

SINGING WITH SPIRIT AND UNDERSTANDING:
PSALMODY AS HOLISTIC PRACTICE IN
LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

KAREN L. SHADLE: *Singing with Spirit and Understanding:
Psalmody as Holistic Practice in Late Eighteenth-Century New England*
(Under the Direction of Dr. Philip Vandermeer)

Late eighteenth-century New England was, above all else, a society based on religion. As such, sacred song dominated the musical landscape and was performed in a wide variety of both private and public contexts. With growing political independence came a desire for some degree of cultural independence, and a school of native composers of psalmody flourished. At the same time, the eighteenth century's major religious movement, the Great Awakening, refocused religious thinking and demanded a new understanding of acts of devotion. This new theology called for an emphasis on biblical literacy, emotional outpouring, and each individual's unique relationship with God, among other things. Psalmody embodied this radical shift and offered a concrete way of practicing the ideals of the Great Awakening. The discourse of sacred song at this time addressed the ways in which it improved the whole person—soul, body, and mind. Religious leaders, composers, and tunebook compilers alike endorsed this holistic view of psalmody, believing that the act of singing was crucial for the overall health of individuals and whole communities.

To Avery

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PREFACE

In discussing the deep connections between religious and musical life in eighteenth-century New England, I find myself immersed in a topic that speaks directly to my own spiritual and professional life. As a Christian, a singer, and a church musician, I cannot but relate to the arguments presented by religious leaders and commentators in early America. Many of their conclusions are, I believe, very much relevant to music ministry in Christian churches in the twenty-first century. For example, the assertions that the act of singing sacred words aligns the soul, body, and mind with God, holistically heals the individual, and requires the participation of all regardless of innate skill level are themes that I repeat again and again to choirs and congregations under my leadership.

The subjects of this study would likely agree that psalm singing elevates the soul, bringing it closer to God, and that sacred song discourages sin and encourages right actions. Statements such as these are no more empirically provable today as they were in the eighteenth century; they are not presented as facts, but rather as statements of religious truths that were more or less commonly held by white Protestant Christian groups in New England. The underlying premise of these beliefs—that is, that a more personal relationship with God is both possible and desirable—is foundational for the formation of American Protestantism, and it continues to find expression in modern Christianity and in American religious culture. As someone who firmly believes (1) in God, (2) in a personal connection with God, and (3) in music's important role in fostering that connection, I have a unique relationship to the subject of my research, as I uncover materials that resonate with my own Christian identity and mission as a leader of congregational song.

Furthermore, because of my intimacy with the topic at hand, I felt that as a researcher, I could become something of a participant observer in this historical culture. Although I could not directly converse with the long-deceased subjects of my research, I nonetheless attempted to interrogate their values, attitudes, and feelings and to reconstruct a portion of their way of life. One way of achieving more of an insider's perspective on this repertory was to sing the songs myself and to teach the underlying attitudes about singing to the vocal groups with which I have regular contact (i.e. choirs and congregations). Because of these close ties to my own spiritual and ministerial life, I admit that it is sometimes difficult to interact with the discourse of sacred song presented here without some measure of enthusiasm. I hope that the reader finds no bias in my conclusions and treatment of the repertory, but rather a passionate engagement with the material.

Secondly, I wish to draw the reader's attention at the outset to one bibliographic source that figures prominently in my research. *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800* is a recently digitized collection based on the extensive and celebrated "American Bibliography" by Charles Evans (and portions of the supplement by Roger Bristol). It includes thousands of documents—music, pamphlets, legal documents, textbooks, and other miscellany—published in America. Many of the primary documents that I investigate in this study, especially sermons and speeches, were accessed via *Early American Imprints*. (Throughout, I make note of this using the abbreviation *EAI*.) These materials were invaluable in helping me construct a clearer picture of the culture surrounding sacred song in the late eighteenth century, and a majority of the non-musical sources (and some of the musical ones) have not been explored by scholars to date. With primary sources in this convenient, online, and searchable format, I was able to conduct my research with infinitely greater speed than I otherwise could have. *Early American Imprints* represents exhaustive work by many bibliographers, researchers, and library technicians, and its existence greatly facilitates the interpretive work of musicologists, who seek to analyze, situate, and understand the music that is now so readily accessible. I am much indebted to all those involved in making these materials available, and I highly recommend *EAI, Series I* (and its

companion, *Series II: Shaw-Shoemaker, 1801-1819*) to scholars of American music. I hope that more research is coming that will make use of these excellent resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin, reflecting on sacred music in eighteenth-century America, remarked, “one could not walk thro’ the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”¹ Franklin’s observations reveal a culture saturated with sacred song in which many segments of society—the “*different families of every street*”—embraced singing as an important part of everyday life. Although he was speaking specifically about his time in Philadelphia, Franklin’s comments might apply equally well to the broader area encompassed by the northern colonies, where Protestant theology pervaded daily life. The act of singing seemed to accompany both public worship and private devotion, small social gatherings and large, community-wide events. Observers of this scene, including writers such as Franklin, religious leaders, and composers of psalmody, cited the omnipresence of sacred song as evidence for its ability to draw a community closer together. They believed that the act of singing sacred words improved the whole person—soul, body, and mind—which, in turn, built up the society in a wholesome way. I argue that sacred song, viewed through this lens, contributed to a radical shift in American religious thought. Psalmody embodied the new personalism of the Great Awakening, the diminishing authority of doctrine and hierarchical leadership,

¹ Benjamin Franklin, *Franklin’s Autobiography*, ed. Frank Woodworth Pine (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), 115. Franklin began writing the autobiography in 1771-72 and continued to work on it until his death in 1790. Here, he speaks of the conditions in Philadelphia at around mid-century.

and the cooperative ethos that was so crucial to the health of New England communities during the volatile decades of the late eighteenth century.

The intertwining of religious devotion through song and the hum of daily life is not surprising in the context of early America. Religion has been an important part of life in America for much of its history, especially for the first Anglo-American settlers. Many of those individuals were prompted to make the long journey to the New World because of religious intolerance in their homelands, and many of the first American communities formed around commonly-held religious beliefs. After the initial wave of settlement in the seventeenth century, the colonies grew in number, establishing their own laws and norms for religious toleration. Each colony became identified to some extent by the religious group or groups it harbored. In some colonies, laws and moral codes were one and the same. Church buildings were usually the most prominent edifices in any community, often doubling as meeting places for governing bodies and civic groups. Religiosity pervaded almost every aspect of life, and religious rhetoric formed the foundation for writings on a variety of subjects, including politics, medicine, current events, family life, geography, and science.

Religion was at the heart of music during this early period of American history, too. More specifically, religious devotion found expression through vocal music. Sacred song dominated the musical landscape, and religious allusions could be found in nearly all types of secular song as well. Bibles and sacred tunebooks formed a large proportion of the inventory of American printers; their popularity amid scarce resources indicates their importance to colonial society. Traditional musical “institutions,” like professional orchestras and opera companies, were, for the most part, not to be found in eighteenth-

century America, but the church and the singing school were two venues that promoted sacred music in nearly every town and city in New England.

Unaccompanied sacred song proliferated to a greater extent than instrumental music in late-eighteenth century America for a very practical reason: the voice was virtually the only musical instrument available to early Americans. New England's churches and singing schools were rarely equipped with instruments of any type. Instrument-making in America was in its infancy, and while a few wealthy churches and individuals owned keyboard or other instruments, most did not. In the absence of instruments, *a cappella* singing was the norm.² Three- and four-part settings, which suited all vocal ranges and highlighted the interdependence of voices, became the favorites of American congregations. A lack of instrumental resources forced a repertory of vocal music on settlers, but what might have been perceived as a handicap soon became a strength. The voice and its unique qualities and capabilities emerged as hallmarks of this period of American music.³

In establishing a repertory of sacred vocal music, eighteenth-century Americans absorbed a broad range of influences both from Europe and their own natural surroundings. In spite of the American Revolution and its anti-Loyalist sentiment, New Englanders were deeply connected to cultural and philosophical trends of the Old World. They were at the same time children of Enlightenment rationalism, embracing learning

² In this sense, American congregations, small, localized, and with loose or nonexistent ties to denominational hierarchies, had much more in common with the rural English parochial tradition. See chapter 6, "Country Psalmody," in Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 141–203.

³ Although vocal music was more popular and accessible for practical reasons, there was a handful of composers of keyboard and harpsichord music active during this period also, notably Francis Hopkinson, Alexander Reinagle, and Benjamin Carr.

and philosophy, and down-to-earth pragmatists, immersed in the realities of a harsh, isolated, and unpredictable environment. The singing voice seemed to bridge the gap between these competing influences. The voice was the ultimate practical instrument—portable, universal, inexpensive, capable of a wide range of expression, and easily honed through regular practice. The act of singing was both a lofty expression of human artistry and a mechanical movement of the body. In this context, sacred song was not for mere listening; it was something to wholly participate in—through sincere belief in the religious sentiment it expressed, skillful exercise of the vocal instrument, and careful understanding of the music and text. In other words, sacred song required the full commitment of soul, body, and mind. Writers, religious leaders, and composers alike discussed sacred song with attention to this threefold division of soul, body, and mind, emphasizing song's ability to benefit each of these three aspects of the whole human person. The term holism, with both its modern medicinal and spiritual connotations, although not used by eighteenth-century writers most accurately describes the predominant attitude towards individuals and their relationship with sacred song. With this focus on the whole person, these authors pointed to sacred song as a concrete way of practicing the new religious ideals of the Great Awakening.

I believe that a theory of sacred song, which integrated soul, body, and mind and posited a direct applicability of theological ideals to everyday life through song, underpinned the discourse psalmody. Like most other things in eighteenth-century America, this theory drew on scripture for support and justification. Colonial religious leaders seemed to have a particular affinity for St. Paul, who, like them, worked to build new Christian communities with limited resources. Paul's words on singing formed the

core of the holistic philosophy described above. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul argues for a unified and multi-layered approach to song: “I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15).⁴ He endorses the physical act of singing (as opposed to mere listening), and calls for an inspired performance as well as a high degree of mental engagement.

Late eighteenth-century preachers, tunebook compilers, and composers took this rather demanding philosophy to heart, often describing it in terms of an inward and an outward expression of psalmody. This Pauline quotation appears, with commentary, in the prefaces of many late eighteenth-century tunebooks, serving as a justification for learning simultaneously the methods of psalmody (the outward expression) and the meaning of the text (the inward expression). Presbyterian minister and Mohegan Indian Samson Occom presents such an argument in the preface to *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1774):

The People ought not to be contented with the outward Form of Singing, but should seek after the *inward* part:—There are two Parts of Singing, as St. Paul informs us, in 1 Cor. 14, 15. (*I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*) To sing without the Spirit, (though with good Method) is like the Sound of a musical Instrument without Life.⁵

Occom argued for singing that combines technical facility (“good method”) with something more intangible (“the Spirit”), which brings life to the vocal instrument. Similarly, Thomas Walter’s instructional text from 1721, reprinted several times in the

⁴ This and all other Biblical passages in this study are taken from the King James Version, the standard for most English-speaking Protestants then and now.

⁵ Here, as with all quotations from primary sources, I have kept the original orthography. Emphases are in the original unless otherwise noted. Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations* (New-London, CT: Timothy Green, 1774), 3. Accessed via *Early American Imprints*, ed. Charles Evans, series I (New Canaan, CT: Readex, 2002), hereafter noted as *EAI*.

1760s and 70s, explains the rules of music and the art of singing and connects the outward, bodily aspect of singing with the inward, heartfelt aspect, concluding that both are essential for an acceptable act of praise to God. In the preface, Walter includes a document signed by the influential Puritan ministers Cotton and Increase Mather, along with fourteen others:

We would above all Exhort, That the *main Concern* of all may be to make it not a meer *Bodily Exercise*, but *sing with Grace in their Hearts*, & with Minds Attentive to the *Truths* in the Psalms which they Sing, and affected with them, so that in their *Hearts they may make a Melody to the Lord*.⁶

The authors emphasize that singing cannot be merely physical; it necessarily involves the hearts and minds of the performers as well. Passages such as these in tunebooks and theoretical treatises show that the compilers and authors were religious as well as musical men who saw the spiritual, bodily, and intellectual aspects of singing to be inextricably mixed. The idea that lay persons were capable of involving their minds and bodies in acts of devotion (as opposed to being passive observers) was part of a radical shift in religious thought that could trace its roots back to Martin Luther and the Reformation. Psalmody and the institutions surrounding it made this body-mind-soul spiritual experience accessible and expressible for the broad public.

Preachers also espoused this teaching about sacred song and sought to reach their congregations by filling their sermons with messages similar to those found in tunebooks. They often applied musical terminology, such as melody and harmony, to describe the relationship between inward and outward expressions. Consider these examples from late eighteenth-century sermons:

⁶ Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note. Fitted to the Meanest Capacities* (Boston: J. Franklin, 1721), ii-iii. Accessed via EAI.

Between the voice and the heart, there should be the strictest harmony.⁷

This duty is to be performed, not only with an outward gracefulness of voice, but also with inward gracious melody, and elevated, spiritual devotion of heart.⁸

In singing praises unto God the heart must be engaged ... Chanting hymns of praise to God are pleasing to him, only when they are the outward expressions of inward pious affections.⁹

A hymn entitled, “The Inefficacy of Hymns without Devotion,” from a 1783 collection, best summarizes this belief about the integral union of body and spirit in the act of singing:

But what are tuneful, sacred songs,
Or what our measur’d lays?
Unless thy spirit warm our hearts,
How flat—our hymns of praise!¹⁰

Observations about the salutary effects of singing were not only to be found in sacred tunebooks and hymnals, where one might expect to find such laudatory remarks. Publications dedicated mainly to other topics, such as health, morality, and education, also contain comments about music and song and the positive effects that flow from them. Nor was this attitude about song confined to the written word. Sermons, lectures, and public speeches also addressed the topic and were later published in written form,

⁷ Ezra Weld, “A Sermon, Preached at a Singing Lecture” (Springfield, MA: Ezra W. Weld, 1789), 21. Sermon preached May 21, 1788 in Braintree, Massachusetts. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁸ Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green., 1773), 13. Delivered at a singing lecture in a parish in Simsbury, CT, March 18, 1773, on the occasion of introducing regular singing into public use in worship there. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁹ William Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing Praises unto God” (Danvers, MA: E. Russell, 1779), 12. Delivered at an occasional lecture in Andover, MA, April 6, 1779. Symmes was pastor of the First Church in Andover. Accessed via *EAI*.

¹⁰ *A Collection of Hymns More Particularly Designed for the Use of the West Society in Boston* (Boston: T. and J. Fleet, 1783), 162. Accessed via *EAI*.

apparently due to their popularity. These documents indicate a substantial and vibrant discussion of sacred song in late eighteenth-century New England and a set of deeply-held socio-religious beliefs about song. The conviction that sacred songs, and especially the act of singing them, benefited the whole person—soul, body, and mind—is evident from the language used to describe song in these sources. Ezra Weld, minister at a Congregational church in Braintree, Massachusetts, aptly summarized the intertwining of these three dimensions in a sermon delivered on May 21, 1788: “the operation [of singing] often issues, not merely in a *physical* rhapsody, but in moral improvement. It soothes the *mind* into calmness; heals the festering wounds of anxiety, and furnishes the *soul* for the sublimest contemplations.”¹¹ Weld suggests a broad range of positive effects that singing might have for the individual. Congregationalist minister Ichabod Skinner, speaking at a singing lecture in 1796, described the unified expression of self through song using similar language: “As all our religion supposes a mixture of *bodily* and *mental* exercise, there is nothing, which more than music, can engage the whole *soul*, and call up every power into divine service.”¹² Due to their belief in these benefits, pastors such as Weld and Skinner encouraged the practice of singing both inside and outside the house of worship. Religious leaders recognized the ability of music to bring the whole person into a state of holiness. They followed the lead of St. Paul in insisting on spiritual practices that involved understanding as well as heartfelt belief, with singing being chief among them.

¹¹ Weld, “A Sermon,” 14. Emphasis added.

¹² Ichabod L. Skinner, “A Discourse on Music” (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 17. Delivered at a singing lecture in North Bolton, CT in February, 1796. Emphasis added. Accessed via *EAI*.

Scope and Context

In presenting this cultural history of American psalmody through the lens of religion, I have chosen to focus on the final forty years of eighteenth century. The history of American psalmody extends from the landing at Plymouth until the present day, but during the period from 1760 to 1800, American psalmody was at the height of its popularity. Those decades also encompass several significant events in the religious, political, and cultural life of America—not the least of which was the American Revolution—that affected the meanings of psalm singing in the context of New England.

Psalmody, broadly defined, was the dominant musical genre of the day and included not only settings of English translations of the psalms, but other sacred texts in similar three- and four-part *a cappella* vocal settings. From the early 1760s, the demand for natively composed psalmody grew steadily, and the first New England school of composers began to take shape. James Lyon's *Urania* (1761) is often noted by American music historians as a landmark publication, being the first tunebook to include a significant number of American compositions alongside British ones. The golden age of American psalmody, in terms of its popularity and dissemination, lasted throughout the 1770s, '80s, and '90s, as evidenced by a proliferation of new tunes by American composers, the publication of dozens of new tunebooks compiled and printed by Americans, and lively discussions about sacred song in a variety of American sources. The sheer abundance of sacred song in print in New England from 1760 to 1800, mostly in the form of sacred tunebooks, confirms the widespread popularity of the genre.

At the same time, these decades brought great demographic, social, and political change in New England. While song dominated the musical landscape, political and

religious history in America were at important crossroads as well. Much of the American Revolution's fighting occurred in New England, mostly in and around Boston. Yet singing schools and tunebooks continued to flourish in those areas. Amid intense ideological and military conflict concerning political freedom and cultural independence, civic and religious leaders continued to talk about singing, often relating it to those lofty concepts like democracy and liberty that underpinned the war itself. This illustrates an obvious yet important point: musical life did not stop to tend to urgent political matters (see Figure I.1). Social and cultural activities like singing continued and even thrived amid political turmoil. In fact, the flourishing of tunebooks and other documents related to sacred song during this period suggests that singing was deemed especially crucial in difficult times, perhaps because of its spiritual aspects. A number of the tunebooks listed below, such as *American Singing Book*, *Federal Harmony*, and *Thirteen Hymns, Suited to the Present Times*, bear titles that show an awareness of political happenings and American identity.

