social participatory music-making traditions like Sacred Harp and like most music making in the world outside of Western culture, we can more easily discern the purposes for making music. Drawing on the work of others, I have devised a list of reasons to participate in music:

- To build creative confidence and self-worth <sup>2</sup>
- To create “flow” together <sup>3</sup>
- To enhance our societal rituals (both religious and non-)
- To model and explore ideal relationships <sup>4</sup>
- To build social unity
- To unite disparate people’s activities toward a common goal

Let us discuss each reason in turn. Every human being possesses creative capacity, whether or not that person thinks of him/herself as a creative person. Even though our culture frequently discourages innovative thinking, in order to contribute to society, one must learn to innovate. How to practice and improve one’s creativity is a bit of a paradox. One must simply “be creative” repeatedly, with the courage to weather judgment of one’s first feeble attempts. Through simply engaging in creative activities, one begins to think of oneself more and more as a creative person. Music-making is one excellent way to practice creativity. Thomas

Turino, in his book *Music as Social Life*, identifies “flow” as a primary goal of music-making and defines “flow” as heightened concentration, where distractions vanish, and the actor is fully in the present.

*The [“flow”] experience actually leads to a feeling of timelessness, or being out of normal time, and to feelings of transcending one’s normal self. . . . People find “flow” experience restful and liberating, because the problems and aspects of ourselves that sometimes get in our way from reaching a clear, open state of mind disappear during intense concentration. . . . This open state of mind is fundamental for psychic growth and integration.* <sup>5</sup>

A ritual is any human act that serves to communicate a set of cultural values. According to Christopher Small, music’s main purpose is to rehearse the gestures of ideal relationships, and music is therefore an excellent medium for the expression of cultural values. What are these gestures, and how are they expressed in music? Since one can interpret a wide variety of musical phenomena as gestures, let us begin with a simple example. One rudimentary type of musical gesture is a melody that ascends. Because higher pitches often require more energy to produce (with the voice), an ascending melody often depicts a gesture of striving toward a goal. One can find music’s most immediate gestures in the music’s rhythm, or how the music “moves.” Is the music fast and furious, slow and sombre, or irregular and halting? The musical movements give rise to ideas of activity and relationship.

The language of gesture thus includes verbs, but not nouns. Music can depict nouns through sound effects, for example the sound of a babbling brook, a chirping bird, or a speeding locomotive. But beyond identifying onomatopoeia in music, a listener cannot discover who is performing the gesture, and upon whom the act is being performed. So musical language requires the listener to imagine the relationship that would include such a gesture. The relationships can

be between human beings, between a person and the environment, or between a person and God.

When people make music together and agree upon the cultural values conveyed through the musical gestures and idealized relationships, this has the effect of building social unity. Many people all over the world have therefore discovered the power that music possesses to unite disparate people’s activities toward a common goal. Work songs exemplify this purpose for music-making, but the goal, as we shall see in Sacred Harp singing, does not have to be a physical task.

### The Philosophy of Community Music-Making

Community music-making strives much more to embody gestures that express idealized relationships than to make precisely the right sounds in the right way. As a result, amateur musical communities place far less importance on musical ability than the concert music profession does. Musical ability does not necessarily indicate mastery of the gestures and relationships modeled. The process of learning how to make the musical gestures is what ultimately rewards the musician. The sound is just evidence—a trace or record of our experimentation process and our degree of success engaging with the gestures and relationships.

Because music communicates using the language of gestures, expressing the actions but leaving the forces involved anonymous, the relationships thus remain hypothetical, not specific relationships in the real world. Making mistakes in the music does not particularly damage the event. If one makes a serious mistake when acting in a real relationship with real people, one could harm that relationship, but an amateur musician does not have to apologize for messing up the musical gestures that build the hypothetical relationships expressed through the music. Further, if one tries out some music and finds that one disagrees with the content of the music, there is no obligation attached. One will





Gray Court Pioneer Day Sacred Harp Singing, Sept. 8, 2012. Photograph by Robert T. Kelley.

have learned something just by trying out the gestures that one then found disagreeable.

Music-making also models relationships in an even more important way than the content of the music or of the text. It is through how people make the music. One can discover the culturally valued relationships modeled in everything from the venue chosen to the way that people organize themselves in order to engage in the music-making. This is where community music making and Sacred Harp in particular truly excel as musical traditions. Christopher Small provides the following three relationships to examine when evaluating a type of music-making:

1. Relationships between the people and physical setting
2. Relationships among those taking part
3. Relationships between the sounds that are being made

## Community Music Traditions in 21st-Century America

Let us now examine some of the participatory amateur music-making opportunities that we can presently find in the United States. If you feel like you need to make some music, you can join a community choir, community band, or community orchestra, you could go dancing,<sup>6</sup> you could sing karaoke with your friends or start a garage band, or you could play Guitar Hero or Rock Band.<sup>7</sup> We shall also talk about Sacred Harp singing and the values that it promotes.

