

AN OVERVIEW OF WIND BAND REPERTOIRE BASED ON SHAPE-NOTE MELODIES
AND A STUDY OF WORKS BASED ON THE TUNE “WONDROUS LOVE”

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF ARTS

BY

STUART ALEXANDER IVEY

DISSERTATION ADVISORS: DR. THOMAS CANEVA AND DR. LINDA POHLY

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the past, present, and future singers of shape-note music. As a sixth-generation singer, I have spent my whole life surrounded by Sacred

Harp music and the community of people who take part in it, and I am proud to pass this tradition on to the seventh generation of singers in my family. I believe that everyone with an interest in shape-note music should have the opportunity to hear it in person and join in by singing. The growing popularity of shape-note music has reduced the geographic limitations that once existed in this genre, as shape-note music is being sung across the United States and in numerous foreign countries. Most people who hear shape-note music for the first time are enamored with its raw power and intensity. The style of this music and the people who sing it encourage untrained musicians of all backgrounds to participate to the best of their ability with the acceptance of an unpolished sound. The community of Sacred Harp singers is one that accepts individuals for who they are, regardless of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, sexuality, political affiliation, and any other distinctive personal features, and I look forward to continuing to play a part in the growth of this music and its traditions.

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: An Overview of Wind Band Repertoire Based on Shape-Note Melodies and a Study of Works Based on the Tune “Wondrous Love”

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This study provides an overview of wind band repertoire based on shape-note melodies with a focus on the tune WONDROUS LOVE. Of the eighty-one known works for band based on shape-note tunes, thirteen are based on the tune WONDROUS LOVE, a hymn first published in William Walker’s *Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* in 1840. These thirteen works are separated into chapters by grade level (Grade 2-3, Grade 3.5-4, Grade 5). In each chapter, all applicable works are discussed generally, and one representative work from each grouping is studied in greater detail – Greg Danner’s *Wondrous Love*, Michael Cox’s *Variations on a Theme of Wondrous Love*, and the first movement of Dwayne Milburn’s *American Hymnsong Suite*, “Prelude on ‘Wondrous Love.’” In particular, I examine the melody, harmony, instrumentation/orchestration, and any other important compositional factors or conducting considerations in each representative work. In addition, the list of all eighty-one known works, as of publication, are included in an appendix. The intent of this study is to provide conductors a starting point for choosing repertoire based on shape-note melodies, offer composers and theorists a view into the representative works, and provide historical context for all interested in shape-note music and wind band repertoire.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A Brief History of the Shape-Note Singing Tradition

Shape-note music has a history that spans more than 200 years in America. William Little and William Smith are widely credited with inventing the four-shape music notation that first appeared in the book *The Easy Instructor* in 1801.¹ This system provides a scale of FA-SOL-LA-FA-SOL-LA-MI-FA where “FA” is represented by a triangle-shaped note head, “SOL” by an oval, “LA” by a rectangle, and “MI” by a diamond.

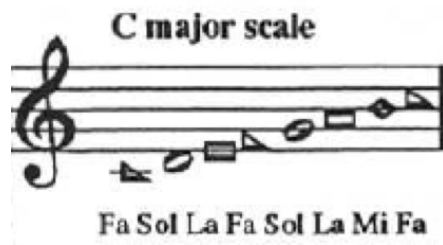


Figure 1.1. Major scale based on four-shape music notation.²

At least thirty-five tune books with this four-shape system (or a seven-shape system based on the more familiar “DO-RE-MI” scale) were compiled and published throughout the nineteenth century, either as a companion to singing schools or for regular worship.³ Many of these tunebooks are still in use today, the most popular of which is *The Sacred Harp*, first printed in 1844 under the guidance of B.F. White and E.J. King and most recently revised in 1991 with

¹ Buell Cobb, *The Sacred Harp* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 66.

² Hugh McGraw, ed., *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Revision* (Bremen, GA: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1991), 18.

³ David Warren Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 3.

another revision in progress in the 2020s. Many of the tunes found in *The Sacred Harp* were first seen in the *Southern Harmony*, a book published by William Walker in 1835.⁴

Shape-note music served three main purposes in the 19th century: as worship music in southern churches; as an educational tool to aid in sight-singing; and as a business opportunity for itinerant singing masters. Many rural churches in Appalachia and the Bible Belt could not afford to purchase an organ or piano and, before shape-note tunebooks found their way to congregations, worshipers participated in a form of singing called “lining out.”⁵ In this technique, a song leader would sing a line of text to a familiar melody and the congregation would repeat the same music back in what was a disorganized unison at best. The addition of a songbook that included melodic and harmonic elements that were taught to the congregation immediately improved the music in these churches. The tunebooks were peddled by traveling musician-salesmen, many of whom had compiled their own book to teach from during multi-day singing schools. These singing schools often served an important purpose beyond financial gain for the itinerant singing masters and music education for churchgoers; the singing school often became a social event for the community where young people could meet other singers who may not go to their church or their school.⁶

Most shape-note tunes were first composed in three parts, with the melody in the tenor (sung by both men and women in octaves), a complementary treble part (also sung by both men

⁴ William Walker, *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (Philadelphia: E.W. Miller, 1835).