Figure I.1: Timeline of American political, religious, and cultural history, 1761-1800

1761	● James Lyon, <i>Urania</i> [Philadelphia]; second printing in 1767
1763	● Treaty of Paris ends French and Indian War
1764	● Stamp Act raises taxes on colonists
1769	● Lewis Edson, Sr. opens a singing school in Halifax, MA. It continues until 1776.
1770	● Boston Massacre ● William Billings, <i>The New-England Psalm-Singer</i> [Boston]

- 1771 ● Zabdiel Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure, and Advantages of Church-Musick” [Lancaster, MA]

- 1773 ● Boston Tea Party
 ● Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” [New Haven, CT]

- 1774 ● Englishwoman Ann Lee and her followers, later known as the Shakers, settle near Albany, NY
 ● First Continental Congress
 ● Billings begins teaching a singing school in Stoughton, MA. Among the pupils listed is Jacob French, a later composer of psalmody.

- 1775 ● Battle of Lexington and Concord marks beginning of the Revolutionary War
 ● Battle of Bunker Hill
 ● Second Continental Congress
 ● Samuel-John Mills, “The nature and importance of the duty of singing praise to God, considered” [Torrington, CT]

- 1776 ● Declaration of Independence signed [Philadelphia]
 ● Elhanan Winchester, *Thirteen Hymns, Suited to the Present Times* [Baltimore]

- 1777 ● Surrender of Burgoyne at Battle of Saratoga

- 1778 ● France enters the War
 ● Billings, *The Singing Master’s Assistant* [Boston]

- 1779 ● Andrew Law, *Select Harmony* [Cheshire, CT]; subsequent printings: ‘82, ‘84

- 1781 ● Battle of Yorktown marks the end of fighting
 ● Billings, *The Psalm-Singer’s Amusement* [Boston]

- 1782 ● Simeon Jocelin, *The Chorister’s Companion* [New Haven, CT]; subsequent printings: ‘88, ‘92

- 1783 ● Treaty of Paris officially ends the American Revolution

- 1784 ● John Wesley consecrates the first Methodist Episcopal bishop, Thomas Coke

- 1785 ● Daniel Read, *American Singing Book* [New Haven, CT]; subsequent printings: '86, '87, '93

- 1786 ● Billings, *The Suffolk Harmony* [Boston]
 ● *Worcester Collection* [Worcester, MA]; subsequent printings: '88, '91, '92, '94, '97, '00
 ● Stoughton [MA] Musical Society formed, the oldest choral society in the United States

- 1787 ● Constitutional Convention [Philadelphia]

- 1788 ● Constitution ratified
 ● Timothy Swan, *Federal Harmony* [Boston, MA]; subsequent printings: '90, '92, '93

- 1789 ● Bill of Rights adopted
 ● Several quasi-sacred odes composed to celebrate the inauguration of George Washington

- 1790 ● Seat of government moves from New York City to Philadelphia

- 1791 ● Vermont admitted to Union

- 1792 ● Kentucky admitted to Union

- 1794 ● Billings, *The Continental Harmony* [Boston]

- 1796 ● Tennessee admitted to Union
 ● Ichabod Skinner, "A Discourse on Music" [North Bolton, CT]

- 1797 ● Timothy Langdon, "The Pleasure and Advantages of Church Music" [Danbury, CT]

- 1800 ● Seat of government seat moves from Philadelphia to Washington, DC
 ● Election of Thomas Jefferson marks beginning of "Virginia Dynasty"
 ● First known Methodist camp meeting held in Logan County, KY
 ● Death of William Billings

The later decades of the eighteenth century brought tremendous growth in New England, both in sheer numbers of people and in cultural output. It is difficult to reconstruct population figures from before the first national census in 1790, but approximate data show a tripling of the white population of British North America from around one million near mid-century to 3.17 million in 1790.¹³ Most of these people were concentrated in New England and the Mid-Atlantic coastal region. Some towns were of significant size, but even the largest, like Boston, still contained only a fraction of the state's population as a whole. Nineteenth-century America would feature more densely populated economic and cultural centers, but during the late eighteenth century, small towns separated by sparse rural landscape were the norm.¹⁴

As indicated in Figure I.1, the year 1800 signals a number of important shifts in New England's political and cultural climate that cleared the way for a new musical era in which psalmody played a less important role. First, in 1800, the seat of the national government was relocated from Philadelphia to Washington, DC. In addition, the election of Thomas Jefferson in that year marked the beginning of the "Virginia Dynasty," a succession of presidents and important figures from Virginia who controlled national politics for the next quarter century. Both of these changes indicate a southward political shift. For more than a century and throughout the Revolutionary War period, New England's and the upper seaboard's larger towns—Boston, New Haven, Newburyport, Philadelphia, and others—had been the hubs of colonial activity. They did not by any

¹³ Michael R. Haines and Richard Hall Steckel, *A Population History of North America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150-151. The authors suggest a significant baby boom in the post-Revolution years. The authors do not estimate the growth of the non-white population (e.g. Native Americans and slaves).

¹⁴ Haines and Steckel, *A Population History*, 158-59.

means cease to be important in the nineteenth century, but a growing national consciousness and awareness of the unique economic and cultural characteristics of the South expanded the heart of America well beyond New England. In the musical arena, the early nineteenth century witnessed the migration of New England psalmody to the south and west, as it was incorporated into shape-note and folk singing traditions.

Second, many scholars mark 1800 as the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, another shift in religious thought in the United States. This movement brought a revivalist spirit similar to that of the eighteenth-century Awakening, which will be explained in chapter two, but with a new focus on social activism. Issues such as temperance, abolition, and women's rights became the subjects of religious discourse and evangelical preaching during the antebellum period. The reach of the Second Great Awakening extended further South, as its fervor was strongest in the Appalachian region, including parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and the Carolinas.¹⁵ Singing schools continued to be important venues for American religious life, but a new institution—the camp meeting—recombined the religious, social, and pedagogical aims of the singing school in a more diffuse rural environment. The first recorded occurrence of one of these camp meetings was in Logan County, Kentucky, in the summer of 1800.¹⁶

Finally, the year 1800 witnessed the death of William Billings, by far the most prolific of the Yankee tunesmiths. Although he descended into poverty and relative obscurity in the final years of his life, Billings's works were popular during his lifetime and continued to appear in later collections, both Northern and Southern. Other

¹⁵ Bret E. Carroll, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 62.

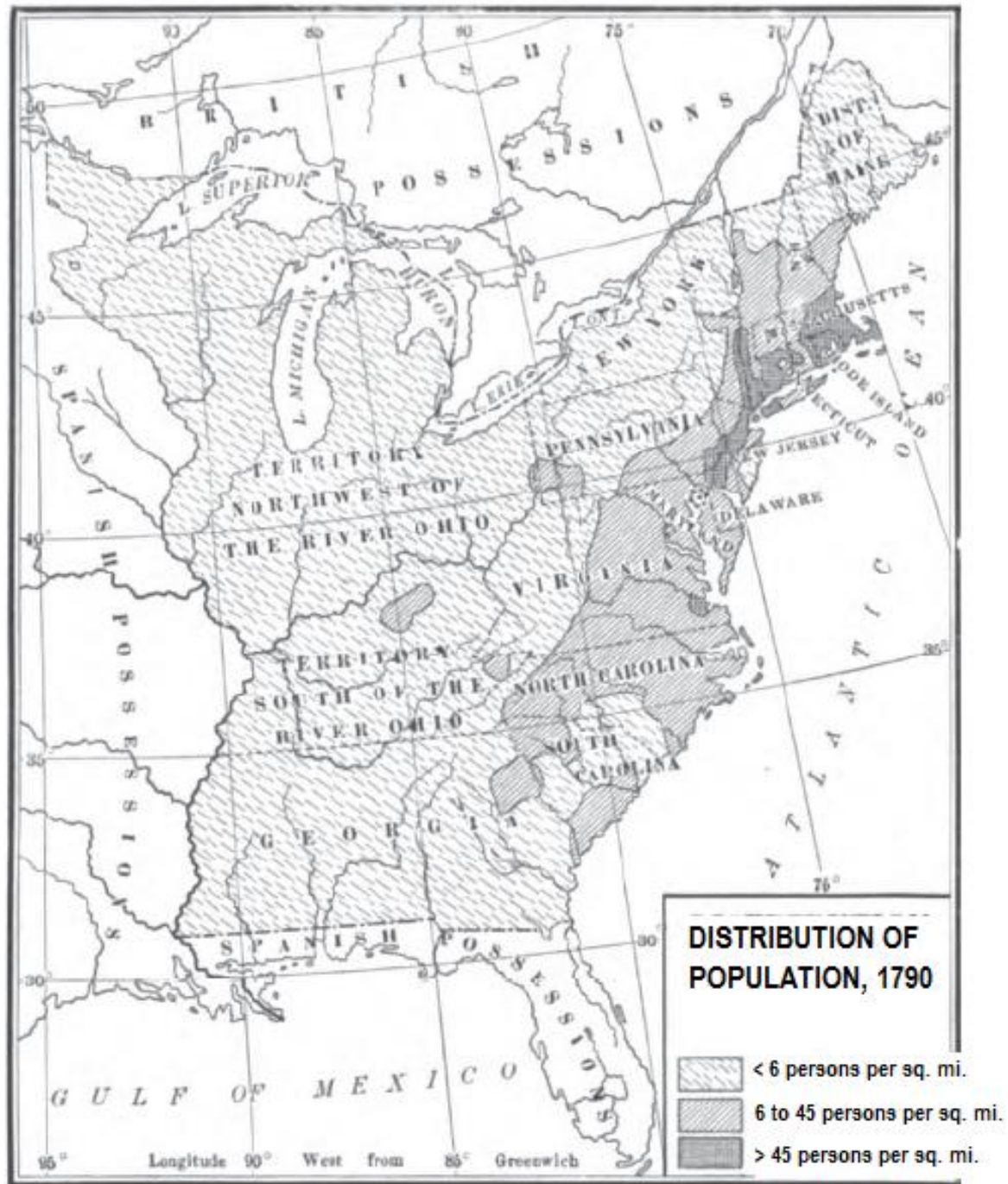
¹⁶ See Chapter 5, "Kentucky Ablaze," in John Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996). The camp meetings and revival services held in Kentucky in 1800 are considered by many scholars as the beginning of the Second Great Awakening.

psalmodists carried on with psalmody composition well into the nineteenth century, but production was never again as high as it was during Billings's lifetime. While the importance of singing and its impact on daily life certainly extended before and after this time period, the decades from 1760 to 1800, covered in this study, provide the richest evidence for early America's concept of singing as a holistic activity that brought theological and political realities of the time into focus and laid the foundation for a society that viewed song as an educational and spiritual tool.

Furthermore, the influence of psalmody on daily life was strongest in New England. Therefore, I have focused my study, with a few exceptions, to this general geographical area. The modern definition of this region of the United States encompasses specific states—Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. In the pre-Independence and nation-building stages of American history, the precise borders of these areas were less clearly defined. New England during the late eighteenth century is probably best described as a general geographic area that included a conglomerate of growing towns and cities. Culturally speaking, it may extend as far west as eastern Pennsylvania, although the more pluralistic religious environment in that area surely distinguished it in many ways from the staunchly Congregationalist colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. The bulk of the American population during this time was concentrated in Northeast, specifically along the Atlantic seaboard (see Figure I.2).

What did these early American communities look like? How did they function? During the latter half of the eighteenth century, these locales were hardly urban in the same way as London or Paris. Their economic and social networks were in their infancy. The *de facto* economic structure of early American towns was not conducive to the full-

Figure I.2: Population distribution after first U. S. census, 1790¹⁷



time profession of artistic endeavors. In what might be described as a subsistence economy even in the largest cities, colonists were dependent on each other for basic

¹⁷ Taken from Dixon Ryan Fox, *Harper's Atlas of American History* (New York: Harper, 1920), 23.

necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, protection, and transportation. Citizens' roles revolved around these necessities. As a result, artistic activities and products were more remarkable endeavors than they would be in a place like eighteenth-century London, with its large population, highly specialized labor, and well-established cultural institutions. Out of necessity, music was integrated into the rigors of daily life. Those who did compose or write in America had to balance it with other duties, finding time outside of their regular professions or integrating their art with their daily work. Art and practical life blended together, as tradesmen, doctors, soldiers, and politicians were also poets, musicians, composers, and artists. (Appendix C shows the occupations of some early American psalmodists, most of whom were from the working class.) Furthermore, the various types of musical activity—composing, teaching, performing, compiling, and publishing—were closely connected, tending to be concentrated among a few individuals; one person might do them all.¹⁸

Venues and institutions specifically designed for musical performance were rare in eighteenth-century New England. Instead, psalm singing was integrated into everyday activities and locations, blending spiritual, pedagogical, and aesthetic aims. The most obvious context for psalmody was the church worship service, where the sacred texts accompanied formal prayer and praise of God. Unlike their British and other European counterparts, early American churches were usually non-hierarchical, and they often differed in theology and institutional structure from town to town. Nonetheless, within the town, the church was a central (and typically centrally-located) establishment. The

¹⁸ Richard A. Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 49; David P. McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-Century Composer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 25.

church building often doubled as a meeting house; analogously, church music also functioned as everyday music.¹⁹

A number of other venues in the typical New England town supported the practice of psalmody. Collections of psalm tunes functioned as texts for singing schools. Occasional concerts of sacred music indicate yet another very public setting for the performance of this music.²⁰ Psalmody was intended for more intimate settings, too. The home offered a place where small groups of friends or family members could enjoy sacred song together, or individuals could practice a form of private devotion. Because of its flexibility and adaptability in numerous contexts, there does not appear to be one strict set of ritual norms that accompanied early American psalmody. Sacred music enjoyed great popularity outside of the church building, and the varied settings in which it was heard is indicative of the pervasive religiosity of New England society.

The name “New England” is particularly appropriate because of the close relationship these budding American towns had with the motherland. Many elements of New England culture—from literature and music to food and fashion—were closely connected to English culture. News and artistic tastes were largely imported from London, albeit with the time lag one would expect with overseas communication in the eighteenth century. Vocal music serves as an excellent case study in this regard; nearly all psalmody circulating in America prior to the 1760s was English in origin. Even during and after the American Revolution, when common mythology might suggest that a

¹⁹ Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: Norton, 1964), 281.

²⁰ Few programs are available, but published sermons and lectures from such events speak to their importance as community events. It also seems that some pieces were composed specifically for these concerts, for example, “Anthem to Be Sung by the Charity Scholars, on Sunday, the 22d of November, at St. Paul's Church, after the Charity Sermon for the Benefit of the School” (New York, 1789).

uniquely American culture and a defiance of all things British proliferated, in truth, Englishness still pervaded life in New England to a high degree.

This is not to say that *all* of America or even all of the towns and cities in the New England area were of English origin. Pockets of German-speaking settlement and accompanying culture also flourished, most notably in the Eastern counties of Pennsylvania, in the Mohawk Valley region of New York, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and at New Bern, North Carolina. Other nationalities, like Scotch-Irish, Dutch, and French, were represented in significant number, and the varied religious landscape of the Colonies, explored in chapter two, reflects the impact of the many European groups settled in America at this time. In addition, American Indians and their cultural and religious beliefs remained an ever-present part of New England in the late eighteenth century. While these diverse cultures abutted those of British New England and certainly influenced the musical and cultural products of that society, this study focuses solely on the dominant English-language and English-culture based societies of New England. Where evident, the influence from other communities is noted.

The natural surroundings of New England also have an important, though perhaps less obvious role in defining the spatial boundaries of this study. Britain and New England shared a cool and wet climate, but beyond that similarity, the landscapes of New England and “Old” England were very different. One was an island with clearly limited and defined geography, and the other was part of a vast, uncultivated expanse, with seemingly limitless space to the north, south, and west. The concept of the wilderness with its unknown excitement and dangers must have been at the forefront of the minds of some American colonists in a way that starkly contrasted with the well-plotted and much-

farmed topography of rural England and the entrenched edifices and structured city streets of London. The concept of “vastness” seems to capture the essence of New England geography at this time. A vast ocean, which many had recently traversed, separated the Old World from the new, vast distances separated towns, and vast physical structures—hills, mountains, and waterfalls—dotted the landscape. It is likely that bridging this vastness became an underlying and perhaps unconscious goal of early American societies. Cultural products like song, which promoted togetherness and suggested a physical or spiritual connection, may have more easily found a prominent place in New England because of their ability to counterbalance this vast landscape.

Sacred song did not draw merely on biblical texts; political happenings, the natural surroundings, and culture in general all served as potential “texts” to be set to music. Uniquely American and religious themes freely intermixed in poetry and song, creating an environment where psalmody thrived.

Reception and Historical Analysis

By the end of the eighteenth century, native composers had earned a significant place in the repertory of early American psalmody. Their tunes were popular in singing schools and public worship, and they were prominent in the pages of the many new tunebooks being printed each year. As these New Englanders became more prolific and well-known, observers began to evaluate critically the quality of American psalmody. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these assessments focused on the aesthetic and technical value of the music, largely overlooking its religious and social functions. More recent analyses tend to center on William Billings as an icon of this

period in American music history, drawing connections between American independence and musical products that mixed religion and politics. A brief review of historical and musicological treatment of psalmody from the late eighteenth-century to the present day reveals some chronic biases and displays the need for research that more deeply explores the music's religious and cultural contexts.