## Relationship Types

What are the relationships expressed in these types of music-making events? First, we should talk about the possible types of relationships that we might encounter in the organizational structures surrounding the music-

making and in the gestures of the music itself. Anthropologist Alan Fiske, in his study of relational structures, has provided us with three cross-cultural types of human relationships that will be useful and adequate for our purposes here:

- **Dominance** “Don’t mess with me.” This is a very high maintenance relationship.
- **Reciprocity** “Tit for tat.” Relationships of commerce, the basis for democratic society.
- **Communality** “Share and share alike.” Relationships of kinship, family, tribe, or community.

These relationship types may not seem equally desirable, but our human nature requires all three types. In different forms these relationship types all can either benefit all parties or harm one or more involved. In the United States, educators make an effort to

train “leadership skills” so that those in dominance relationships can maintain a positive relationship. People can only maintain a communality relationship when they can put the health of the relationship above feelings of fairness and equality. Because this rarely happens among diverse people, even people who share the same worldview sometimes must resort to the structures for maintaining positive reciprocity relationships. We shall see that the degree to which these principles of positive relationships are built into a musical tradition’s practices form a useful way of measuring how well it provides for the musical, social, and spiritual experiences of its participants.

### Relationships Modeled by Classical Music

Let us now examine the relationships that seem to be promoted by the types of music performed in most community music-making events in America. First, let us examine Classical music. Most works of concert music (symphonies, concertos, tone poems, etc.) pantomime a narrative about overcoming struggles against a force that seeks to destroy order (usually portrayed as a masculine ideal of order and a feminine force of disorder).<sup>8</sup> Concert music presents the imagined protagonist’s triumph in his struggle to restore order and hierarchy as a life-changing event, where a new order is established that differs from the tranquility before the struggle.<sup>9</sup> Most classical music’s traditional music-making venues and traditions also show preference for dominance relationships, or at least reciprocity relationships—that is, one must pay for a ticket to experience the professional musicians’ expertise. Those that come to hear classical music have no say in the music-making. The musicians onstage also organize themselves into a strict hierarchy of power in making decisions about the musical interpretation and details of performance practice. The musical director chooses the repertory to be performed, and the conductor (usually the same person) makes all of the important musical decisions for the group.

### Relationships Modeled by Rock Music

Suppose instead that we would rather join a Rock band to satisfy our musical desires. What types of relationships does this popular genre of American music endorse? Rock music often promotes rebellion and anarchy, describes dysfunctional romantic relationships, and seems to express a kind of solipsism through endless repetition of a groove. Presentational performance is perpetuated in much of rock music as well, but the music is frequently intended for dancing and as ambience for social occasions. The volume at which the music is almost always played, however, seems not to encourage conversation as the main type of social interaction.<sup>10</sup> The high level of violent imagery in the staging of a lot of rock music also becomes troublesome when viewed from our perspective that music should convey our cultural values.

All of the amateur music-making opportunities that I have listed also express many positive relationship ideals. Let us use Sacred Harp to examine these, since this musical culture promotes positive relationships so effectively.

### Relationships Modeled in the Traditions of Sacred Harp Singing

When we sing Sacred Harp, we sit in a hollow square with everyone in the room facing the center. The fact that this places the whole group of singers on more-or-less equal footing, and that we make no distinction between performer and audience, is amplified and exemplified in the hollow square arrangement. This has the effect of emphasizing both the participatory nature of our tradition and the primarily social purpose of our music making.

We also, with very few exceptions, always sing the shapes before singing the words. Our practice of solmizing every song connects us to our singing-school origins, and offers an invitation to participate. Less experienced singers get a chance to practice the song before singing the words. Through

singing on the notes, we also gradually become better at sight-singing new music written in shapes. Our carrying a singing-school practice into our social music-making events forms a self-preservation and self-improvement device, and singers tell stories of shape-note traditions that died out when singers stopped singing the shapes.

The venue for music-making also needs to be examined here. Shape-note singers like to sing in meeting houses and primitive country churches. Singers perceive these plain surroundings as ideal acoustically for singing (at least for singing without any distinction between performer and listener) and adequate for food and fellowship, and they provide no distractions from the main purpose of our music-making. Singers hold excellent singing locations in high esteem and make great efforts to travel to singings where the community is welcoming and the venue is conducive to a highly spiritual singing experience.