⁵ Cobb, 80.

⁶ Kiri Miller, *Traveling Home* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 7.

and women in octaves), and a bass part.⁷ In 1911, alto parts were added to most of the existing songs, and since then, it has been the tradition to write music in four parts.⁸ The music is composed in a unique style of dispersed harmony that features voice crossings, dyadic and quartal harmony often lacking the third of the chord, parallel fourths and fifths, and instructions for the singer to use the “pure, full, firm, and certain” voice.⁹ Sacred Harp¹⁰ gatherings have traditionally followed the format of an “all-day singing” or “convention,” usually lasting from about 9:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. with breaks every hour and a “Dinner on the Grounds” during the noon hour. Individual singers take turns in the middle of a “hollow square” surrounded by the singers in four parts. Each singer is given the opportunity to pick a song to “lead” during all-day singings that often feature more than 100 songs in a day. Since 2003, more than 200 all-day singings have been held worldwide each year.¹¹ More recently, singers have regularly held smaller gatherings (often quarterly, monthly, or bi-weekly) in metropolitan areas and other regions with significant populations of singers.

⁷ Early editions of tune book such as *Southern Harmony* and *The Sacred Harp* are available via IMSLP.

⁸ Cobb, 91.

⁹ McGraw, 20-22.

¹⁰ In this document, the phrase “Sacred Harp” will be used in two ways. When referring to the 1844 tune book titled *The Sacred Harp*, italics will be used. If the phrase “Sacred Harp” is used without italics, it will refer to the common acceptance of Sacred Harp as a label for the genre of shape-note music that is sung out of *The Sacred Harp* book.

¹¹ Jesse Karlsberg and Robert Dunn, “Mapping the ‘Big Minutes’: Visualizing Sacred Harp's Geographic Coalescence and Expansion, 1995–2014,” *Southern Spaces* (blog), January 23, 2018, <https://southernspaces.org/2017/mapping-big-minutes-visualizing-sacred-harps-geographic-coalescence-and-expansion-1995-2014/>.

Since the folk revival of the 1960s and 70s, shape-note singing (specifically from the most enduring tunebook *The Sacred Harp*) has made its way into the public view and attracted singers who were not introduced to shape-note singing in a rural southern church.¹² More recently, the ability to advertise and connect via the internet has made shape-note singing an international genre, with gatherings in nearly every US state and more than a dozen other countries.¹³ Individuals of varied musical backgrounds and from different walks of life, diverse religions, races, and political views can join together in music.¹⁴ In short, what started as a way to improve singing in rural churches has grown into a living tradition full of opportunities for anyone.

Shape-Note Melodies in Wind Band¹⁵ Repertoire

There are at least eighty-one documented occurrences of shape-note melodies found in wind band works.¹⁶ The first wind band piece to include a shape-note tune was Clare Grundman's *Kentucky 1800*. It was published in 1955 and is still frequently performed. Only eleven of the eighty-one (14%) examples were written between 1955 and 1990, with the remaining seventy (86%) written since 1990. This surge in shape-note band works parallels the

¹² Cobb, 159.

¹³ See www.fasola.org.

¹⁴ Miller, 4.

¹⁵ For the sake of this document, the term "Wind Band" represents large ensembles of woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments (as well as String Bass). "Wind Band" can interchangeably substitute for ensembles such as Wind Ensemble, Concert Band, Symphonic Band, etc.

¹⁶ See Appendix A for a database of all known works based on shape-note melodies

growth in awareness of and interest in shape-note singing.¹⁷ Forty-one different composers have written band works based on shape-note melodies, which shows a tendency for composers who use shape-note melodies as source material to do so multiple times. A total of forty-five different tunes are found among the eighty-one works.

Band music is often categorized by difficulty from Grade 1 to Grade 6. Grade 1 is meant to equate to music that can be played by first year and other inexperienced players, while Grade 6 music is usually reserved for the top collegiate and professional ensembles. Only eight works of eighty-one (10%) making use of a shape-note melody are categorized below Grade 3, thirty (37%) are Grade 3 or 3.5, twenty (25%) are Grade 4, seventeen (21%) are Grade 5, and two (2%) are Grade 6.

While communicating with composers about their wind band music based on shape-note melodies, one topic that was mentioned by at least four composers was their influence by and connection to composers from earlier generations who had used folk melodies as source material for their repertoire. While none of these earlier composers have any works verified as being based on shape-note melodies (for wind band or other ensemble), some of the names that were cited were Aaron Copland (1900-1990), Percy Aldridge Grainger (1882-1961), Gustav Holst (1874-1934), and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958). While Copland's and Holst's compositional output for original wind band works is limited, Grainger and Vaughan Williams wrote numerous works for band, many of which are organized around folk music. One composer even mentioned how daunting a task it was to compare their wind band works based on folk music to compositions such as Holst's suites for band or Grainger's "Lincolnshire Posy."

¹⁷ Jesse Karlsberg and Robert Dunn, "Mapping the 'Big Minutes.'"