Because of their close ties with Europe and especially England, American composers were most often compared to their counterparts overseas; usually, the comparison was not favorable. Discussion centered on the perceived inferiority, both technical and aesthetic, of American psalmody vis-à-vis Europe. A sermon on music from 1796 gives a sense of perspective and a window onto the perceived state of musical nationalism in America, as native composers dealt with the dominance of music from European nations. Here, America is applauded for "improvement" but not for achievement:

The Italians have for many years excelled, and perhaps still excel all other nations in music.—The Germans also have carried it to a great degree of perfection.—The former are most highly favored by nature and climate, but the latter have nearly equaled the former, by industry and application. The French from their national character have less excelled in the sublime and devotional, while on the other hand, the English, possessed of a phlegmatic temper, have comparatively left the cheerful and delicate for the courser and more languid strains of melancholy. America should be mentioned with respect, for her improvement in all the fine arts. And tho' we cannot in some respects rival the Europeans, we may with pleasure observe the progress, which [America] is making in every profitable and humanizing art.²¹

This self-conscious attitude toward native composition sometimes came from the ranks of American composers themselves. In the preface to *The Rural Harmony* (1793), Jacob

²¹ Ichabod L. Skinner, "A Discourse on Music" (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 5-6. Accessed via *EAI*.

Kimball offers something of an apology for his and others' amateurish attempts at composition:

In a country where music has not yet become a regular profession, it cannot be expected that a composition of this kind can stand a rigid criticism; but as every attempt to subserve the interest, or to increase the innocent pleasures of the community, deserves public patronage, the author of the following work, without further apology, presents it to the public eye.²²

Kimball accurately assesses the economic structure of New England, which could not at that time support the full-time practice of artistic pursuits like musical composition. He reminds his audience that the present collection is meant for their enjoyment and not necessarily as a display of compositional skill.

Andrew Law, who was active as a composer and compiler in the 1790s, expressed frustration with the lack of support for musical activity and the resulting poor quality of psalmody in America and called for a standard of style modeled on late eighteenth-century British psalmody.²³ In his preface to *The Musical Primer* (1794, 2nd edition), he makes the usual comparison with European works:

European compositions aim at variety and energy by guarding against the reiterated use of the perfect cords. Great numbers of the American composers, on the contrary, and as it were, on purpose to accommodate their music for harsh singing, have introduced the smooth and perfect cords, till their tunes are all sweet, languid, and lifeless.²⁴

Of course, Law viewed his own compositions as a remedy for this problem.

²² Jacob Kimball, *The Rural Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), preface, dated November, 1793.

²³ Temperley and Crawford, "Psalmody," 642.

²⁴ Andrew Law, *The Musical Primer; or The First Part of The Art of Singing*, 2nd ed. (Cheshire, CT: William Law, 1794), preface 8. Accessed via EAI. The reference to "harsh singing" recalls the criticisms of rote singing levied by reformers like Law in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The specific arguments against rote singing and the role of reform in the popularity of singing schools will be explored more deeply in chapter four.

Criticism grew more intense and came from a variety of sources around the turn of the century. The death of the prolific Billings in 1800 may have sparked this increase. More importantly, as the new nation was becoming more independent and capable of sustaining cultural institutions, there was a greater interest in establishing parity with Europe in a number of fields, including music. Attempts at reform accelerated, singing schools multiplied in number and adjusted their goals, and more textbooks teaching the fundamentals of music were published. The growing population of the new nation meant new waves of both children and immigrants to assimilate into a musical culture. *The Massachusetts Compiler* (1795), a theory and singing instruction manual, opens with a reminder of these changing demographics: “At the present period it becomes necessary that greater attention be paid to every mean for improving that important part of divine worship, as good, musical emigrants are daily seeking an asylum in this country.”²⁵ The author of this collection saw great potential in the increasing number of newcomers and an opportunity to elevate the status of the nation through music.

John Hubbard, a Dartmouth professor and connoisseur of European music, was also concerned about quality and perception of American music and worked passionately to bring his cultivated musical tastes to a broader American public. To this end, he co-founded the Handel Society in 1807, the oldest student, faculty, staff, and community organization in the United States devoted to the performance of choral-orchestral works. As the name implies, the Handel Society was devoted only to works by European masters

²⁵ *The Massachusetts Compiler of Theoretical and Practical Elements of Sacred Vocal Music* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1795), preface, dated February, 1795.

and had no relationship with American music or the still-popular practice of psalmody.²⁶

Hubbard's "Essay on Music," written a year after the Handel Society's formation, vehemently attacks native composition: "While the noble expressions of those great masters [European composers] excite our admiration, the counterfeit efforts of the unskillful [American composers] excite our contempt."²⁷ Clearly, Hubbard believed that the path to improving America's musical status was through the performance and imitation of European masterworks.

Lowell Mason was perhaps the most vocal of the critics of psalmody and one of the most active in terms of working to change America's musical environment. Instead of blaming composers, he focused on the practices of churches and singing schools as the sources of problems with American music. According to Mason, the styles of music that proliferated through these rudimentary institutions were simply backward. He explained how their popularity hurt the overall quality of sacred music in the late eighteenth century: "The style derived from Tans'ur and other inferior English composers spread widely, superseding in great measure the admirable old 'Church Tunes' and preparing the way for the still lower character of tunes which came up at about the time of the American Revolution."²⁸

²⁶ The Handel Society, which is still active and continues to be attached to Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, is not to be confused with the Handel and Haydn Society, a completely separate organization founded in Boston in 1815. Both groups were established with the same goal—to improve the quality of choral music in America by performing the works of European masters.

²⁷ David McKay, "William Selby, Musical Émigré in Colonial Massachusetts," *The Musical Quarterly* 57.4 (1971), 619. For similar material, see McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-Century Composer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 193-194. For examples of fusing tunes coming under attack for obfuscation of text, see John Hubbard, "An Essay on Music, Pronounced before the Middlesex Musical Society, Sept. 9, 1807" (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1808).

²⁸ Horn, *Sing to Me*, 3-4.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as a more formalized school of music criticism arose in the United States, a picture of eighteenth-century American music history began to form that either trivialized or apologized for the First New England School. Billings alone received some praise for contributing a style of sacred music with patriotic texts at a critical point in America's political history. Nathaniel Gould, a nineteenth-century music critic and composer, wrote a history of American sacred music in 1853. There, he described Billings's influence in terms of his contribution to the perceived patriotic fervor of the times, although he says little about the music itself:

The effect that music had on the people was perceived by all. In those days, patriotic songs were unknown; so Billings, from his ardent spirit, composed or procured words, of a mixed character, combining religion and patriotism, which, when set to music, answered every purpose.²⁹

Like many of his contemporaries, Gould largely ignored other composers of psalmody:

"[Besides] Billings, others commenced writing and publishing music of the same character, but most of it was inferior to his in merit."³⁰ Gould's narrative is typical of histories of American music from this period; it largely dismisses eighteenth-century psalmody as an unlearned art, focusing instead on pieces and composers associated with American nationalism.

In 1882, America's most prominent nineteenth-century music critic, John Sullivan Dwight, ridiculed this overt patriotism through music, depicting Billings as an uneducated and overly patriotic bumpkin with a simple and aesthetically flawed musical style. In his article, fittingly titled "Our Dark Age in Music," Dwight belittled the art of psalmody as trifling and criticized the psalmodists for ignorance and naiveté:

²⁹ Nathaniel D. Gould, *History of Church Music in America* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1853), 43.

³⁰ Gould, *History of Church Music in America*, 51.

Whether it appealed to any deep religious sentiment or not, [psalm singing] set the singers in good humor, and responsive to the exhortation that we "make a joyful noise." Billings was exceedingly prolific in this kind of composition, and had imitators, some of whom "out-heroded Herod" in their ventures on the sea of bold "originality" and native "inspiration." His music had a flavor of its own, and showed a certain rude native talent and invention. Fugue it was not in any right artistic sense; of all that he was ignorant. What a god-send it would have been to him, what would he not have thought, what possibly have done, had there, by any chance, fallen into his hands some fugues or other compositions, some harmonized chorals even, of Sebastian Bach or Handel!³¹

Besides misunderstanding the non-relation between fugues and fuging tunes, Dwight's evaluation and others like it miss the critical purpose of psalmody as a singer's art and not primarily as music to be heard in concert or even in church. Aesthetics were certainly important, but aesthetics *for the singer* in his or her relationship with the other singers and with God. In their defense, Dwight and like-minded contemporaries were likely attempting to establish cultural parity with Europe at a time when growing musical institutions, such as symphony orchestras and theaters, made other instrumental and vocal genres both possible and profitable. Amid post-colonial anxiety, they likely dismissed early American psalmody because of its modest performance contexts and its close associations with the church and with English psalmody. In establishing a "Dark Age," Dwight implies that the period in which he is writing is a musical Renaissance for America, with a full flowering of compositional greatness on a par with European masters.

With seemingly less at stake in terms of musical nationalism, recent decades have witnessed tremendous efforts to collect and attribute sacred music from the late eighteenth century, allowing scholars the opportunity to more easily analyze the core

³¹ John Sullivan Dwight, "Our Dark Age in Music," *Atlantic Monthly* 50 (December, 1882): 821.

repertory of early American psalmody. Modern comprehensive histories of American music now typically devote a chapter or substantial section to this music, recognizing its place in the unique political, religious, and natural environment of early America.³²

Contributions to the Study of Psalmody

Although promising work has been done in recent decades to counterbalance negative assessments from earlier periods, this summary of historical attitudes and approaches to studying early American psalmody suggests a need for more scholarship to help the musical community develop both an appreciation for and a more thorough understanding of the repertory. Once it became accepted as a repertory worthy of musicological attention, massive and diligent efforts were made to collect, ascribe, and catalogue this repertory. Those efforts, of course, are only the beginning of understanding psalmody's cultural import and exploring its potential contributions to modern music scholarship. A number of recent recordings and re-releases of older recordings of eighteenth-century American psalmody shows a nascent interest in this earliest school of

³² Richard Crawford's edition, *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody* (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1984), Vol. 11 and 12 of *Recent Researches in American Music* (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1984), was the first of its type. Other comprehensive collections and catalogues include Karl Kroeber, *An Index to Anglo-American Psalmody in Modern Critical Editions* (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 2000), and Frank J. Metcalf, *American Psalmody; or, Titles of Books Containing Tunes Printed in America from 1721-1820* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968). For sections on psalmody in general histories of American music, see Chapter 3, "From Ritual to Art: The Flowering of Sacred Music" in Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001), 29-55; Chapter 2, "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs in the Colonies" in Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: Norton, 1983), 24-46; Chapter 7, "American Pioneers" in Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1987), 112-130; Chapter 4, Nym Cooke, "Sacred Music to 1800" in David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78-102; Chapter 1, "Sacred Music in New England and the Other Colonies" in H. Wiley Hitchcock and Kyle Gann, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000).

Anglo-American composition.³³ Still, much of the music remains unheard and unperformed, and scholars may never know as much as they would like about the lives of the composers or the performance practice. Large portions of the repertory are available (either in print or on recordings), yet the cultural significance of American psalmody remains a little-explored topic in both theological and musicological literature.

Surprisingly, textbooks on American religion in general and those devoted to Colonial period religion in particular make little or no mention of sacred music. Jon Butler's *Religion in Colonial America* (2000), for example, is typical in its neglect of sacred song's role in religious culture, mentioning music only in reference to the objection to it by some early Puritan groups.³⁴ The Puritans bequeathed much to late eighteenth-century religious culture in America, but reserved attitudes toward music did not endure.³⁵ In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth, as evidence points to a passionate esteem for sacred song as a necessary component of religious life in the colonies. With the notable exception of Stephen Marini, whose work is discussed in chapter three, scholars of eighteenth-century American religion have engaged little with

³³ Recordings often group early New England psalmody with music from the early nineteenth-century shape note tradition, which is more Southern in its orientation, as both are considered part of the larger category of early American sacred music. Although there is some overlap in repertory between the two, the performance contexts are quite different. Furthermore, recordings by professional performing groups designed for personal listening necessarily far short of communicating what I argue is the true essence of the music, that is, a full soul-body-mind experience that must be enacted by all (amateurs especially) in community with others. Examples of recent recordings and re-releases include: Anonymous 4, *American Angels: Songs of Hope, Redemption, and Glory*, Harmonia Mundi HMU 907326-CD (2003); Oregon State University Choir, *Make a Joyful Noise: Mainstreams and Backwaters of American Psalmody, 1770-1840*, New World Records HMU 907326-CD (1996) [1978]; His Majestie's Clerkes, *Anglo-American Psalmody 1550-1800*, Harmonia Mundi HCX 3957128-CD (2002); and The Norumbega Harmony, *Sweet Seraphic Fire: New England Singing-School Music from the Norumbega Harmony*, New World Records 80640-2-CD (2005).

³⁴ Jon Butler, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.

³⁵ Neither is this a wholly accurate portrayal of the early Puritans, who indeed valued psalmody in many contexts. See Barbara Lambert, "The Musical Puritans," *Old-Time New England* 62 (1972): 66-75.

psalmody. This omission seems strange, given the centrality of sacred song to the religious experience of colonial Americans, which I argue for throughout this study.

Musicological literature on psalmody is slowly on the rise, as some scholars are now recognizing the possibilities of applying modern research methods and viewing this repertory through a cultural lens. Chapter three in Richard Crawford's *America's Musical Life* (2001), "From Ritual to Art: The Flowering of Sacred Music," and Marini's "Hymnody and History: Early American Evangelical Hymns as Sacred Music," an essay in *Music in American Religious Experience* (2006), edited by Philip Bohlman and others, are two prominent examples of the new directions in the study of American psalmody. The former assesses the cultural importance of the singing schools and their role in reform movements, and the latter explores the relationship between the religious fervor of evangelicalism and the style of music being sung. One of the best treatments of sacred music in the context of the religious revival of the Great Awakening is found in the first two chapters of John Ogasapian's *Church Music in America, 1620-2000* (2007, 2nd edition). Ogasapian describes the relationship between psalmody and the revival movement as "synergistic," but the precise ways in which religion and music mutually influenced one another remain unclear.³⁶ Furthermore, true to the title of his volume, Ogasapian considers psalmody purely as church music, setting aside its important role outside of the worship service and its impact on the daily lives of the colonists. Nonetheless, Marini, Bohlman, and Ogasapian all offer promising insight into this relatively unexplored repertory, albeit in chapters or small sections of larger works. Both fields (musicology and theology) lack book-length studies of this type. By bringing

³⁶ John Ogasapian, *Church Music in America, 1620-2000*, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 25.

sacred song into the discussion of theological and religious trends present in late eighteenth-century America, my study strengthens the interdisciplinary relationship between the two fields, a relationship which is strong for other repertoires, places, and times but lacking in this context.

In *America's Musical Life*, Crawford offers one possible explanation for this lacuna: "Because the psalms were cast in standard verse forms, or meters, worshipers could sing many texts to the same tune, proving that music *as an art* played only a secondary role in psalm singing."³⁷ By stating what psalmody, primarily, was not, Crawford elucidates the many unfavorable assessments of the repertory by reformers and music historians of the past who were focused on judging psalmody solely as an art. These observers wanted psalmody to measure up to European choral masterworks, specifically those by Handel. They wanted a style of music that displayed polished skills and technical mastery. They wanted a national music that demonstrated artistic parity with the rest of the Western world.³⁸ Many modern scholars implicitly understand that psalmody was none of these things, but that is not to say that the music was not important. Crawford's statement tells half of the story. Music *as an art* was secondary, but in other ways, music was indeed *primary*, even more important than the texts. As a physical action, as a mental exercise, and as a means of religious expression, singing was an indispensable practice for most Protestant Christians in late eighteenth-century New England, and research into these social, cultural, and performative aspects of psalmody offer the most promise for fresh approaches to the repertory.

³⁷ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 22. Emphasis in the original.

³⁸ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 295.

Another part of the explanation for the dearth of full-length studies on early American psalmody may be a lingering apprehension about how to deal with the music itself. In the preface to *The American Musical Landscape* (1993), Crawford describes the frustration he experienced while working on early American psalmody in the 1960s, as he attempted to apply the analytical tools he had been taught in his graduate courses—traditional chord-labeling, Schenkerian graphs, form and genre studies, etc.—to a repertory that seemed unresponsive to those methods.³⁹ After reaching no significant conclusions in that way, he experienced a breakthrough and ultimately began to analyze the tunebooks as commercial objects within the economic structure of late eighteenth-century America. I believe that obstacles like those described by Crawford, combined with a lingering belief in the inferiority of psalmody vis-à-vis European vocal music, accounts for the fact that a large portion of the research on this repertory has been concerned with collecting and cataloguing rather than with analyzing it as a way to understand the musical and religious convictions of a culture.

Of course, these obstacles long impeded the study of other musics that similarly defied traditional analysis. In recent decades, ethnomusicologists, in particular, have worked to develop new methods of analysis that recognize the cultural significance of musical repertories. Early American psalmody has not been, perhaps, an obvious subject for ethnomusicological research, given its temporal distance and its Western and Anglo-Saxon context (although more current, historical ethnomusicological approaches apply quite well). As such, it is especially difficult to find a satisfying way to analyze the music and integrate that analysis into historical and religious contexts. This is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that psalmody, with its four-part vocal scoring, so closely

³⁹ Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape*, ix.

resembles (in its appearance on the page) a style of choral music that *is* responsive to traditional analysis. My research bridges that gap by presenting the music and its most relevant analytical features—elements like texture, text painting, and melodic shape—as evidence for its social and religious functions. This integrated approach—interrogating the songs themselves, the tunebooks, and the larger discourse of sacred song present in late eighteenth-century New England—brings a fresh perspective to this repertory.

The idea that music operates on all aspects of the human person is not unique to American psalmody; other repertories and musical cultures share similar holistic approaches to music and even specifically to singing. The case of early New England psalmody, which has not yet been viewed through the framework of soul, body, and mind, is exceptional because it signaled a radical shift in American religious thought. In this context, psalmody mediated between two competing religious/political ideas—individualism, born of the Great Awakening and ultimately of the Reformation (in its religious formulation), and the communitarian ethos, which found support both in the Bible and in the rhetoric of the American Revolution. Sacred song bound these together; the singing of four-part psalms, essentially a group activity, nevertheless offered each individual access to a personal experience with and of God. By bettering the whole person (the individual body-mind-soul), it built up the community (the social “body”). Psalmody’s prominent, even indispensable role in shaping late eighteenth-century American religious thought has yet to be fully recognized. Ultimately, these religious ideas found political expression in democracy during the volatile later decades of the eighteenth century.