We have a tradition of offering all singers the privilege of leading a song. Many others have commented on the inherently democratic sensibility exemplified in our system of sharing the job of leading the music among all members of the group who wish to do so. This is an excellent example of how our music-making methods and culture model ideal relationships. But we can learn even more by examining our willingness to allow anyone in the group temporarily to take on a dominance relationship, and we try as much as we can to render their song choice in the way that they want to hear it.

The fact that the leader can choose any song in the book that has not already been sung that day is also worth examining. The texts in *The Sacred Harp* express relationships among people and between the singer and God. The leader may choose a particular song in order to explore the relationships in the music itself, or in the text, or both. The tune that the leader selects for singing a popular text carries a particular emotional response to the relationships expressed in the text. For example, we can easily see the different emotional



responses inherent in choosing “Huntington” (p. 193 in *The Sacred Harp*) as opposed to “Greenwich” (p. 183) for the singing of “Lord what a thoughtless wretch was I”, or choosing “Concord” (p. 313t) versus “Novakoski” (p. 481) for singing the Isaac Watts hymn “Come, we that love the Lord.”

Thomas Turino explains why all participatory social music-making traditions possess the feature that they discourage displays of virtuosity.

*Music making is as much about social relations and fostering participation as it is about sound production and the creative drives of particular musicians. Those who wish to prioritize their own creative urges would do better to perform in presentational contexts.”*

In Sacred Harp singing, we discourage ostentation in the square and encourage restraint, dignity, and composure when leading. The speed at which one leads a song has bearing on this issue. Leading any song so fast that only a practiced few can spit out the correct syllables quickly enough privileges the virtuosity of a few at the expense of the social unity of the group and therefore creates a destructive ostentation. But there is more to be read in the speed at which we choose to lead a song: It can indicate the degree to which the leader wants the class to deliberate on the meaning of the text. Slower leading can also suggest a desire for the class to deliberate on the traditions and “proper ways” of conducting ourselves at a singing.

In shape-note singing, we sing in harmony together (both metaphorically and literally). A simplistic view of this might lead one to assert that to make the ultimate statement of unity everyone should sing the melody together in unison. As we all should already know, however, the more complicated reality of human existence is that people are not all the same. In the “dispersed harmony” of Sacred Harp singing, we bring highly individualistic melodies together into harmonious union. We are showing that each person has a role to play in our community, and not all of the jobs are alike.

Some elements of the music itself clearly relate to our relationship ideals as well. The rudiments no longer discuss the science of composition in depth, but the 1844 B. F. White rudiments prescribe how to use discords carefully to make the concords more satisfying. There is an obvious metaphor here for disagreements among people in our community. We *resolve* our dissonances.

The gestures in the melody and rhythm of Sacred Harp music are worth studying, but in the interest of space here, let us only explore one unique feature of Sacred Harp singing, accent, and how it expresses our values. When people read a text out loud together, they must come to terms on the inflection, stress, and timing. Likewise in Sacred Harp singing, we accent the music based on the meaning and scansion of the text. Accent can be seen as a gesture of agreement among people about the text that they are reading. Good accent does not necessarily indicate an agreement on the veracity of the message. But it does amount to an agreement on the meaning of the text. How we accent confirms how we interpret the words. We can all say or sing words that we do not believe in literally. But unless we understand what they mean and inflect them appropriately, the unified delivery will not come off. It is the unified delivery of texts whose overarching meaning conveys our values that fosters unity among the singers. Ultimately, as a day of singing proceeds with good accent, this unification of meter and meaning, text and music, and hearts and minds, builds the connection that people feel with each other while singing.

Laura Clawson, in her book *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!: Community, Spirituality, and Tradition among Sacred Harp Singers*<sup>12</sup> provides an in-depth study of how Sacred Harp singers navigate through differing views about the texts in the Sacred Harp, as well as conflicting religious, sexual, and political identities among singers, while still encouraging people of diverse cultural backgrounds into the communality of the “fasola folk.” While I direct the reader to Clawson’s book and Kiri

The texts in *The Sacred Harp* express relationships among people and between the singer and God. The leader may choose a particular song in order to explore the relationships in the music itself, or in the text, or both.

Miller's *Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism*<sup>13</sup> to explore this topic, let us take a moment here to consider the relationships that singers have with the text and how we can sing together about particular religious or political ideals, but at the same time we avoid discussing them at a singing. When speaking about a controversial idea, one must take great care to convey that one is *not* endorsing nor denouncing it, and even then one runs the risk of misunderstanding.<sup>14</sup> Singing communicates a text differently from speaking, however. Speech is complicated and could be literal or figurative, factual or hypothetical, critical or descriptive, and abstract or specific. People nevertheless tend to interpret speaking as more literal, factual, critical, and specific. In singing, however, it becomes difficult to express that one is actually espousing the ideas being sung, especially in group singing. Music contains only generalized and hypothetical relationships, and sung texts become an object for more detached interpretation than statements made in public speech or conversation. Each singer has a reaction to the messages in the text that is being sung, and these individual reactions can differ wildly and even conflict without disturbing the unity-building effects of singing that text together with the other singers.

With all of the unwritten rules for maintaining a spirit of welcome and communality at a singing, Sacred Harp singers also have more formalized standards when it comes to the functioning of the singing convention and the schedule of the all-day singing. To varying degrees, different singings and singing communities operate by *Robert's Rules of Order*, most of them probably functioning most of the time in a more informal manner. In fact, virtually all singings today seem to work perfectly well without the traditional meeting-house traditions of Primitive Baptist associations and singing societies. Why do we still at least pay lip service to operating by *Robert's Rules* and observing the singing traditions outlined

in the rudiments?<sup>15</sup> Sacred Harp has built within its organizational structures the principle that our music-making is modeling idealized relationships. When it comes to discussing the nitty gritty business among people that do not necessarily agree, we want to model a principle of fairness and reciprocity. We are expressing our ideal that the whole world would conduct business fairly in the way that we do. Sacred Harp thus operates within all three types of relationships, allowing individuals into temporary positions of dominance for the purpose of using their individuality to strengthen the community, and enforcing time-honored procedures of reciprocity when conducting business, so that a feeling of fairness and equality strengthens the communality that Sacred Harp strives to achieve as its normal mode of proceeding.

We can see how, simply through singing together, Sacred Harp seeks to build a community of trust and constantly add new members who, even though highly diverse, benefit from the fellowship and music-making. People do not sing together and share food with people with whom they have a dominance or reciprocity relationship. These activities create a communality relationship. This explains why singers freely open their homes to each other to spend the night before and after singings. In the foregoing discussion, I have hinted at a higher purpose as well. When you make communal music that models ideal communal relationships, you open up the possibility of accomplishing tremendous and amazing things together. When we come together to sing, we are modeling our ideals about community to the rest of the world and setting forth our highest hopes for the future of society. ■

## Footnotes

1. Christopher Small, *Musicking* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 39.
2. David Kelley, "How to Build Your Creative Confidence," TED Talk, May 2012, [http://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_kelley\\_how\\_to\\_build\\_your\\_creative\\_confidence.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/david_kelley_how_to_build_your_creative_confidence.html).
3. Thomas Turino, *Music As Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
4. Small, *Musicking*.
5. Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 4.
6. I include any kind of dancing here, from square dancing and contradancing to ballroom dancing and dubstep. Christopher Small includes dancing as a music-making activity, because more than almost any other way of interacting with music, through dancing one physically embodies the gestures found in the music.
7. Ethnomusicologist and Sacred Harp singer Kiri Miller, in her book *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), addresses the heightened interactions with musical gesture that these video games provide beyond just listening.
8. For more on the gendered narratives in Classical music, see Christopher Small's book, *Musicking*, and Susan McClary's book, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
9. The hero's journey is an archetype that parallels this typical musical narrative.
10. I leave to the reader's imagination the question of what types of socializing are encouraged by music that drowns out conversation.
11. Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 184.
12. Laura Clawson, *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!: Community, Spirituality, and Tradition among Sacred Harp Singers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9–10, 124–125, 130–132.
13. Kiri Miller, *Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
14. For example, someone might tune into a conversation after the disclaimers have been made.
15. John Garst, "Rudiments of Music," in *The Sacred Harp*, p. 25.



## Read the Old Paths

## In Search of Silas Mercer Brown

by Rebecca Over | Ash Vale, United Kingdom



Hand painted sign to Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church where Silas Mercer Brown is buried.

As some will know I was fortunate enough to retire from work in July 2011, escaping in the nick of time before my employer revised the retirement age upwards by a number of years. What better way to celebrate than with a “big trip” to sing in Alabama and Georgia during the summer of 2012.

A number of friends in the UK asked how I would spend the time between singings. Well, with composers’ graves to find, historic sites and civil war battlefields to visit, and one of the largest surviving carousels in the USA not far from Atlanta I knew that I would definitely not be at a loss for things to do.

On Thursday August 2nd, towards the end of my travels, I visited the Genealogy Room at Buchanan Library in the old Haralson County Court House. Having learned from Warren Steel’s book, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, that S. M. Brown, composer of four songs in the 1991 edition including “Span of Life” (p. 379), had settled in Haralson County and had been the first secretary of the Tallapoosa Musical Convention I decided to take the opportunity to search for information about him. Warren had been unsure of his first given name at the time of

writing his book.