In addition to drawing these connections between religion, politics, and singing, I examine a number of rarely acknowledged primary sources—sermons and speeches about sacred song—alongside the musical texts. The use of the pulpit as a forum for discussing sacred music, a practice that had largely died out by the mid-nineteenth century, indicates the high value placed on singing as a religious act with significant theological support and the importance of singing for the broad public and not just a small cadre of trained composers and performers. These sermons and speeches contain key evidence for understanding the holistic approach to sacred song in late eighteenth-century New England, and preachers encouraged singing as a way of embodying the new religious attitudes ushered in by the Great Awakening. To date, this evidence has not been mined by scholars in either musicological or theological disciplines.

Although they have received relatively more scholarly attention, tunebooks themselves also contain oft-overlooked clues about the perceived purpose of singing for the individual and the community. Typically, the introductory sections of the tunebooks have served as primary source material for the study of music theory and pedagogy, as it was understood by early Americans.⁴⁰ However, in addition to these materials, tunebooks also contain prefaces by composers and compilers, discussion of performance settings, theological excurses, and promotional and subscription information. I take a closer look at these auxiliary materials, examining how they endorsed the holistic approach to singing. As publications available to most Protestant Christians in New England, they too offer a window into the broader religious culture of the time.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Allen Perdue Britton, “Theoretical Introductions in American Tune-Books to 1800” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1949).

Synopsis

Sacred tunebooks, sermons, speeches, and the sacred or sacred-themed texts accompanying most vocal music of late eighteenth-century New England suggest that religious beliefs about music played a large role in the formation of a musical culture. New Englanders were certainly familiar with the writings of major English Protestant religious figures such as Isaac Watts. Passages from Watts's oeuvre that address sacred music appear again and again in prefatory sections of American tunebooks, and his versifications of the psalms are the most common source material of American psalmody texts. Throughout this study, primary source material from these types of publications, as well as the music itself, support the argument that late eighteenth-century New Englanders thought about sacred song as a means of bettering the entire human person—soul, body, and mind—and saw that interpretation of song as a way of embodying new religious ideals.

After chapter one's brief introduction to American psalmody and its role in late eighteenth-century American culture, successive chapters examine each of these three aspects—soul, body, and mind. This organization illuminates the genre's relationship to three key areas in which American religious thought underwent significant reformulation in the late eighteenth century. However, because I argue that commentators within these communities viewed singing as a gateway to holistic well-being, the boundaries between soul, body, and mind are not always clear-cut. As a general rule, the salutary effects of sacred song on the mind or body also enlivened the soul, and vice versa. Thus, some of the topics overlap, and some evidence might seem equally applicable in multiple parts of the study. For example, learning how to sing well through practice in the singing schools

was considered a moral obligation, rooted in spiritual beliefs about the soul's eternal occupation in the angelic chorus. Here, matters of the mind and the soul cross paths. Similarly, discussions about states of spiritual ecstasy and physical pleasure achieved through song bring both body and soul into play.

Chapter two explores the relationship between sacred song and the soul. A brief discussion of the religious climate in colonial New England highlights important trends and overarching beliefs that shaped the discourse of psalmody and the pieces themselves. While a number of different denominations co-existed in significant number, broadly speaking, Reformed Calvinist theology dominated New England's religious landscape in the late eighteenth century. The movement of the Great Awakening increased religious fervor throughout the colonies, emphasizing emotionalism, American exceptionalism, and a democratic spirit, with God's gracious salvation available to all. Ecumenical in its appeal, the Great Awakening and its largely itinerant leadership brought singing into new focus, reshaping it as a tool for experiencing conversion and emotional outpouring. Sacred song became an important topic not only for musicians and composers but also for preachers and religious leaders looking to inspire their congregants.

Also in chapter two, I review a number of late eighteenth-century sources that discuss the effects of song on the soul. Many preachers claimed that singing sacred texts led the soul to a state of happiness and serenity, banishing temptation to sin and preparing the heart for devout affections. The psalms, which cover a range of different emotions, were thought to be particularly expressive of what St. Paul describes as the "inward part" of the soul; as a result, the Book of Psalms, especially Watts's versification of it, became the core text for American composers. Sacred song's impression on the soul was so

powerful that at times it resulted in what writers described as “ecstasy” or “rapture.” Finally, in light of the salutary effects on the soul, religious leaders, citing scriptural evidence, concluded that singing is a sacred duty, required of all. With this evidence from primary sources, I argue that psalmody was capable of projecting and intensifying the new emotional and personal tenor of religion in New England.

Chapter three begins by considering modern theories about ritual and embodiment, as they pertain to the relationship between song and the body. In the early American context, vocal music was preferred for a variety of practical, aesthetic, and religious reasons. Music that emanated from the body itself was esteemed in a culture that saw the soul and the body as intimately connected. The human voice was a versatile, universal, and natural instrument. Because it was stamped into the very body of those who employed it, expertly constructed and intricately designed by God, it was viewed as superior to all other instruments. Humans were simply created to sing. Therefore, the choice to compose vocal music was not only a practical decision: it was a religious and aesthetic one as well. American composers embraced the singing voice as a subject for their musical settings, writing idiomatically for the voice and frequently including images of the singing body, such as the tongue, breath, and lips, in their texts. Psalms that exhorted the reader to sing praises to God were favored among biblical texts.

In addition, the physical act of singing was thought to be good for the health of one’s body. It brought about pleasurable physical sensations and was indicative of an overall state of well-being; these sensations were welcomed as holy and good. Some writers even suggested that song could heal afflictions and cure diseases. I conclude this chapter by comparing religious ideas about the body to the functioning of the choral

“body,” in which many different parts come together as one whole. Psalmody and the discourse surrounding it embraced the physical dimensions of singing and deemed these as natural and good. The idea that this physicality could bring the singer closer to God was indicative of the new directions in American religious thought, ushered in by the Great Awakening.

In chapter four, I explain how a third part of the human person—the mind—was believed to be affected by the practice of psalmody. While chapter two outlines religious arguments for a moral obligation to sing, chapter four takes this reasoning a step further, presenting evidence that suggests a requirement to *learn how to sing well*. This sacred duty to learn and practice the art of psalmody was rooted in St. Paul’s exhortation to sing “with the understanding,” that is, with a mind fully and competently engaged in the act of singing and the words being sung. Singing schools became a commonplace and popular means of achieving this understanding.

The structure of sacred tunebooks also revealed this society’s interest in teaching and learning. Modeled after English psalters and theory texts, American tunebooks usually contained extensive introductions that explained the rudiments of music. These publications fulfilled many functions in early New England societies: they were singing-school texts, books for private devotion, tools for public worship, and objects for leisure and socialization. The psalm tunes provided not only the opportunity to practice learned musical skills but also, through their texts, the occasion for instruction in basic theology and morality. Singers who leafed through the typical tunebook learned two lessons: how to use their God-given instrument and why there was a moral imperative to do so.

As with the body, singing was believed to benefit mental functioning and even have some healing powers over mental illness. The practice of psalmody, with its combination of sacred text and captivating harmony, was believed to be able to turn the mind away from idle thoughts and toward deep, holy contemplation. Music deepened the imprint of the words and allowed them to be retained longer in the memory. With such positive effects, sacred song could banish a number of mental afflictions, such as anxiety and melancholy. Watts, whose writings were instrumental in developing this connection between singing and the mind, firmly believed that the benefits of singing were particularly acute for children, whose minds were very impressionable. The idea that all persons, even children, could engage the mind in deep contemplation of sacred words, was radical, indeed. This new faith in the potential of human understanding found special expression through psalmody.

In the concluding fifth chapter, this holistic conception of the human person, encompassing soul, body, and mind, is considered as part of a larger social framework. The same religious environment that supported the integrated health of soul, body, and mind encouraged similar ideas about society as a whole. The social “body” functioned in much the same way as the human body and the choral body—with each part working according to its defined role in order to achieve harmony and well-being. In this context, singing served as a sort of social adhesive, facilitating friendships and promoting a communitarian ethos in the new and growing communities of colonial New England. Largely ecumenical in its message and practiced by nearly all segments of society, psalmody at its best demonstrated the cooperative spirit necessary for healthy communities. I conclude by articulating psalmody’s role as a concrete expression of a

radical shift in religious thought and suggesting its potential role in the parallel radical political shift that culminated in the American Revolution and its democratic ideals.

CHAPTER 1: NEW ENGLAND PSALMODY: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

By definition, psalmody refers to the singing or chanting of the psalms, that is, the metrical poetry from the biblical Book of Psalms—traditionally ascribed to the Israelite King David (c. 1037 – 970 B.C.E.)—in the context of liturgical or paraliturgical practices. This textbook definition describes most of the music discussed here, but the unique circumstances of early American sacred music suggest an expanded understanding of both the texts and the contexts of psalmody.

The English versification of the psalms by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was highly influential in New England.¹ It was certainly the most common text source for American composers of this period. The Book of Psalms, often called “the Bible’s hymnbook,” with its lyric poetry and frequent references to music and singing, was ideally suited for musical settings. The psalms were also ideal texts for American composers because of the similarities between how they were perceived to have been used by the early Hebrew peoples and by communities in early America. The ancient Israelites used psalms for both formal, public worship and private devotion. Singing psalms was a part of their religious training as well as their informal social and community activities.² The psalms

¹ David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 28.

² David G. Mobberly, “The Psalms,” in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, ed. Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David G. Downey, vol. 10 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), 9-10. While the singing voice is the most frequently cited “instrument” in the psalms, there are also references to pipes, reeds, lyre, harp, trumpet, and timbrel.

accompanied pilgrimages, and this association with travel, wilderness, and wandering continued in America. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English translations and versifications of the psalms made them portable, memorable, and accessible to both literate and non-literate Americans.³

While American tunebooks contained these texts, set by both English and American psalmodists, more than any others, they also included other biblical and semi-sacred texts, as well as original poetry by the composers or contemporaneous writers. The non-biblical metrical hymn texts by Watts, first published in 1709 in the collection *Hymns and spiritual songs* and widely reprinted throughout New England, were frequently set in the manner of psalm tunes. Anthems freely used other parts of scripture as text sources; the Annunciation (Luke 2), David's lamentation (2 Samuel 18), and the eschatological Revelation texts were among the favorites. Texts by early eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope and the Great Awakening evangelist George Whitefield also appear with frequency, as do original texts by the composers themselves, especially William Billings.⁴ In terms of subject matter, all are sacred. Musically, there appears to be no distinction between the settings of actual psalms and other psalm-like metrical poetry.

Furthermore, sacred tunebooks housed all of these types of texts alongside one another and included genres ranging from simple, homophonic psalm tunes to fusing

³ David P. McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-Century Composer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 46.

⁴ Some examples of texts from sources outside of the Book of Psalms: Pope, "The Dying Christian to His Soul," set by Billings; Whitefield's texts to EDENBOROUGH and EVESHAM in *The Chorister's Companion* (1782); "Behold I Bring You Glad Tidings" (setting of Luke 2) by Stephenson; "Hark! Hark" (setting of Luke 2) by Billings; "David's Lamentation" (setting of 2 Samuel 18) by Billings; KETERY (setting of the Lord's Prayer) by Oliver Brownson; "I Beheld, and Lo a Great Multitude" (setting of Revelation 7) by Jacob French; "I Heard a Great Voice" (setting of Revelation 14) by Billings; INVOCATION (text and music by Billings).

tunes and longer, more elaborate anthems and odes. The tunebooks were used in a variety of contexts—public worship, concerts, singing schools, and private social gatherings—that will be explored more deeply in chapters four and five. More than merely a liturgical practice, psalmody was a part of the larger musical and social world of late eighteenth-century New England. As such, I use the term “psalmody” to refer to this *a cappella* musical style with sacred lyrics, regardless of the specific text source. In this sense, the term comes closer to the etymological meaning of “psalm,” that is, simply, “song.”⁵ This broader understanding of psalmody corresponds with a society that viewed sacred song as a part of everyday life, with very permeable boundaries between the sacred and the secular. This chapter expounds on the broad definition of psalmody and cites evidence for the presence of sacred themes in songs that otherwise seem secular. This lays the groundwork for understanding psalmody’s role in a culture saturated with religious influence. Finally, I give a sketch of the repertory and composers that form the basis of this study.

Song, Religion, and Politics

As Benjamin Franklin’s account suggests, singing served as a backdrop for everyday life in New England. It was certainly a common activity in early America and one that touched on many aspects of social life. Singing accompanied both ordinary

⁵ In the original Greek, “psalm” more specifically implies a song sung with the accompaniment of a harp or stringed instrument. Eighteenth-century Americans believed that the voice was the most sacred instrument (see chapter three), and proponents of the nineteenth-century shape note tradition, which included much eighteenth-century psalmody, referred to the voice as the “sacred harp.” A number of tunebooks from this shape note tradition include “harp” in the title, referring to this original meaning of “psalm” and the belief that voices accompanying each other represented the highest use of the human instrument. The most popular and far-reaching example is *The Sacred Harp* (1844 and many other subsequent revisions); others include *The Hesperian Harp* (1848), *The Social Harp* (1855), *The New Harp of Columbia* (1867), and *The Christian Harp* (1877).

activities, like worship services, school lessons, and private gatherings, and special events in the life of the New England town, like visits by important political figures and dedications of new buildings.

Many secular and semi-sacred songs were written specifically for such events. Most were published as broadsides—single sheets of text in verse, usually without printed music but often with an indication of the tune to be sung. Examples of these include an ode to be sung at the arrival of the newly elected president, George Washington, in New York City in 1789, an ode for the consecration of a new Masonic Lodge in New York, and a poem set to music for the dedication of a new meetinghouse in Lansingburg, Massachusetts.⁶ A number of these broadsides honored important Americans, such as Washington, Franklin, and John Hancock, while others commemorated significant military campaigns.⁷

The various occasions for the singing of broadsides reveal a mixture of secular (often political) and religious devotion. The calendar by which the early colonists marked

⁶ Mr. L**, “Ode, to be Sung on the Arrival of the President of the United States. Tune--God Save, &c.” (New York, 1789); Samuel Low, “Ode, for St. John's Day, June 24, 1790, Performed at the Consecration of the New Building for the Use of Holland Lodge, and the Washington Chapter of Royal-Arch Masons” (New York: Harrisson & Purdy, 1790); John Lovett, “With Joyful Hearts, &c. A Dedicatory Poem. (Written by Mr. Lovett, and Set to Music by Oliver Holden, of Charlestown, Massachusetts) for Performance at the Dedication of the New Brick Meeting House in the City of Lansingburg and Suitable for Other Public Occasions” (Charlestown, MA: Oliver Holden, 1794). All accessible via *EAI*.

⁷ Examples include: Oliver Holden, *Sacred Dirges, Hymns, and Anthems, Commemorative of the Death of General George Washington, the Guardian of his Country and the Friend of Man* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1800); George Richards, *Hymns Composed on the Death of Gen. Washington; and Sung, at the Universal Meeting-House, Portsmouth, N.H. January, 1800* (Portsmouth, NH: United States Oracle Press by Charles Pierce, 1800); Samuel Holyoke, “Hark! from the tombs, &c. and Beneath the honors, &c. Adapted from Dr. Watts, and set to music (Exeter, NH: H. Ranlet, 1800). Performed at Newburyport, NH on January 2, 1800, “the day on which the citizens unitedly expressed their unbounded veneration for the memory of our beloved Washington.”; William Smith, “An Exercise, Performed at the Public Commencement, in the College of Philadelphia, July 17, 1790. Containing an Ode, Set to Music, Sacred to the Memory of Dr. Franklin” (Philadelphia: William Young, 1790); Robert Rogerson, “An Anthem, Sacred to the Memory of His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Late Governor and Commander in Chief of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793); “A Song, Called Crawford's Defeat by the Indians on the Fourth Day of June, 1782” (United States, 1791); “St. Clair's Defeat: A New Song” (United States, 1791). All accessible via *EAI*.

their year was punctuated by both political and religious holidays. Important political days, like Election Day and the Fourth of July, inspired songs of national pride. Religious holidays, like Christmas, New Year's Day, and Thanksgiving elicited ode texts that mixed sacred and secular elements.⁸

The burgeoning Freemason societies in New England provided yet another source of printed song. A number of Masons were also amateur composers, and entire collections of Masonic songs appeared in print, while the songs themselves were performed at important social events, such as the commissioning of new fraternity officers or new lodge buildings.⁹ Although officially a secular brotherhood, the Masons mixed much sacred imagery into their poems and songs. Consider the following excerpt from a 1779 collection of Masonic songs:

But Noah was wisest, for *Noah* judg'd right,
He built him an *ark* so strong and so tight,
That, tho' heaven and earth were coming together,
He kept close in his *Lodge*, and stood buff to the weather.

And, after the Flood, like a Brother so true,
Who still had the good of the Craft in his view,
He delved the ground, and he planted the vine,
He founded a Lodge, aye, and gave his Lodge wine.

⁸ "Ode for Election Day, 1792" (United States, 1792); Hannah Wheaton, "A New-Year's Ode" (Boston, 1790); "A Christmas Ode. Dedicated to the Several Religious Societies" (United States, between 1790 and 1810); *Odes for the Fourth of July, 1796* (Providence, RI, 1796); Hans Gram, "Sacred Lines for Thanksgiving Day, November 7, 1793" (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793). All accessible via EAI.

⁹ Examples include: George H. Spierin, "A Song Composed for the Fraternity of Steuben Lodge, No. 18, Newburgh, January 18, 1791. Tune – God Save the King" (Goshen, NY: David Mandeville and David M. Westcott, 1791); Bennett Wheeler, *The Young Mason's Monitor; Containing Some Necessary Hints to Young Brethren-- Yet Not Beneath the Attention of Any. To Which is Annexed, a Collection of Masonic Songs, Odes, &c. Many of Them New and Excellent* (Providence, RI, 1791); Anthony Haswell, "Hymn on Masonry, Presented to Temple Lodge, by a Brother, to be Sung at the Installation of Their Officers" (Bennington, VT: Anthony Haswell, 1793); Anthony Haswell, "Ode Sacred to Masonry" (Bennington, VT: Anthony Haswell, 1793); John Carter, *A Choice Collection of Masons Songs. To Which is Added, Solomon's Temple, an Oration* (Providence, RI: John Carter, 1779). All accessible via EAI.