Imagine my joy when I found, in *The History of Haralson County, Georgia, 1983*, compiled by the Haralson County Historical Society, a whole article by one of S. M. Brown’s great grandchildren. This began as follows:

*SILAS MERCER BROWN*

*Silas Mercer Brown (1811–1881), my great grandfather, was married to Eliza Chandler (1815–...) on August 16, 1836. Our earliest record showed this family migrated from South Carolina, first settling in Jasper County, then in Polk County, and on to Haralson County for permanent residence near Buchanan, in the early 19th Century. He was active in the Primitive Baptist Church and an ardent lover of Sacred Harp music. Some of his songs are included in the original Sacred Harp Song Book and are still being sung.*

This confirmed that this was indeed “our” S. M. Brown. The unnamed writer of the article continued:

*My great grandparents had ten children, one of whom was my grandfather Samuel Wyatt Brown (1843–1925). He was a teenager when the Civil War was begun and saw active duty in the battles of*

*Silas Mercer Brown  
(1811–1881)...  
was active in the  
Primitive Baptist  
Church and an  
ardent lover of  
Sacred Harp music.  
Some of his songs  
are included in the  
original Sacred  
Harp Song Book  
and are still being  
sung.*



**Top:** Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church (left) and an old grave in the church cemetery (right).

**Bottom:** Brown's grave (left) clearly shows his first name and his complete dates: SILAS M. BROWN / SEPT. 19 1811 / MAR. 29 1881 The Brown plot (right), with Silas's stone in the foreground and the church in the distance behind. A broken stone and a place where footings only remained can also be seen.

*Atlanta and Chickamauga. He knew hunger and hardship, and was taken prisoner, yet had many witty stories to tell. One was the time when a young Confederate soldier told him that he wished he was a baby, and a gal baby at that.*

*When the war was over, grandpa was stationed in Tennessee, so he walked back home to Haralson County to the delight of his anxious, watchful family. Life was very hard since the Yankees had destroyed their homes, taken their livestock and other necessities. People boiled the dirt from the smoke house, where the meat had drained, to get salt for seasoning their food.*

It seems likely that Samuel Wyatt Brown was the S. W. Brown whom Earl Thurman refers to as being one of the "chief architects" of and "leading singers" at the Chattahoochee Convention, although the writer of the Haralson article does not mention anything of his grandfather's participation in Sacred Harp singing. Karen Rollins has kindly

checked and found that S. M. Brown and S. W. Brown, together with J. F. Brown, all joined the Chattahoochee Convention at Cedar Creek Church in Coweta County in August 1867. Unfortunately there are no minutes in the record book for the Chattahoochee Convention of 1925, when Samuel would have been mentioned in the memorial lesson. The writer continued:

*On December 31st, 1867, S. W. Brown married Nancy Catherine Williams (1843-1901), daughter of S. H. Williams. He farmed to support a family of six boys and four girls. Their children were: Frances Elizabeth, Susan Emma, Roland Mercer, Thomas Elmore, Henry Wyatt, Mary Lazora, Noble Newton, Martha Catherine, Isaac Robinson and Samuel Chambers. Typhoid fever struck the family in 1901, taking the mother and two young adult sons within a few months. Then in 1902, he married Nancy Aldridge, continued to farm, take his daily walks and entertain with his wife.*

It would seem that the love of music continued with the writer's father, Roland Mercer Brown. The writer described him as "a progressive, hard-working farmer, [who] cultivated several hundred acres of land, using as many as fourteen mules," and also as "an ardent lover of sacred music, which he sang and encouraged the young people to study" and someone who "supported progressive programs of the church, the county, and the state." Unfortunately the writer does not specify the type of sacred music that Roland Mercer loved so much.

That article gave me the information I needed to look up Silas Mercer Brown in the Haralson County Cemetery Book, which showed that he had been buried in the cemetery of Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church on Macedonia Church Road off Highway 120 between Buchanan and Tallapoosa. After copying down the information and the directions, which dated from 2002, I set off to find the cemetery.

Driving west along the 120 I found no sign whatever of Macedonia Church Road. Explorations down the only likely looking road yielded nothing and my GPS persisted in taking me to Haralson County High School. So I parked at the High School and asked a couple of the students there for directions to the school's office, where I enquired about the church. The first reaction of the helpful ladies there was that no services had been held at the church for many years but when I explained that I was looking for a grave one of them drew a rough map for me. It looked as if the church was down the road I had already tried, but how had I missed it?

As I walked back to the car a young workman who had followed me out of the office said that he was driving home down that very road. He kindly offered to point out the church to me if I followed him. This was not the first time during my trip that a kind stranger appeared and offered help just when I needed it the most.

We did indeed turn down the road that I had explored before. When the man slowed down and pointed out the location to me from his van I realized



why I had driven right past it. I would never have found it without his help. All that could be seen from the road was a locked metal gate to a dirt road. On closer inspection I saw a very faded, peeling, hand painted sign, propped up at ground level, saying “Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church Est 1840.”

Parking the car beside the gate I set off along the road on foot and before too long came to the church and its small cemetery, where it appeared that even though the church was no longer used someone regularly cut the grass.

Here I found the grave of Silas Mercer Brown marked by a reasonably modern flat memorial that, judging by the number of very badly weathered, broken and collapsed stones, may well have replaced an older upright memorial.

I could find no memorial for his wife Eliza, but there were a number of stones nearby for which only the footings remained.

There was an old upright memorial for Samuel Wyatt Brown, and a more

modern flat memorial for Sam’s first wife Nancy Catherine. There was no memorial for his second wife.

After taking pictures of the other memorials in the Brown plot I decamped to the shade for a drink of water before taking the usual notes. Just as I had sat down, enjoying the feeling of being the only visitor at the cemetery, a member of the Sheriff’s department appeared on foot. He had seen my car by the gate and had come to investigate. I did not notice his rank (he was a youngish man) but did see that he went by the appropriate surname of Browning. I explained the significance of the Brown graves, told him a little about Sacred Harp, showed him page 379 in my book and asked him if I could stay to make the necessary notes. He thought for a while—clearly the rules did not cover the eventuality of a woman from England visiting the grave of a Sacred Harp composer—but in the end said that he guessed there was no reason why not. He told me that he had been in his

job for seven years and there had been no services at the church in all that time.

After a short rest I made my usual notes and took a leisurely look round the outside of the church and the rest of the small cemetery, which contained a number of seemingly very old now nameless graves.

On my way back to the hotel I made sure to stop to write down the name of the road that the church was on.

Any fellow grave visiting Sacred Harpers should drive west from Buchanan, Georgia, towards Tallapoosa on Highway 120 and turn left on Estvanko Road between Haralson County Middle School and Haralson County High School. If you get to the High School you have missed the turn. The gate to the dirt road that leads to the church is almost a mile along Estvanko Road on the left.

I had never expected to discover new information about one of our composers and this remains one of the most treasured memories of my trip. ■

## Read the Old Paths

# Picturing Song Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America

by Chris Brown | Elland, United Kingdom

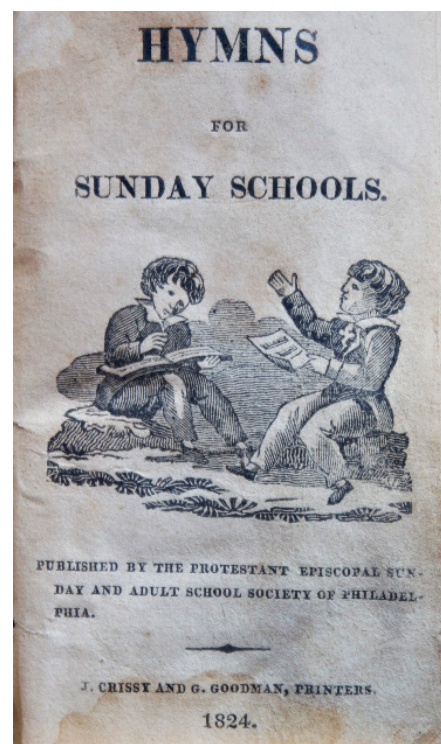
ONE of the things that seems to intrigue new singers is the role of the leader, standing in the center of the hollow square beating time. Many assume that this practice is unique to Sacred Harp singing, but evidence from early sources suggests that our current leading style has origins in pre-revolutionary days. For example, William Tans’ur, whose writings were widely known in New England, wrote in his *Melody of the Heart or the Psalmist’s Pocket Companion* (1737):

*Common time is measured by the motion of the hand or foot, which motions represent the motions of a Pendulum by putting it down and taking it up in equal motion. Common time is measured*

*in even numbers ... So your hand or foot must be down and up in every bar, in equal time as the figures and letters direct. Triple time, moves by odd numbers ... Two to be performed with the hand or foot down and one up as above.*

While this is a pretty good summary of what the leader does, Tans’ur does not say whether this movement of the hand, or foot, is to be done by a single person or by everyone. I have seen similar descriptions of beating time in other early hymnals, but they but are equally vague about the role of the leader.