Let statesmen toss, tumble, and jingle the ball,
We'll sit here in our Lodge, and laugh at them all:
Let priests have their lawn sleeves, and Kings their anointment,
Free-Masonry sure was by heaven's appointment.¹⁰

Here, the author compares the secret society of Masonry to the exclusive protectiveness of Noah's ark and names Noah as a sort of proto-Mason. In so doing, the society explicitly claimed an anointed Biblical lineage and the degree of authority that accompanies it. The fact that they chose to establish this authority using a biblical allegory is indicative of the pervasiveness of sacred language and imagery in political and social affairs in early America.

It is no coincidence that the explosion of broadsides and collections such as the ones by American Masons occurred at about the same time as the onset of political tensions and war. These events provided the raw material for numerous songs, ranging from overtly political propaganda to allegory, and many teem with religious rhetoric. They illustrate the belief that America's independence was heaven-ordained. "Sure God inspired brave Washington," boasts the "Song of Washington" (1778). However, a large number of Loyalists among New Englanders in the 1770s also claimed, through song, that God was on their side. One such Loyalist ballad, "On This Day of Renown," printed in New York in 1779, conflates St. George, the heroic dragon-slayer, with King George III of England.¹¹ These wartime sentiments continued well into the 1780s and 90s, although the songs of the victorious Patriots clearly became more popular in the early years of the new nation. Quasi-sacred "liberty songs" (pre-Independence) and "national

¹⁰ Carter, *A Choice Collection of Masons Songs*, 22-23.

¹¹ Broadside printed in New York entitled "On This Day of Renown," dated April 23 1779. Accessed via EAI. April 23 is the traditional date for the celebration of the feast of Saint George.

songs” (post-Independence) were commonly performed in and around New England.¹² Often bringing religious themes and political aspirations together, these songs indicate the strength of religious devotion in the Colonies and the degree to which religion permeated many aspects of daily life.

One of the most popular confluences of politics and religion in eighteenth-century America was a mapping of the Old Testament saga of the Israelites onto the American situation. Patriot poets, writers, and composers drew many comparisons between the two stories, and in so doing, they asserted God’s favoritism for the American people and their promised land of North America. In its basic form, this analogy cast the British as the Babylonian slave-drivers and the American colonists as the underdog Israelites, favored by God. The biblical Israelites suffered as servants under an Egyptian tyrant who, on top of being oppressive, failed to respect their different religious practices. Many soon-to-be settlers were similarly subjugated in England during the post-Reformation years under the thumb of an oppressive and religiously intolerant English monarchy. Instead of crossing the Red Sea, those original English emigrants traversed the vast Atlantic in search of freedom.

About one-hundred and fifty years later, when the tensions preceding the Revolutionary War permeated all aspects of American life, the analogy re-emerged. George III replaced Henry VIII in the role of the Pharaoh. He sent troops back across the sea to try to reclaim an iron grip on the colonists, but, presumably because of God’s favoritism and the help of the American Moses, George Washington, they were defeated

¹² For expanded research on the topic of political songs at the time of the American Revolution, see Nicholas Tawa, “Secular Music in the Late-Eighteenth-Century American Home,” *The Musical Quarterly* 61.4 (1975): 518.

and thrown back seaward. And yet, the Americans, like the newly freed Israelites still had to wander through the “wilderness” of a vast and untamed landscape. Charles Stearns, a Boston Congregationalist minister, made this connection explicit in a sermon preached on April 19, 1792, the seventeenth anniversary of the battle of Lexington and Concord, which marked the beginning of the American Revolution: “If Moses sung the emancipation of Israel’s sons from the slavery of Egypt, we may as justly celebrate our deliverance from oppressions of a similar kind.”¹³ The Israelites, oppressed but favored in the eyes of God, became metaphorical representations of the American patriots. In fact, Hebrew images, persons, and themes, like Jerusalem, Zion, Israel, Canaan, Egypt, and David, abound in American psalmody. This is perhaps because of the perceived unfulfilledness of the Old Testament in general and the psalms in particular by Protestant Christians, which spoke to the political situation and everyday lives of the early Americans.

The tunebook boom and the sharp increase in original American sacred song composition occurred alongside one of the most politically volatile periods of American history, and music and politics surely mutually influenced one another. Simply because the practice of psalmody was rooted in scripture does not mean that it was not flexible and responsive to current events. While most of the output of the First New England School was not explicitly political, the choices of texts and musical styles reflect cultural trends. In many instances, sacred and political themes overlap in a more obvious way, producing a hybrid genre that freely mixes scripture and politics. The war years produced

¹³ Charles Stearns, “A Sermon: Preached at an Exhibition of Sacred Musick, in Lincoln” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1792), 14. Sermon delivered on 19 April, 1792. Stearns was pastor of a church in Lincoln, MA. Accessed via *EAI*.

a few tunebooks dedicated almost entirely to this type of song. *Thirteen Hymns, Suited to the Present Times* (1776) by Elhanan Winchester is such a collection, and its subtitle, “The Past, Present, and Future State of America, with Advice to Soldiers and Christians” suggests a culture with a sense of history and one that admitted a great deal of permeability between religion and politics. Several songs from this collection imply an American version of the Exodus narrative. For example, “America’s Settlement and Present Distress” discusses Jehovah’s role in leading the religiously oppressed English to the American haven. Key images that evoke Exodus include the forceful expulsion and the traversing of the “wat’ry deep”:

When Britain, mov’d, by furious Rome,
The Saints did persecute and slay;
Jehovah did reveal a home,
A safe retreat,—America.
...
Hither our fathers, drove by force,
Came to enjoy their freedom here;
Thro’ tractless paths pursu’d their course,
And o’er the wat’ry deep did steer.¹⁴

The allusion to Rome implicates the Catholic Church in the oppression as well. For the American settlers, Rome was associated with overbearing rules and regulations and religious inflexibility. Even though the Anglican Church broke with Rome, the two religious entities were grouped together in the minds of Americans as being similarly intolerant and domineering. Winchester’s “America’s Encouragement” also indicts Rome along with the Britons. The image of the British being driven back into the water by God’s hand, like the Pharaoh’s men, is also prominent:

¹⁴ Elhanan Winchester, *Thirteen Hymns, Suited to the Present Times: Cotainging [sic]; The Past, Present, and Future State of America, with Advice to Soldiers and Christians. Dedicated to the Inhabitants of the United Colonies* (Baltimore: M. K. Goddard, 1776), 2.

Though Britons join with Rome and Hell,
And seek our freedom to annoy;
Yet God, who doth in Zion dwell,
Can all their boasted pow'r destroy.

What though their vessels fraught with fire,
Come to distress our peaceful coasts;
The Lord can send his wrathful ire,
And sink their ships, and slay their hosts.¹⁵

This hymn text references Zion, the homeland of the Israelites, and describes God as the ally of the oppressed. It demonstrates the recurring theme in *Thirteen Hymns*: God's favoritism for America. Winchester's poetry suggests that America was destined to be great, but that this greatness could be attributed only partially to the efforts of the American people; the real reason for success was the divine help of a God who had carefully chosen these people. The image of God, the King, was especially important in this scheme, because praise of God replaced any devotion to an earthly monarch:

Oh! May we trust in God, our King,
Who can our foes destroy;
And make our land his praise to sing,
With wonder, love, and joy.¹⁶

While no music is printed in this collection and others like it, the designation of "hymn" indicates singing. Until the 1780s, it was customary for psalters, hymn books, and sung poetry of all types to include text only. Well-known tunes would then be affixed to these texts by the users. In many cases, a tune name might be suggested, drawn from a common bank of tunes that most New Englanders would be able to quickly recall.

While newly-composed verse mixed these sacred and secular elements, established biblical texts, especially the psalms, were also subject to reinterpretation in

¹⁵ Winchester, *Thirteen Hymns*, 8.

¹⁶ Winchester, *Thirteen Hymns*, 12.

light of the American situation. Americans occasionally took liberties with the psalm texts, adapting them to reflect current events. These interpolated settings freely repeated, emphasized, reworded, or condensed certain lines or phrases. Psalm 100, for example, existed in several permutations. Comparing its first stanza in two American adaptations—those by John Mycall and Timothy Dwight—to two authoritative British versifications—those in the King James Bible and by Isaac Watts—reveals how context and politics affected psalmody (emphases added):

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness:
Come before his presence with singing. (King James Bible, 1611)

Sing to the Lord with joyful voice;
Let every land his name adore;
The **British Isles** shall send the Noise
Across the **Ocean** to the **Shore**. (Isaac Watts, 1719)

Sing to the Lord with joyful voice
Let every land his name adore;
America shall send the noise
Across the **ocean** to the **shore**. (John Mycall, 1781)¹⁷

Ye sons of men in God rejoice;
From **land to land** his name adore;
Let earth with one **united** voice,
Resound his praise from every **shore**. (Timothy Dwight, 1801)¹⁸

Watts, who frequently substituted Britain for biblical holy places such as Canaan, Judah, and Israel, rewrites this psalm to portray his nation as a beacon, emanating Godly praise throughout the empire. Mycall, paraphrasing Watts in the post-Revolutionary period,

¹⁷ Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 40th ed., “accommodated to the use of the Church of Christ in America” (Newburyport, MA: John Mycall, 1781), 208.

¹⁸ Timothy Dwight, *Isaac Watts, The Psalms of David, a New Edition, in Which the Psalms Omitted by Dr. Watts Are Versified, Local Passages are Altered, and a Number of Psalms Are Versified Anew, in Proper Metres* (New Haven: Samuel Wadsworth, 1801), 220. A similar comparison is made in David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37-38.

inverts the direction of influence, naming America as the sender of the noise. Two decades later, Dwight reflects the improved relations between America and Britain with his emphasis on unity and a bi-directional joyful noise. All three adaptations include references to the ocean and shore, bringing relevance to the psalm text by drawing it into their own, specific geographical location.

Religious elements were mixed not only into songs about the lofty ideals of American politics but also those about actual military conflict. War was certainly not a topic to be shied away from in places of worship; sermons addressing specific military campaigns were relatively common, and preachers were not afraid to proclaim the revolution as a just war on God's behalf.¹⁹ Not all of the religious rhetoric about war came from the American camp. A broadside from 1781, "The True Christian's Anchorhold, or, Jesus Christ, the Only Hiding-Place," presents an autobiographical account of a captain in the British army, who experiences conversion during the war.²⁰ Its publication in post-war America reveals a popular conflation between defeat at the hands of an earthly enemy and total submission and acceptance of God's power in one's life.

No composer of early American psalmody was more overtly political and took more liberty with biblical texts than William Billings. His longer, freer set pieces and anthems take great license with scriptural texts by intertwining biblical and Revolutionary imagery. Also known for his unique and witty writing, Billings used the familiar images of military conflict to depict a war between dissonance and consonance,

¹⁹ For example, see John Devotion, "The Duty and Interest of a People to Sanctify the Lord of Hosts" (Hartford, CT: Eben, 1777). Preached before the General Assembly of the state of Connecticut at Hartford on the day of the anniversary election, May 8th, 1777. Devotion was pastor of the Third Church in Saybrook, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

²⁰ Broadside entitled "The True Christian's Anchorhold, or, Jesus Christ, the Only Hiding-Place" (Boston: Russell's, 1781). Sung to the tune WILLIAMSTON. Accessed via *EAI*.

pitting such characters as “Lord Jargon,” “Lord second,” “Lord 7th,” and “Lord 9th, alias Lord 2nd junior” against “Lord Diapente,” “Lord Octave, alias Lord Unison junior,” “two twin brothers, viz. Major and Minor Trio,” and others. This colorful description of a “war of sound” appears in the prefatory section of Billings’s *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1778) and is meant to teach that it is the constant contrast between dissonance and consonance that makes a piece of music pleasing to the ear.²¹

Billings’s connection with Revolutionary politics ran deeper than his music and writings; he was an avid patriot who certainly knew such major political figures as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere in the small social world of pre-Revolutionary Boston. Revere engraved the frontispiece to Billings’s first tunebook collection.²² Billings titled his tunes after American places to counteract the British place-name tradition. For example, the difference between his tunes “America” and “Europe” in *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770) betrays his political sentiments.²³ Other tunes from his oeuvre named after American locales include “South-Boston,” “Vermont,” and “Washington-Street.” These direct references to concrete places help to situate the music as uniquely American. By presenting religious ideals, often with a specifically American bent, psalmody became a popular expressive vehicle in a culture where religion permeated nearly all aspects of life.

²¹ William Billings, *The Singing Master’s Assistant. Or Key to Practical Music* (Boston: Draper and Folsom, 1778), 28.

²² See Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*, 53.

²³ Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 33-34.

The Yankee Tunesmiths

With Billings's landmark publication, *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), the desire for a native school of composition became apparent, as themes specific to American religion and politics assumed greater importance. Billings and his contemporaries were the first generation of Anglo-American composers. They lived at a time when the marriage of cultural and political independence colored life in New England. The American Revolution affected not only politics and governance in America; it had a profound influence on American identity as well, and there was a more pressing need for a unique cultural identity in areas such as music. For the first time, American composers were producing tunes prolifically and gaining attention.

Before 1760, nearly all music printed in America was sacred, and virtually all of it was British in origin.²⁴ Most tunebooks were collections of the best-loved British songs and settings of the psalms. Since settlers came to the New World, several English collections of metrical versifications of the psalms and other sacred texts had been circulating in the growing New England communities. From the time of settlement through the early eighteenth century, most of the tunes that accompanied these texts were transmitted informally or through oral tradition. Around mid-century, tunebooks with text and music, some printed in America, began to appear in greater numbers. This coincides with the growth of singing schools, which utilized the printed music as material for

²⁴ Nicholas Temperley and Richard Crawford, "Psalmody," *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1984); Dorothy D. Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1970), 11–16 provides a list of American-composed hymns. Some of the most popular British tunebooks in early America include those compiled by Henry Ainsworth (1612), Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins (1556), Este (1592), Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady (1692), Thomas Ravenscroft (1562), and Henry Playford (1677). Like the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), the first book printed in America, most did not contain music until later reprints. Musicians in the colonies also read the available British theory treatises, especially those by John Tufts and William Tans'ur.

teaching and learning, and the major religious movement of the eighteenth century, the Great Awakening, which recognized singing as a way into a personal experience of God. These collections comprised the core repertory for American singers.

The last few decades of the eighteenth century marked a dramatic rise not only in tunebooks compiled by Americans but also in new tunes composed by Americans. James Lyon's *Urania* (1761), which included a significant number of compositions by Americans, signaled a shift in American psalmody. This movement toward favoring native composition accelerated in the 1770s, sparking an increase in sacred song composition by Americans and their inclusion alongside older tunes in compilations.²⁵ Soon, a school of "Yankee tunesmiths" emerged, including composers such as Billings, Supply Belcher, Justin Morgan, Daniel Read, Elias Mann, and several others.²⁶ Works by this new group began to occupy more space in tunebooks to fuel the singing schools' healthy demand for new music.

Billings, whose compositional activity coincides roughly with the American Revolution and the early Colonial Period, contributed more to early American psalmody than any other composer. His first collection, *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770) alone produced a tenfold increase in native composition.²⁷ Even during his lifetime, his important place in American musical history was widely recognized. In 1786, eight years

²⁵ See the work of Richard Crawford, who has traced the attributions of tunes in many of the collections listed here, especially in *The American Musical Landscape* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993): 142–43. Many of these tunebooks contain a significant number of American compositions, which make up a large percentage of each collection as a whole. Billings's collections are entirely original.

²⁶ The term "Yankee tunesmiths" was first used by H. Wiley Hitchcock in "William Billings and the Yankee Tunesmiths," *HiFi/Stereo Review* 16 (Feb. 1966): 55. Examples of works by these contemporaries of Billings can be found in Allen Perdue Britton, Irving Lowens, and Richard Crawford, *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698–1810: A Bibliography* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1990).

²⁷ Temperley and Crawford, "Psalmody," 638.

before Billings published his most original and groundbreaking collection, *The Continental Harmony* (1794), tunebook compiler Isaiah Thomas wrote of Billings as if he were already a legend:

Mr. William Billings of Boston was the first person we know of that attempted to compose Church Musick, in the New-England States; his musick met with approbation. ... Several adept in musick followed Mr. Billings's example, and the New-England States can now boast of many authors of Church Musick, whose compositions do them honour.²⁸

Many scholars name Billings as the first American-born composer to enter the canon of American music history and the first whose fame extended beyond his lifetime.²⁹

However, Billings was certainly not the only active composer in late eighteenth-century New England. By 1810, nearly three hundred Americans had published sacred music. This first school of New England composers comprised men who were largely Anglo-Celtic and Protestant, usually Congregationalist.³⁰ Most lived in Massachusetts or Connecticut, were tradesmen of various sorts, and were singing-school-trained or self-taught amateur musicians, but this lack of formal training says less about their skill level and more about the economic support for artistic endeavors in colonial New England.

Although the works of these American composers continued more or less in the same stylistic vein as British psalmody, composers of the First New England School developed individual idioms, and subtle changes in repertory and musical style began to set this American brand of psalmody apart. Interpolated biblical texts, nature imagery, the characteristic use of fusing tunes, and long anthems with contrasting sections are features

²⁸ *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1786), front matter 1.

²⁹ See, for example, Philip V. Bohlman, Edith L. Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow, eds., *Music in American Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 3-4.

³⁰ Temperley and Crawford, "Psalmody," 638.

of the American style. Another significant change is the increased attention that American composers paid to the singing voice itself, both in their choices of texts and musical style. (Some of these features will be explored more deeply in chapter three.) New Englanders held the practice of psalmody and the singing voice itself in high esteem for various practical, religious, and social reasons. The form and the content of new tunebooks changed to reflect this cultivation and celebration of the so-called “breathing instrument.” This suggests that religious leaders were not the only ones who recognized the theological import of the singing voice; composers, too, chose text about singing to reflect its crucial role in religious culture.

Even before the “Yankee tunesmiths” gained prominence, psalmody dominated the musical landscape of New England. Defined as *a cappella* three- and four-part settings of metrical texts based on the Book of Psalms, other parts of the Bible, or other sacred themes, this style of music seemed to capitalize on the strengths of early New England societies; it was highly portable and accessible to most persons, it highlighted the singing voice, and it was flexible enough to adapt its texts to relevant cultural and political events. In a society teeming with religious rhetoric and devotional practices, songs of all types adopted language similar to that found in psalmody. With the flowering of the First New England School, the music and the discourse surrounding it began to more closely reflect the unique manifestation of the Reformed religious climate present in colonial New England.

CHAPTER 2: SACRED SONG AND THE SOUL

Religious leaders in late eighteenth-century New England agreed that the nourishment of the soul was a critical function of psalmody. The music alone possessed a certain aesthetic beauty and required some knowledge of how to perform it, but they believed that sacred song was useless without its spiritual dimension. The text that accompanied the notes provided one level of meaning; psalm texts or other sacred words expounded upon religious beliefs and offered a way for the listener or performer to communicate with God. On another level, however, the total experience of singing—the beauty of the music and words together—allowed, it was believed, for change within the soul, catapulting it into realms unknown. In the predominantly Reformed religious climate of the time, this sort of personal spiritual experience was an especially important part of worship.

This chapter discusses the shift in religious thought ushered in by the Great Awakening, focusing especially on its uniquely American aspects. Religious leaders and composers claimed that sacred song took those theological changes to another level. Psalmody exemplifies the religious personalism of the post-Great Awakening period and was a crucial medium through which New Englanders practiced the new brand of spirituality.

“A Citty upon a Hill”

Commonly held religious beliefs and moral codes in late eighteenth-century New England clearly impacted attitudes about the human soul and music’s ability to affect it. The different colonies had developed somewhat distinct religious cultures, but despite the variety of Christian denominations, an overarching climate of Reformed Calvinist theology prevailed in New England and the surrounding areas. A brief review of the colonies’ religious traditions shows both the unity and diversity of religious thought in the late eighteenth century.

Calvinist thought encompassed many aspects of Puritanism from the previous century. “Puritan” was the name given to English Protestants who called for more intense reform of the Church of England. They believed that the English brand of Protestantism was too mild, being essentially Catholicism under a new name. The English monarchy’s harassment of the Puritans during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries prompted the Great Migration of the pilgrims to America in the 1630s and 40s. In its American manifestation, Puritanism included heavy reliance on the Bible for answers to all of life’s questions and rejection of Anglican traditionalism and hierarchy, which, in their mind, was too close to Catholicism. In regards to the church institution, they believed that each congregation was an autonomous unit, able to function as a decision-making body with Christ as its true authority.¹

Early American societies revolved around these autonomous church polities, which oversaw even the most minute aspects of practical life. Historian Perry Miller

¹ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 31-32, 37. See also Timothy L. Hall, *Religion in America* (New York: Infobase, 2007), 9, 23-24. During the reign of the Catholic monarch Mary I (1553-58), many English Protestants were sent into exile to places like Geneva, where they were exposed to a much more extreme form of Protestantism than was practiced by the Church of England.

argues that early American Puritanism “was not only a religious creed, it was a philosophy and metaphysic; it was an organization of man’s whole life, emotional and intellectual.”² Although the Puritans gained a reputation for conservatism because of some rather authoritarian practices (e.g., laws regulating dress, music, and behavior), their goal was reformation and purification of the church; in light of their experiences with the Church of England, they were looking to create a better world order, and might be seen, in that sense, as progressive.

Concomitant with this desire to be a reformed, enlightened offshoot of the Anglican Church was the concept of American exceptionalism.³ In its religious context, this was a belief that God was doing special work in America through a select group of disciples. The new geography was an opportunity for a fresh start. John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s and 40s, provided the rallying cry for this ideology when he preached that his new community would set an example for others, both overseas and at home: “wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are uppon us.”⁴ For nearly a century and a half leading up to the American Revolution, the pioneering spirit of Winthrop’s words embedded itself in religious discourse, setting the stage for a uniquely American conception of Christianity. Rhetorical comparisons with the biblical account of Exodus were commonly used to support the idea of American exceptionalism, and these were incorporated into some of America’s native psalmody in the late eighteenth century. America was conceived as a

² Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 4.

³ Hall, *Religion in America*, 98.

⁴ John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” in Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans: A Sourcebook*, 199.

New Jerusalem and the Puritans as the new band of Israelites, God's chosen people, being guided through the wilderness of the unfamiliar and often dangerous landscape of the New World. This type of biblical rhetoric combined with Calvinist thinking contributed significantly to the revolutionary mentality of the 1770s by stressing America's mission to inaugurate the millennial age by building such a "citty upon a hill."

The Revolution, however, was not the end of the theory of American exceptionalism; it is still alive in modern discourse, hundreds of years after the identity crises that sparked the immigration of the Puritans and, ultimately, the war for independence. Modern proponents continue to argue that there is something about the religious culture of America that is fundamentally different from any other. They describe an apparent paradox central to American society: despite being a thoroughly modernized nation in terms of its economy, technological progress, and political systems—indeed, perhaps the icon of modernization in the twenty-first century—the social and cultural importance of religion remains remarkably strong. This flies in the face of general assumptions about the relationship between modernization and secularization.⁵ In many European nations, for example, modernization accompanied a diminishing role of religion in social organization and political decision-making. This is decidedly not the case in America, as proponents of American exceptionalism argue that religious congregations, rather than political parties, are still the predominant form of popular participation in American civil society.⁶ This contemporary conception of the

⁵ James A. Beckford, *Social Theory & Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59-60.

⁶ See William Safran, ed., *The Secular and the Sacred: Nation, Religion and Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 13, 15. The author cites a number of popular movements initiated by religious groups. Additionally, the fact that the United States is one of the least "statist" modernized nations (that is, in terms of public employment and social programs) is supposed to stem from the radical individualism that was part of the unique character of American religious movements like the Great Awakening.

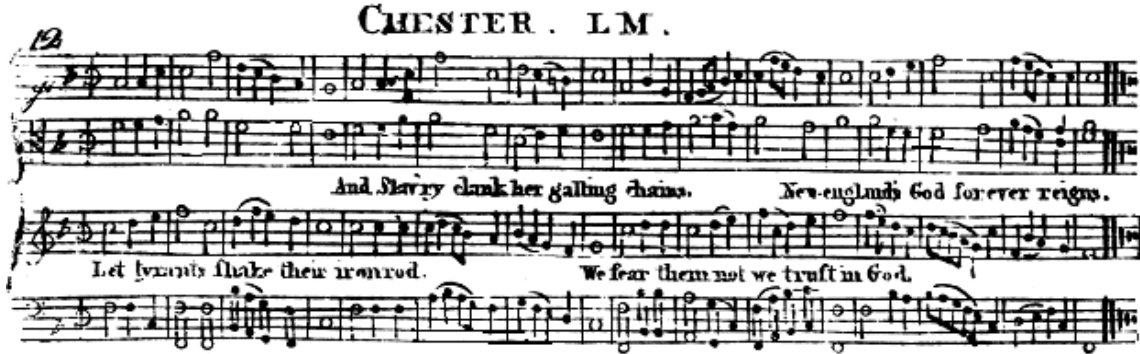
“citty upon a hill”—a beacon of modernization with religion as its driving force —traces its roots directly to the first Anglo-American communities. While eighteenth-century New England was not on the cutting edge of modernization, many of its residents had truly radical ideas about religious and social organization. Edmund Burke appropriately called these early Americans “Protestants of Protestantism” and “dissenters of dissent.”⁷ Many embraced the ideal of a New Jerusalem, and sought to carry this out in virtually every aspect of life.

Sacred music was one prominent manifestation of American exceptionalism in these early American communities. Because the predominant musical style required many voices working in concert, psalmody promoted community organization centered on religious themes. Some examples of late eighteenth-century psalmody from this period exhibit a nationalist tone, combining biblical imagery with unique aspects of the American setting and suggesting the potential for political initiative through these singing groups. Billings was particularly known for such hybrids. His famous “Chester,” first printed in *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770) and revised into its final version (shown in Example 2.1) in *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1778), emphasizes the slave-master relationship that characterized tensions with England at that time in America’s history. Its setting, mostly homophonic with a preponderance of root-position tonic harmonies, exudes strength.

Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And Slav’ry clank her galling chains.
We fear them not, we trust in God.
New-England’s God forever reigns.

⁷ Edmund Burke, *Selected Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 180-181.

Example 2.1: William Billings, “Chester,” *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1778)



By claiming God for New England, Billings echoes Winthrop’s declaration of divine favoritism. That such a song appeared in a sacred tunebook speaks to the fluid boundaries between religious and political rhetoric in late eighteenth-century America.

Drawing on this Puritan heritage that included a sense of exceptionalism, most churches in the colonies were decidedly Calvinist in their theology. According to religion historian William McLoughlin, this theological grounding underpinned more than Sunday morning worship: “a broad Calvinistic Puritan base was the common feature of the colonial world view.”⁸ The most prominent denominations in New England, namely, the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Dutch Reformed, embraced at least some aspects of this theology.

The colonial world view that McLoughlin alludes to included ideas about human nature, salvation, and everyday actions. Reformed Christians believed that salvation was the gracious gift of a sovereign God and that the recipients were sinful and therefore undeserving. Humans were in a constant struggle with Satan; he could be kept at bay only with diligent effort and self-discipline. Yet, depravity was considered the natural state of

⁸ McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 38-39.

even the most conscientious Christian. While good works and right actions were thought to be excellent offerings of praise, God's grace was the key to salvation. Earlier Puritans held that only the elect would be saved, and they saw outward good works as a confirmation of such election. But debate ensued surrounding the so-called "covenant of works" as opposed to the aforementioned "covenant of grace." By the eighteenth century, the doctrine of "total depravity" and dependence on God's grace was widely accepted among American denominations.⁹ Calvinists also maintained that God revealed much of his will through the Bible, the ultimate guidebook for human action. However, this revealed will was best interpreted by learned men, aided, again, by God's grace. Even these men, that is, preachers and ministers, were fallible, but they were to be respected as God's servants.¹⁰

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the predominant manifestation of Calvinist theology in New England was Congregationalism. Congregationalists hailed from a line of Puritans who maintained that each church was an autonomous group of believers. The colony of Massachusetts was especially rife with Congregationalists, and they were notably intolerant of dissenters. Baptists, called the "incendiaries of commonwealths," were banned by law there in 1644. Quakers were persecuted in the latter half of the seventeenth century and were sometimes deported, maimed, or even, on occasion, executed. The hardships that colonists faced were often

⁹ Hall, *Religion in America*, 26-27. Early dissenters like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were proponents of this "covenant of grace."

¹⁰ McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 43.

explained as God's wrath brought upon them for the moral depravity caused by these dissenting religious groups.¹¹

Roger Williams, as one of the best known dissenters, complained about the close relationship between the church and state in Massachusetts, resembling at times a theocracy. He fled to Rhode Island and founded the First Baptist church there. The numbers of Baptists, most emigrating from England and Wales, swelled during the eighteenth century, and Baptists gained many converts from Congregationalist and Anglican congregations during this period as well.¹² Because of the strong presence of Baptists there, some Anglicans referred to Rhode Island as "that fertile soil of Heresy & Schism."¹³

The Baptists, however, were not as harshly condemned as the Quakers. Perhaps the most characteristic difference between the Quakers and other Protestant denominations in New England was the former's focus on an inner experience of spirituality. Scripture was less important to the Quakers, and they claimed that salvation was available to everyone, not just the elect. Quakers began to arrive in America in the 1630s, and their controversial beliefs made them outcasts in many places, especially Massachusetts. New Jersey, Rhode Island, and New York were tolerable havens for Quakers, but William Penn's new colony of Pennsylvania was the most hospitable

¹¹ Hall, *Religion in America*, 37, 39, 47.

¹² Hall, *Religion in America*, 74. The right to vote in Massachusetts, for example, was restricted to Congregationalist church members.

¹³ Cutler, Timothy, James Honyman, Samuel Johnson, et al., "The Anglican Clergy of New England to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 20 July 1727," in *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 123-24. Letter dated July 20, 1727.

location because of Penn's own conversion to Quakerism in 1667.¹⁴ Pennsylvania offered a degree of religious pluralism and freedom that was ahead of its time. Christopher Schultz, a Pennsylvania resident, described the atmosphere there to his friend, Carl Ehrenfried Heintze, in 1769:

Here [in Pennsylvania] we mingled like fish at sea, but peaceably ... A Mennonite preacher is my real neighbor; I do not wish for a better; on the other side stands a large, stone, Catholic church. The present Jesuit father here is a native of Vienna, ... he confides more in me than in any of the bosom-children. When he encounters a difficulty he comes to me. These men have learned to adjust themselves perfectly to the time. Furthermore, the Lutherans and Reformed have their churches here ... On Sundays we meet each other crisscross.¹⁵

Schultz's account bears witness to the pluralistic environment in Pennsylvania that tolerated a number of different sects and harbored immigrants from various parts of Europe.

Some religious groups were purposefully established as enclaves by European counterparts. For example, Cecil Calvert, the Second Lord Baltimore, established Maryland as a Catholic colony in 1632 at the behest of Charles I of England and his Catholic queen consort, Henrietta Maria; the Catholics were a minority there, but they were still more prominent than elsewhere in the Northeast.¹⁶ "Popery" was almost universally despised in America and sometimes prohibited by law; "papists" were denied positions in colonial governance, and some were made to take loyalty oaths that were

¹⁴ Hall, *Religion in America*, 49-50.

¹⁵ Christopher Schultz, Christopher Schultz to Carl Ehrenfried Heintze, 1769, in Sally Schwartz, *"A Mixed Multitude": The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 266

¹⁶ Hall, *Religion in America*, 30.

incompatible with Catholic allegiance to the pope.¹⁷ Catholics were disenfranchised in Maryland in 1718, when it became an Anglican colony. Dutch Reformed leaders, notably Peter Stuyvesant, were sent to present-day New York on behalf of the Dutch East India Company. Stuyvesant enacted regulations attempting to compel church attendance, enforce Sabbath rest, close brothels and taverns, and bar Catholics and Jews. However, by the eighteenth century, New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) was very religiously diverse, harboring Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Puritans, and Anabaptists along with the prominent Dutch Reformed population.¹⁸ Other sects came to America because of worsening conditions in Europe. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 made life less tolerable for many French Calvinists, many of whom immigrated to New York.

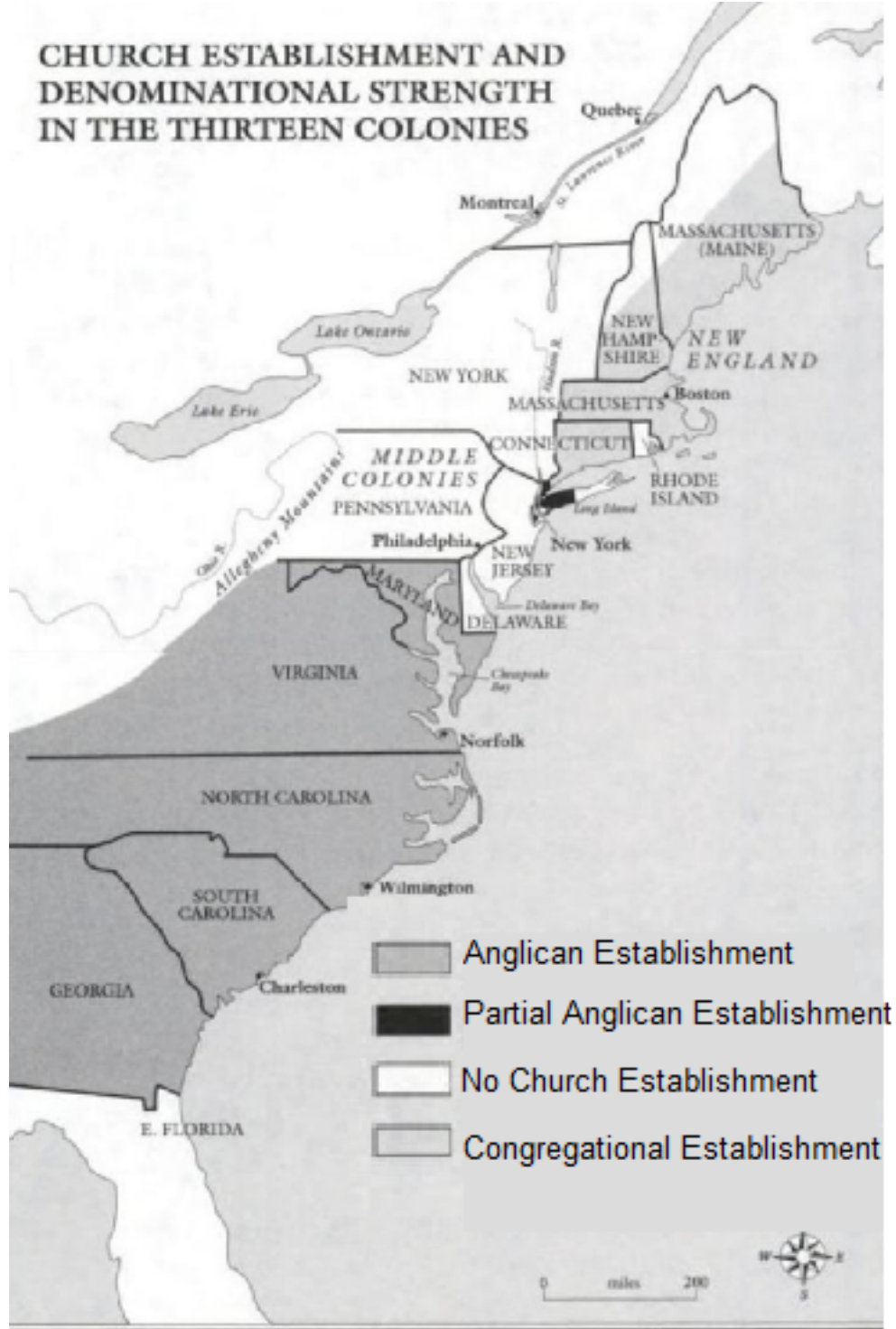
By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Congregationalism had been established as the dominant religion of New England, although disagreements over key theological points created pockets of dissenting communities.¹⁹ By this time also, the southern colonies were established as Anglican strongholds, and other groups were discouraged from settling there. In the middle colonies, religious pluralism was the norm, with Baptist, Presbyterian, Quaker, and even Catholic and Jewish communities flourishing. Figure 2.1 summarizes the religious climate of America in the late eighteenth century.