I have recently discovered a copy of a small words-only hymnal that casts a new light on leading. *Hymns for Sunday Schools*, published in 1824 by The



Title page of *Hymns for Sunday Schools*, published in 1824 by The Protestant Episcopal Sunday and Adult School Society of Philadelphia



This typical engraving depicts a children kneeling while singing from conventional upright sheets. From *Hymns for Sunday School*, published in Philadelphia in 1828 by The American Sunday School Union.

Protestant Episcopal Sunday and Adult School Society of Philadelphia, has on its title page, like many such books, an image of children. However this one shows them with oblong books. The child on the right is beating time with an emphatic motion much like modern singers are taught to lead—he even looks up confidently from his book. Though the child on the left is concentrating on the music, he is also beating time. His more restrained motion evokes the current practice of singers in the class as they mark time along with the leader. This image suggests that remarkably little has changed over two hundred years in the practice of leading music, at least from a Sacred Harp singer's perspective.

Few images from the time period portray this type of leading. More typical is an engraving printed in *Hymns for Sunday Schools*, published in Philadelphia in 1828 by The American Sunday School Union (ASSU). Here the children are kneeling while singing from

conventional upright sheets and there is no leader.

Publications by ASSU required unanimous approval by a Publications Committee, which had to have members of at least three different denominations, ensuring that all works were free of denominational bias. This committee included members of the Episcopal Church, so we may take it that they approved of this book and the image. It would therefore appear that their 1824 image of a leader beating time was not only one of the earliest images of leadership but one of the last of it, at least in the Episcopal Church. The musical practice represented in the second image reflects shifting musical tastes during the period, as the American shape note tradition gradually gave way to a European-influenced choral style. ■



## News

## Behind *A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note Singing*

by Lisa Grayson | Chicago, Illinois

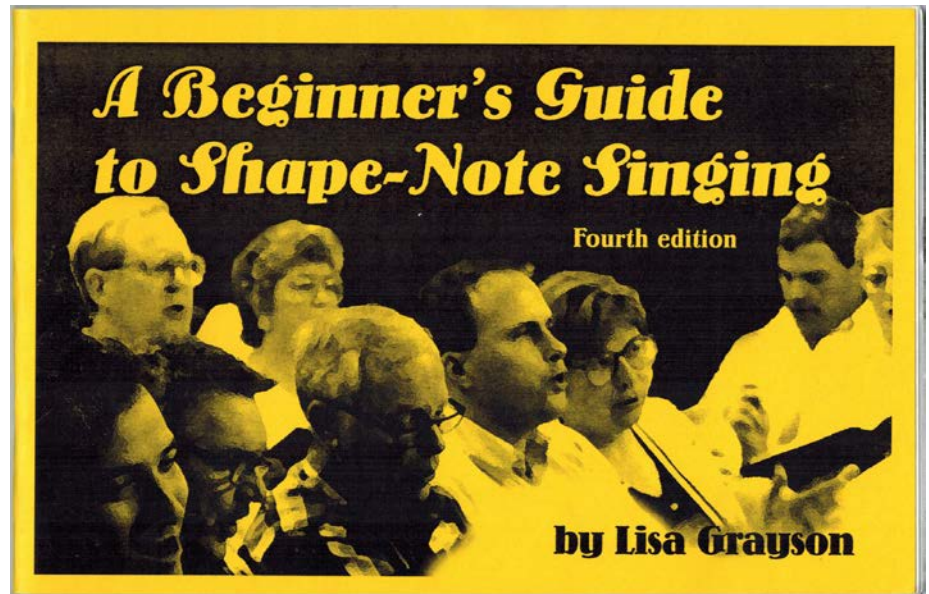
As much as Sacred Harp feels imbued in every part of my life now, I can still remember when I stumbled upon the music in 1991 at the University of Chicago Folk Festival. Although I arrived only three songs before the session was over, the singing exerted its tractor beam on me, as it has on so many others, and my heart knew that I was at home not only in the music itself, but among the singers, all strangers to me.

I wanted more. I wanted to immerse myself in the Sacred Harp sound and experience. However, I was utterly baffled when I opened the tunebook.

Three years later, I had managed (with much help from kindly singers, including many wonderful souls North and South who no longer grace the hollow square today) to figure out the basics. To my astonishment, after three years of trying, and failing, to sight read, I could at least stumble through some slow tunes. And new singers were approaching me, often sheepishly, to ask the same questions I had when I first opened the Sacred Harp.