¹⁷ Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 82.

¹⁸ Hall, *Religion in America*, 33- 34.

¹⁹ For example, debates ensued about who was qualified to receive the Lord's Supper, whether infant baptism was a legitimate practice, and whether baptism alone was sufficient for church membership. See Hall, *Religion in America*, 52-53.

Figure 2.1: Church Establishment and Denominational Strength in the Thirteen Colonies²⁰



²⁰ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York: Perseus, 1999), 96.

The religious pluralism of New England, at least within the Protestant branch of Christianity, exploded in the second half of the eighteenth century. At that time, sizeable communities of Methodists, Shakers, and Unitarians could be found; in addition, German-speaking immigrants established communities of Lutherans, German Reformed, Mennonites, and Moravians. Table 2.1 shows a summary of religious groups and their main locations.

Table 2.1: Summary of religious groups in late eighteenth-century New England²¹

Denomination / Group	Date*	Main Location(s), 18th century	Main Ancestry
Dutch Reformed	1628	New York	Dutch
Congregationalists	1630s	Massachusetts	English
Catholics	1632	Maryland	English
Baptists	1639	Rhode Island	English
Presbyterians	1644	Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania	Scottish, Irish
Quakers	1681	Pennsylvania	English
Huguenots	1685	New York	French
Anglicans	1689	Virginia	English
Moravians	1740s	Pennsylvania, North Carolina	German
Methodists	1766	New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware	English
Shakers	1785	New York, Pennsylvania	English
Unitarian	1785	Massachusetts	English
*Approximate date of first formally established churches, congregations, or religious colonies in America			

This increasing religious toleration grew, culminating in an amendment to the United States constitution in 1789 “respecting an establishment of religion,” but acceptance for minority groups, like Quakers, Baptists, Catholics, and Jews, was especially slow in some

²¹ Information culled from Hall, *Religion in America*.

of the New England colonies.²² Congregationalists maintained a strong hold on both private and public life in the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut well into the nineteenth century.²³ Although religious differences between various denominations in New England remained important, they moved to the background somewhat in the late eighteenth century, as community-level organization superseded regional religious boundaries in many places. Sacred song, which was usually a theologically neutral expression of commonly-held Christian beliefs within this Reformed religious climate, flourished and flowed freely from community to community.

The Great Awakening

The common ground between different religious groups came to forefront through the most important religious movement in eighteenth-century America—the Great Awakening. Most scholars date this movement from roughly 1730 to 1760. Springing from the Reformed tradition and its emphasis on God’s gracious salvation in the face of human sinfulness, the prominent feature of the Great Awakening was a new, emotion-based preaching style that applied this idea of grace to the individual. George Whitefield, an itinerant Calvinist Anglican minister with a gift for passionate speech, is often considered the catalyst for this movement. He travelled along the eastern seaboard, preaching mostly outdoors and attracting large crowds. Whitefield claimed that his purpose was to breathe new life into the spiritual lives of Americans and to remake

²² First amendment to the Constitution, submitted to the states for ratification September 25, 1789; adopted on December 15, 1791. Amendments aside, the U.S. Constitution, drafted in 1787, was notably un-religious in its language; state constitutions often referred to God, but the federal one did not. However, religious practices, like swearing in the new president on a Bible, and the institution of Thanksgiving holiday in 1789, revealed the permeable boundaries between church and state in the early years of the new republic.

²³ Hall, *Religion in America*, 75.

religious leadership; he wanted to awaken the “dead, false-hearted preachers among the dissenters, who hold the form of sound words, but have never felt the power of them in their own souls.”²⁴ He gained celebrity status and sparked a new focus on the personal experiences in the heart of the believer. Intellectual acceptance of religious doctrines and adherence to traditions were still important, but the evangelistic fervor brought by Whitefield and his ilk imbued the emotional experience of religion with legitimacy like never before. The individual’s conversion experience was emphasized, as faith was seen as something chosen rather than something that one is born into. A covenantal relationship existed between the church and the individual; membership in the church polity became intentional, stated voluntarily by the believer, as opposed to being automatically assigned upon birth or entry into the community.

In many ways, the Great Awakening was an ecumenical movement, downplaying the differences between denominations in favor of the focus on conversion experience, which was available to everyone. Scholars have called the Great Awakening the “first prominent intercolonial cultural event.”²⁵ All denominations experienced the revival brought by the Great Awakening in one way or another; some fragmented as a result, splitting into traditionalist and progressive factions. For example, Congregationalists sympathetic to the Great Awakening were known as “New Lights,” as opposed to the “Old Lights” who largely rejected it. Unitarianism developed out of a liberal branch of “Old Light” Congregationalism, challenging traditional Calvinist doctrines, such as the Trinity and divine sovereignty. Presbyterians were similarly divided into the “New Side”

²⁴ George Whitefield, entry dated 17 April, 1740 in *George Whitefield’s Journals, 1737-41, to Which Is Prefixed His “Short Account” (1746) and “Further Account” (1747)*, ed. William W. Davis (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), 405-406.

²⁵ Hall, *Religion in America*, 95.

and the “Old Side.” The Separate Baptists split from mainstream Baptists because of their insistence on a testimony of conversion to attain church membership.

The Great Awakening also placed great emphasis on the mind. During this era, formal religious education of the clergy was the norm for most denominations, and they were thus more equipped for biblical interpretation, preaching, and evangelical ministry.²⁶ The ministerial professionalism ushered in during the Great Awakening gave preachers the authority to speak on a broad range of topics relating to the individual’s religious life, including sacred song. Many of America’s first institutions of higher education were closely associated with or established by religious groups. Schools like the College of New Jersey (established 1746, later renamed as Princeton) and William Tennent’s Log College (established 1735), both founded by New Side Presbyterians, were responsible for the style of intellectual revival preaching embodied by philosophically-minded ministers like Jonathan Edwards. Edwards’s sermons were meticulous and thoroughly reasoned discourses, which were often published.²⁷ This focus on learned ministry meant that congregations were exposed to more intellectual speech and were schooled on the finer points of theology through sermons. The Great Awakening embodied a dualism between intuition and reason, that is, between the heart and the head. Its proponents were at the same time deeply spiritual persons, seeking an inner experience of conversion, and practical thinkers. As “heirs of humanism,” they were firm believers in the power of the intellect and human reason in discerning the

²⁶ As a case in point, see Appendix B, which gives the schooling backgrounds of the preachers discussed in this study. Sixteen out of twenty-one were trained at one of late eighteenth-century America’s three premier educational institutions—Harvard, Yale, and the College of New Jersey (Princeton).

²⁷ Hall, *Religion in America*, 78-79.

truth.²⁸ Passion was to be checked by logic, but both were welcomed as means of encountering God. By affirming both the emotions and the intellect as useful tools in religious life, they embraced a holistic view of the human person, and passed this religious culture on to subsequent generations.

Of course, this integration of the intellect and spirituality was not unique to the Great Awakening; it merely found renewed expression there.²⁹ American preachers relied heavily on the past wisdom of Reformation figures and earlier Christian thinkers. In addition to the seminal writings of John Calvin, the works of Sts. Paul and Augustine experienced a revival during this period in American religious history. Paul, in his letters to early Christian communities along the eastern Mediterranean, spoke of the duality between the spirit and the intellect and the necessity of both in the actions of daily Christian living. This teaching aptly supported the ideals of the Awakening. It's also likely that preachers favored Paul because certain aspects of his life were similar to theirs. Like many of New England's early religious leaders, Paul was itinerant, establishing new communities of Christians wherever he went and relying on his words to inspire them. The theme of building a New Jerusalem was common to both situations. In addition, Paul's famous conversion to Christianity along the road to Damascus made him an appealing figure for eighteenth-century American Christians, who increasingly emphasized the conversion experience as a marker of faith maturity. St. Augustine also

²⁸ McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 41. See also David Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 11-29.

²⁹ Furthermore, the ideals of the Great Awakening have continued to thrive in various manifestations since the eighteenth century. In many ways, the theology of modern Evangelicals is indebted to the Great Awakening. Although Evangelicalism in America is incredibly diverse, common themes of emotional outpouring, a personal relationship with God, and the initiation of social action based on religious principles flow directly from the theology of the Great Awakening.

converted to Christianity as an adult and exhibited a lifelong obsession with teaching and learning that produced many theological writings. Augustine's ideas about basic human sinfulness and efficacious grace found expression in the works of Reformation theologians, especially Calvin and Martin Luther.

The Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity, as it was explained by theologians such as Paul, Augustine, Whitefield, and Edwards, proved an important figure in the religious climate of the Great Awakening. The intangible ways in which souls were affected, converted, and moved to action were attributed to the workings of the Spirit. The outpouring of emotion that might accompany a conversion experience or the singing of a particularly moving song could be explained through the concept of inspiration, literally, the filling of oneself with the Spirit. Because of the importance of inspiration in the act of singing, some examples of psalmody from this period open with an invocation to the Holy Spirit. For example, the text of Abraham Wood's "Waterford," written by the English Calvinist minister Joseph Hart, calls on the Spirit to perform both an emotional function ("touch our hearts") and a musical one ("tune our tongues"), so that the action of singing might become an outpouring of emotion as well:

Holy Ghost inspire our praises,
Touch our hearts and tune our tongues;
While we laud the name of Jesus,
Heav'n will gladly share our songs.

Woods's setting, shown in Example 2.2, is typical of those found near the beginning of late eighteenth-century tunebooks. Its homophonic texture, steady quarter-note rhythms, abundance of root position harmonies, and the clear antecedent-consequent relationship between the two phrases make it an ideal warm-up piece for a singing session. If used in

this way, the invocation of the Spirit might serve as a blessing over the entire proceedings.

Example 2.2: Abraham Wood, “Waterford,” in Nehemiah Shumway, *The American Harmony* (1793)



Another popular text, written by Billings and set by him and a handful of other composers, invoked the Holy Spirit in a similar way, asking it to assist in the musical performance, to “augment” the “swells” and “refine” the “tones” of the voice. Elias Mann’s setting, “Lancaster,” shown in Example 2.3, is somewhat more intricate than Woods’s.

Majestic God, our muse inspire,
And fill us with seraphic fire;
Augment our swells, our tones refine;
Performance ours, the glory thine.³⁰

³⁰ Also found in Billings, *The Continental Harmony* (1794) with the tune INVOCATION.

Example 2.3: Elias Mann, “Lancaster,” *The Worcester Collection* (1786)



Pieces like these appear frequently in late eighteenth-century tunebooks. The invocation of the Holy Spirit seemed to function as a blessing over the music, calling on God to literally inspire the act of singing.

Whitefield and Edwards, two of the preeminent preachers of the Great Awakening, saw the importance of the Holy Spirit in making God’s grace present to everyone. One of Whitefield’s published discourses on the topic defends the indwelling of the Spirit as a legitimate and extraordinary means of encountering God, available to everyone. He emphasizes the universal availability of the Spirit’s workings:

The genuine effects and fruits of the love of God ... are flowers not to be gathered in nature’s garden. They are exotics; planted originally in heaven, and in the great work of the new birth, transplanted by the Holy Ghost, not only into the hearts of the first apostles or primitive Christians, but into the hearts of all true believers.³¹

Edwards also preached about “the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit,” which tended to surface in everyday situations and for everyday people, perhaps through singing or other daily tasks. Although the gifts were extraordinary, the means of receiving them were not. Edwards emphasized the Spirit’s “ordinary operations, in convincing, converting,

³¹ George Whitefield, *Observations on Some Fatal Mistakes, in a Book Lately Published, and Intituled, The Doctrine of Grace; or, The Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1763), 10. Accessed via EAI.

enlightening and sanctifying the souls of men.”³² This type of grass-roots religious philosophy appealed to the large crowds who often gathered to hear itinerant preachers like Edwards and Whitefield, and it probably influenced the choices of texts by American composers.

Furthermore, this religious movement of the Great Awakening and its proclamation of the universal availability of God’s grace contributed to a revolutionary mindset in the years leading up to the war for American independence. Preachers commonly lamented the spiritual decline of ministers at home and abroad, who were supposed to be God’s trustees on earth.³³ Most denominations were quick to remove leaders that they believed to be illegitimate. In this way, the language of revolution entered American churches during the Great Awakening. The movement’s emphasis on the individual’s conversion added to an overall suspicion of hierarchical institutions.³⁴ The ability to approach God directly, without need of a priest, bishop, or other official intermediary, to some extent lessened the authority of church hierarchy and doctrines pronounced by church leaders, and this attitude probably carried over into political life as well. The concept of a “priesthood of all believers,” that is, a laity with the ability to

³² Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Philadelphia: Parry Hall, 1792), 3.

³³ See Hall, *Religion in America*, 100. These sermons and speeches were known as “inverted Jeremiads.” A Jeremiad lamented the depraved moral state of society; the “inverted” version decried not the common people but the religious leaders of a community.

³⁴ Catholicism, of course, represented an extreme form of hierarchical religious structure. The disgust for Rome evident in religious writings of this period and the exclusion of “papists” from many aspects of New England society is evidence of this suspicion of heavy-handed church leadership. Anglicans and Methodists, though less harshly criticized than Catholics, struggled with inherit connections with religious leaders in England. American Anglican bishops had to pledge allegiance to the British throne, and Methodists were considered a subset of the Church of England. Tensions mounted during the war years, when American leaders of these faiths tended to be sympathetic to the loyalist cause and were opponents of independence. Post-Revolution, both split with their English counterparts, forming American Episcopalianism and American Methodism.

approach God directly without need of church leaders to perform that function, was a popular ideal for religious groups in New England.³⁵ The belief in the availability of God's saving grace to all Christians helped to introduce strains of democracy into religious thought, possibly setting the stage for democratic political reforms. Thus, the secular revolution of the 1770s was reflected in Protestant church practices of that period as well.

The Puritan era bequeathed to America its core culture and a sense of American exceptionalism. Those values, based on the predominant Calvinist theology and filtered through the lens of the Great Awakening, permeated life in the colonies during the last forty years of the eighteenth century. It is no exaggeration to say that the American consciousness throughout the eighteenth century revolved around religion; it colored nearly every aspect of life, from politics to family life, from economics to the arts. The act of singing fit neatly into this religious landscape because it, too, touched on the public and private and nourished the whole person by involving the soul, body, and mind. Psalmody focused these new religious ideas into a format that involved the whole person and indeed every person.

Effects on the Soul

Because the texts of psalmody were almost always directed toward God as an act of praise, matters of the soul were of prime importance for authors and composers. St. Paul's exhortation to "sing with the spirit" called for attention to this relationship between

³⁵ In particular, the writings of Martin Luther expound on this concept, which is rooted in scripture (1 Peter 2:9—"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light").

song and the soul. Paul's distinction between the outward and inward parts of singing mirrors the distinction between the human and divine audience for sacred song. The part of the performance for the human audience, including the performers themselves, was concerned with technical facility, vocal production, text declamation, and aesthetic beauty. However, the part of the performance directed toward God strove for something more intangible and personal. This striving directly related to the radical shift in religious thought towards the ideal of a more personal relationship between God and each individual.

Ideally, the inward, spiritual part of singing involved a personal relationship with God that was strengthened each time the singer engaged his or her voice in praise. The belief in the capability of sacred song to achieve this relationship is espoused in sermons and tunebooks. Preachers, composers, and practitioners of psalmody emphasized the importance of singing by noting many salutary effects on the soul. Observers noted several specific ways in which sacred song was thought to improve the relationship with God. It seemed to ward off evil temptations, cleanse the soul of impurities, and fill it with lofty and virtuous desires. It supposedly enlivened the soul and made it more fit for heavenly engagement. In their descriptions of sacred song, many writers spoke of music's ability to "refine" the soul, as a metal is refined and made free of all impurities:

Musick has a most happy tendency to polish and refine the soul.³⁶

Devout psalmody ... revives and refreshes the spirit under trials... Singing psalms or hymns of praise to God has a happy tendency to strengthen and animate devotion: And to prepare the soul for further good impressions.³⁷

³⁶ Zabdiel Adams, "The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages of Church-Musick" (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 6. A sermon preached at a lecture in the First Parish of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on Thursday April 4th. 1771. Accessed via *EAI*.

This image of refinement, taken from the Old Testament prophet Malachi's description of the day of judgment, was certainly a familiar one in New England towns, where metalworking was a common and vital segment of the economy.³⁸ Like the purified metal, a purified soul was a clean, raw material, full of possibilities and ready to be put to good use.

Once sacred song had refined and cleansed the soul, it was believed to have further powers to fill the soul with good feelings and desires. These "devout affections" were considered to be one of the greatest fruits of psalmody, and discussion of them abounded in treatises and sermons about sacred music. The Reverend Ezra Weld described a range of holy emotions that might be brought about by singing and boldly claimed that sacred music was perhaps the best way to achieve closeness with God:

[The psalms] help the soul on in its way towards perfection; strengthen, and promote every virtue, and lead to the most intense contemplations on the infinite beauties of God, and his works. Psalmody carried to possible perfection, would perhaps be more than equal to any other exercise, in purifying the heart; leading it to God, and heavenly attainments. It is true indeed, the pious mind ... is filled with holy wonder, and a tranquility of heart, that admits no description; but by the energy of sacred song.³⁹

The purification that Weld refers to is similar to Malachi's process of refinement. Weld claimed that pious feelings of "wonder" and "tranquility" resulted once the purified soul was exposed to sacred song.

³⁷ William Symmes, "The Duty and Advantages of Singing Praises unto God" (Danvers, MA: E. Russell, 1779), 16. Delivered April 6, 1779. Symmes was pastor of the First Church in Andover, Massachusetts. Accessed via *EAI*.

³⁸ Malachi 3:2-3: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver."