By then, I had written a few columns for the *Chicago Sacred Harp Newsletter* as the cranky Dr. Mixolydian Moad. I started to create a one-page guide for our singings, explaining to newcomers what they were encountering in the room: where the parts were seated, how shape notes work, why we beat time, etc. What began as a single flyer soon became a series of handouts. People seemed to like them, but the pages generally mouldered in the bottom of book bags.

After polling a few singers from different parts of the country, I realized that there was no published general introduction to Sacred Harp—outside of the rudiments, of course. In 1994 I decided to publish a booklet that would fit inside the tunebook, something I could create on my home computer



Fourth Edition (2009) of Lisa Grayson's *Beginner's Guide*.

(I was working as a publication designer at the time) printed inexpensively and sold for little. Thus the guide, first printed with a lurid lemon yellow cover, was born.

People started approaching me at singings with suggestions for revisions and additions, and I tried to pay attention. The book is in its fifth edition now. Sure, I've fixed mistakes, but I've also had to revise and expand the contacts and resources section: Think of all the web pages, not to mention new singings, that have sprung up since 1994!

For the first few years, through about 1998 or so, the Chicago Sacred Harp Singers (i.e., Ted Mercer) paid for the cost of printing the booklets and recouped the expenses as they sold. Multiple orders for single copies came to Ted's storefront office, where many a pizza party had been held after mailing out Sacred Harp newsletters and postcards. I took over the printing and sales, and soon realized just how much hard work Ted had put into production

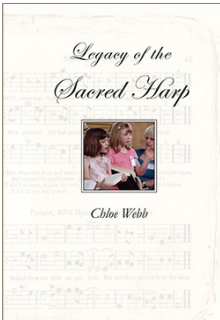
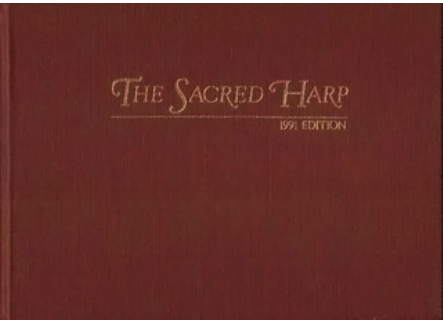
and promotion of that little booklet.

A few years ago, Annie Grieshop helped me find a relatively cheap printer and even schlepped boxes of the guide from Iowa to Chicago. I soon realized, however, that as much as I loved the publishing world, I was not cut out for sales and distribution. And I was getting into heated arguments with local postal clerks over international shipping rates, suddenly an issue with the overseas spread of Sacred Harp. So this year, after suggestions and encouragement, notably from Chris Thorman in California, I decided to publish the guide online. It's available as a free download on the Fasola.org resources page.

I don't know how many copies of the guide are in circulation, but it must be over a thousand by now. I will continue to update it, albeit irregularly. Thanks to everyone who has taken time to comment on the beginner's guide, and extra thanks to everyone who helped me to sing. ■

The Sacred Harp Publishing Company is a non-profit organization that promotes traditional Sacred Harp singing, community, and culture across the United States and around the world. SHPC publishes *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* and other books, recordings, and resources that support Sacred Harp singing.

Books available



<b><i>The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition</i></b>	The best collection of sacred songs, hymns, odes, and anthems ever offered the singing public for general use.
<b><i>Original Sacred Harp: Centennial Edition</i></b>	A commemorative reprint of the historic 1911 edition of <i>The Sacred Harp</i> , with a new introduction.
<b><i>The Makers of the Sacred Harp</i></b>	Companion to <i>The Sacred Harp</i> , tracing the sources of every tune and text in our songbook.
<b><i>Legacy of the Sacred Harp</i></b>	One singer's quest to reconnect with family ancestors who composed, sang, and lived by the words of <i>The Sacred Harp</i> .

For ordering information visit [originalsacredharp.com](http://originalsacredharp.com), email [ordering@originalsacredharp.com](mailto:ordering@originalsacredharp.com) or write to Sacred Harp Publishing Company, c/o Jesse P. Karlsberg, 318 Arizona Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30307.



Connect with the Sacred Harp Community

For additional issues of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter plus audio and video extras. Visit [originalsacredharp.com/newsletter/](http://originalsacredharp.com/newsletter/).

Find a singing in your area and learn more about Sacred Harp singing. Annual singings are held almost every weekend of the year, and there are monthly or weekly practice singings in most US states and several other countries. All welcome beginners! Visit [fasola.org/singings](http://fasola.org/singings) for a singing directory.

Consider attending Camp Fasola, a weeklong all-ages summer camp teaching Sacred Harp singing and traditions. Visit [campfasola.org](http://campfasola.org) for more information.

.....