³⁹ Ezra Weld, "A Sermon, Preached at a Singing Lecture" (Springfield, MA: Ezra W. Weld, 1789), 15-16. Sermon preached May 21, 1788 in Braintree, Massachusetts. Accessed via *EAI*.

Because different strains of music cause different outpourings of emotion, the ways in which sacred song might bring forth devout affections are virtually limitless. The introduction to *A Selection of Sacred Harmony* (1788) describes a whole range of salutary effects on the soul:

Music not only decently expresses, but powerfully Excites and Improves the devout affections. It is the prerogative of this noble art to cheer and invigorate the mind, to still the tumultuous passions, to calm the troubled thoughts, and to fix the wandering attention.—She can strike the mind with solemnity and awe, or melt with tenderness and love; can animate with hope and gladness, or call forth the sensations of devout and affectionate sorrow.⁴⁰

According to the author, sacred song brought out the complexity and variety of human emotion. In an address delivered to a singing school in Groton, Connecticut, in 1798, Congregationalist minister Aaron Kinne similarly explained that there are “various passions of the soul” and listed a number of disquietudes of the soul that are assuaged by sacred song:

Melody softens and sweetens the animal spirits,—dissipates gloomy apprehensions,—mollifies the obdurate, —tames the ferocious, — composes the distracted, —exhilarates the sad, —refreshes the weary, — and diffuses through the soul, the most exquisite and pleasing sensibility. Subjects are most clearly illustrated by the most simple examples. How naturally does the nurse attempt to quiet the infant, by singing? And how many uneasy, restless children, by *Hush my dear*, have been composed to sweet and refreshing sleep?⁴¹

In so many cases, they argued, sacred song was a remedy for afflictions of the soul.

⁴⁰ *A Selection of Sacred Harmony* (Philadelphia: W. Young, 1788), front matter 1. The use of the feminine pronoun “she” to refer to music recalls ancient conceptions of music in its ability to excite the emotions. In this religious context of early America, it also suggests the workings of the Holy Spirit, decidedly the most “feminine” person of the Trinity, in its mothering role as comforter and nurturer.

⁴¹ Aaron Kinne, “Alamoth. An Address, Delivered to the Singing Schools, in the First and Second Societies in Groton” (New London, CT: S. Green, 1798), 6. Accessed via *EAI*.

Composers of psalmody often used aspects of the music to portray these myriad emotions. “Contemplation,” with text by Isaac Watts, explores the profound sorrow of the crucifixion and its overpowering effect on the soul:

Deep in our hearts let us record,
The deeper sorrows of our Lord.
Behold the rising billows roll,
To overwhelm his holy soul.

Daniel Read’s use of a minor mode setting, shown in Example 2.4, for this morose text is perhaps an obvious choice, but his use of texture is more inventive and illuminating.

Example 2.4 Daniel Read, “Contemplation,” in Nehemiah Shumway, *The American Harmony* (1793)

♩ 20 CONTEMPLATION. 69th, D. W. L. M.

Deep in our hearts let us record, The deeper sorrows of our Lord. Behold the rising billows roll, To overwhelm his holy soul.

The slow-moving homophony and open harmonies of the opening couplet reflect the weight of sorrow. A possible interpretation of the faster, melismatic, fusing section that follows, beginning in the lowest voice and rising from there, is that it depicts the experience of the soul, being overcome with emotion. Perhaps the increased movement in

the music parallels the ways in which the soul is moved as well. By choosing texts with strong emotional content and using the music to enhance the meaning of the text, composers of psalmody offered a way for singers to practically experience the new emotional fervor that characterized religious devotion in the post-Great Awakening period.

When it came to conveying the passions of the soul, no sacred text seemed to befit such a range of human emotions as the Book of Psalms. The soul found special expression through this unique part of the Bible devoted to verse and song. The texts of the psalms spanned a wide range of emotions, from lamentation to joyful praise. They affirmed both the awesome power and the personal tenderness and intimacy of God. Englishman William Tans'ur, whose writings on music theory were printed in several American editions throughout New England and likely influenced first generation of American composers, recognized the variability of the psalms. With the body-soul connection clearly in mind, he described the Book of Psalms as the “anatomy of the soul,” because it encompasses such a broad range of emotions, including grief, joy, hope, fear, doubt, anxiety, penitence, desperation, and thankfulness. Like the many parts and systems of the human body, he posits that each psalm has a role that contributes to one's overall spiritual health. There is no part of our soul's anatomy, Tans'ur would argue, that cannot find expression in a psalm.⁴²

Because they so reflected the workings of the soul, many claimed that the psalms were absolutely essential reading for early Americans; one Boston minister preached,

⁴² William Tans'ur, *The Royal Melody Complete: or The New Harmony of Zion* (Boston: W. McAlpine, 1767), 6.

“Our Psalm-books are as necessary in their place, as our Bibles.”⁴³ The psalms were so culturally significant that the first book printed in British North America was the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), which had gone through twenty-seven editions by 1800. The sheer number of psalm books published in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America speaks to the popularity of this form of religious devotion.

Besides being an expression of nearly every conceivable emotion, psalmody was believed to have the ability to change some of those emotions from less desirable ones into more fruitful ones. Weld preached in 1789 that “harmony, as a preparatory exercise, serves an important purpose in religion. It softens the mind; quiets the tumults of thought.”⁴⁴ By having such a calming and perhaps even a sedative effect on the soul, music seemed to take the edge off of some of the rougher emotions, replacing them with softer ones more accepting of the imprint of God. Another preacher claimed that evil could be transformed into goodness through song: “Even a bad man, may be charmed into a kind of temporary virtue and devotion, by the influence of divine song.”⁴⁵ Thus, sacred song had two important effects on the soul: first, it cleared out unwanted emotions; then, it replaced them with holier ones.

When holy emotions filled the soul, the occasion for sin, that is, a violation of moral law and a rupture in the person’s relationship with God, was greatly diminished. Preachers discussed the ways in which sacred song turned the individual away from

⁴³ Lemuel Hedge, “The Duty and Manner of Singing in Christian Churches, Considered and Illustrated” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1772), 35. Delivered at a singing lecture in Warwick, MA, on January 29, 1772. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁴⁴ Weld, “A Sermon,” 16.

⁴⁵ Ichabod L. Skinner, “A Discourse on Music” (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 12. Accessed via *EAI*.

sinful actions and toward virtuous ones, thus improving the personal relationship with God:

Music has several excellent effects, viz. It induces the savage, the Rude and profane, to attention, civility and sometimes to generosity and religion. It attracts the affections of youth and age from the groveling sensuality of covetousness and sinful gratification, and points their views to objects of social; sublime, and eternal happiness and insensibly draws the human heart to generosity, and friendship; and dispelling envy, ignorance, and every species of sin, raises the thoughts to contemplate the glorious harmony of the seraphic mansions.⁴⁶

[Singing] is remarkably calculated to excite and animate Devotion, to abstract the Mind from trifling Objects, and to elevate our Hearts to the great Author of all Harmony. It is calculated to sooth and soften the Passions, to expel Rancour and Revenge from humane Breasts, and to lay waste as it were an whole Army of such like fiery flying Serpents which are apt to infect us.⁴⁷

Chief among these “fiery flying Serpents” was Satan himself, and many observers claimed that Satan was repelled by sacred song.

Sacred music is a barrier to keep Satan out of the soul, it shuts, as it were, against him each avenue to the heart.⁴⁸

It is not only an enemy to every desire and imagination, which would injure man, but to his greatest adversary, the Devil. Satan and Music, luckily, are not friends.⁴⁹

Songs of Zion, when they are sung with the Spirit of the Gospel, are very comforting, refreshing, and edifying to the children of God—convincing

⁴⁶ Solomon Howe, *Worshipper's Assistant* (Northampton, MA: Andrew Wright, 1799), from the preface by Elias Mann. Dated February 14, 1799.

⁴⁷ Samuel-John Mills, “The Nature and Importance of the Duty of Singing Praise to God, Considered” (Hartford: Ebenezer Watson, 1775), 9. Sermon delivered at Litchfield, Connecticut, on March 22, 1775. Mills was pastor of a church in Torrington, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁴⁸ Oliver Noble, “Regular and Skilful Music in the Worship of God, Founded in the Law of Nature, and Introduced into His Worship, by His Own Institution, under Both the Jewish and Christian Dispensations” (Boston: Mills and Hicks for Bayley, 1774), 43. Sermon preached at the North Meeting-House in Newburyport, MA on February 8, 1774. Noble was pastor of a church in Newbury, MA. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁴⁹ Timothy Langdon, “The Pleasure and Advantages of Church Music. A Sermon, Preached at a Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music” (Danbury, CT: Douglas and Nichols, 1797), 7. Sermon delivered in Danbury, CT on April 5, 1797. Accessed via *EAI*.

to a carnal Wold [sic]—well pleasing to God, and destructive to the Kingdom of Satan.⁵⁰

Sacred harmony which gives all pious souls the most sensible pleasure, fills that infernal and envious fiend [i.e. the Devil] with torture: so that he had rather quit his delightful possession of mens [sic] bodies and minds, than undergo the torment of it.⁵¹

Arguments to this effect were particularly useful for those who were attempting to sell tunebooks. By using the introductory sections of their publications to write about music's ability to discourage sin and enliven the soul, tunebook compilers were essentially promising moral as well as musical improvement and a safeguard against all things evil. Similarly, preachers, choir directors, and singing-school masters could easily adapt this message to recruit more people into their churches and classrooms. They argued that, because of these powerful spiritual effects, singing to God was nothing short of a moral obligation.

The task of singing praise in worship was taken so seriously that a number of ministers composed entire sermons on the topic, offering scriptural support for the practice and recommending the singing of sacred song for the variety of reasons that have been outlined here. While nearly all agreed that singing was a solemn Christian duty to be practiced diligently, some of the finer points of this doctrine were sometimes disputed. The published sermon of John Black, a Presbyterian minister of Marsh-Creek, Pennsylvania, entitled "The Duty of Christians in Singing the Praise of God, Explained," sparked something of a feud with another minister about the content of sacred song and the methods of performing it. Black's initial sermon, published in 1790, discussed,

⁵⁰ Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations* (New-London, CT: Timothy Green, 1774), 3-4.

⁵¹ Adams, "The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages," 14.

among other things, the importance of the act of singing in public as a community exercise of worship and the numerous sacred texts that might appropriately achieve this end. These words caught the attention of another minister, John Anderson, also a Presbyterian and a member of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, who served the congregations of Mill-Creek and Herman's Creek, about 160 miles south of Black's locale. Although technically outside of the New England orbit, the teachings of these Presbyterian ministers represent an extension of the Reformed theological climate that permeated the Northeastern United States. Anderson published a 112-page response to Black's sermon in 1791, attacking some of his points about the theology of singing. Firstly, Anderson argued that certain parts of sacred scripture, especially the psalms, were intended for singing, and these scriptural texts are the *only* ones worthy of performance in the context of worship. Secondly, while he agreed that sacred song is a vital part of public worship that requires the participation of all, Anderson asserted that the inward, spiritual part of singing is more essential than the outward, physical act.

One year later, in 1792, Black, clearly agitated, rebutted with an equally lengthy, 115-page document entitled, "An Examination of the Reverend John Anderson's Discourse, on the Divine Ordinance of Singing Psalms: Wherein the Inconclusive Reasoning, and Many Inconsistencies of That Writer, Are Detected; and the Truth Vindicated." Finally, the next year, Anderson responded with a vindication of his own—*Vindiciae Cantus Dominici*, a 184-page *tour de force* in which he asserted his position of authority in the Presbytery and claimed superiority in finer matters of doctrine.⁵² The

⁵² John Black, "The Duty of Christians in Singing the Praise of God, Explained" (Carlisle, PA: Kline & Reynolds, 1790); John Anderson, *A Discourse on the Divine Ordinance of Singing Psalms* (Philadelphia: William Young, 1791); John Black, *An Examination of the Reverend John Anderson's Discourse, on the Divine Ordinance of Singing Psalms: Wherein the Inconclusive Reasoning, and Many Inconsistencies of*

feud between these two, or at least the published version, ended there, but this disagreement indicated more than mere bad blood between two preachers. Clearly, the important role of music in worship was a topic of interest for religious leaders and one that they felt necessary to communicate to their congregations. Furthermore, the published nature of these debates also points to a broader significance for the whole of New England society and a more general societal interest in sacred song's role in religious formation. These commonly held ideas about sacred song's ability to affect the soul helped strengthen the singing culture in late eighteenth-century New England. Singing became a clear expression of the new focus on emotional outpouring and personal relationship with God that characterized religious devotion of this period.

“Heavenly Frames & Strains”: Spiritual Transport and Ecstasy

One of the most prominent effects of sacred music on the soul, discussed in numerous sources, was a feeling of enjoyment that was afforded to the performer and/or listener, at times manifesting in a state of religious ecstasy or rapture. If an intimate closeness to God was a goal of religious activity during this period, singing was believed to accomplish this goal by elevating the soul beyond its normal station in a unique way. Descriptions of this type of effect use the image of being transported to another realm, incorporating an imagined physical movement. For Cotton Mather, prefacing his 1721 discourse on regular singing, *The Accomplished Singer*, this movement was flight, and the destination was heaven, where the soul would join the chorus of saints:

That Writer, Are Detected; and the Truth Vindicated; Agreeably to the Principles Exhibited in a Sermon on the Subject of Psalmody (York, PA: John and James Edie, 1792); John Anderson, *Vindiciae Cantus Dominici: or A Vindication of the Doctrine Taught in A Discourse on the Divine Ordinance of Singing Psalm* (Philadelphia: William Young, 1793). John Black is one of the founding trustees of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. All accessible via *EAI*.

In Singing our *spiritual songs*, ... let us with a Soul flying away to God, *for* them, try whether we cannot fly *with* them; and strive to come at *the like*; and give not over the struggle, till we feel our selves come into an Holy *Symphony* with the Saints who had their *Hearts burning* within them, when they *sang* these things unto the Lord.⁵³

Mather moved seamlessly from this description into promotion for the publication at hand. By learning the methods presented in *The Accomplished Singer*, he argued, the reader might also share in this awesome experience and even come to eternal salvation: “Christian, Behold a lovely Method of getting into those Heavenly *Frames & Strains* which will assure thee of thy arriving one Day, to the same state of Blessedness, and those *Everlasting Habitations*.”⁵⁴ Mather argued that singing offered the soul a preview of heavenly bliss. This probably served as a powerful motivator for devout Christians to learn the art of singing and to practice it often.

Decades later, numerous writers and composers echoed Mather’s language in describing a sense of physical transport in an upward direction, toward the heavens, that is experienced during the act of singing:

Music gives eyes to explore the beauty, and wings to rise, to the high palace of the happified being above; and if we in this life, do ever anticipate the extatic joys of the celestial regions above; if the aspiring thought of finite beings, is ever elevated, to join with the Angelic host, in the high praises of the king of glory; it is when our voices are employed in melodious accents.⁵⁵

⁵³ Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer. Instructions How the Piety of Singing with a True Devotion, May Be Obtained and Expressed; the Glorious God after an Uncommon Manner Glorified in it, and His People Edified. Intended for the Assistance of All That Would Sing Psalms with Grace in Their Hearts; but More Particularly to Accompany the Laudable Endeavours of Those Who Are Learning to Sing by Rule, and Seeking to Preserve a Regular Singing in the Assemblies of the Faithful* (Boston: B. Green for S. Gerrish, 1721), 13.

⁵⁴ Mather, *The Accomplished Singer*, 13.

⁵⁵ Dr. H. Farnsworth, “An Oration on Music” (Cooperstown, NY: Elihu Phinney, 1795), 9-10. Delivered at the courthouse in Cooperstown, April, 1794, at the conclusion of a singing school taught by Nathan Billings (no apparent relation to William Billings). Accessed via *EAI*.

They are, as it were, the best pinions on which the soul wings its way to the joys of Paradise; and foretells the pleasures of the *perfect*. The *pious*, possibly never mount so high, or approach so near seeing, “what no man can see, and live,” as sometimes in the raptures of sacred harmony. When the sound, and sense; the tune, and subject harmonize in the true sublime, they elevate to extacies of pleasure, substantially celestial.⁵⁶

Such poetic compositions set to music, increase the pleasure, and by still further fanning the fire of devotion, serve to waft and elevate the soul to God.⁵⁷

Our souls are wafted on the wings of sublime devotion; and with extatic rapture carried even to the third heavens, where nothing else but the exactest harmony, and most melodious, heavenly songs fill the place.⁵⁸

How suddenly and insensibly are we wrapt and carried away in our thoughts to Heaven?⁵⁹

These images—wafting on wings, mounting to heaven, elevating into the ranks of angels—all illustrate the ability of sacred song to *move* the soul, in an almost literal sense. The writings of Watts were, again, likely influential in making this language of physical transport a part of the vocabulary of sacred song. In his “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” from which excerpts appear in the prefaces of many eighteenth-century tunebooks, Watts described the upward movement of the soul: “If the Memory be well stored with devout Songs, we shall ... feel our Souls borne up, as on the Wings of Angels, far above this dusky Globe of Earth.”⁶⁰ In *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, which

⁵⁶ Weld, “A Sermon,” 16.

⁵⁷ John Mellen, “Religion Productive of Music. A Discourse” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1773), 4. Delivered in Marlborough, MA, March 24, 1773, at a singing lecture. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁵⁸ Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), 20. Sermon delivered at a singing lecture in Simsbury, CT, March 18, 1773, “on occasion of introducing regular singing into public use in the worship of God there.” Accessed via *EAI*.

⁵⁹ Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing,” 10.

⁶⁰ Isaac Watts, “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” appearing in the 1760 printing of Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note. Fitted to the*

enjoyed dozens of American printings, Watts again describes the singer as being up in the heavens: “While we sing the Praises of our God in his Church, we are employ’d in that Part of Worship which of all others is the nearest a-kin to Heaven.”⁶¹ Like Mather, Watts claims that sacred song allows a glimpse of heaven, perhaps the closest approximation of paradise that is attainable on earth. That this type of experience was available to the common person was one of the more radical elements of the Great Awakening. By facilitating the experience, sacred song played a crucial role in individuals’ realization of religious ideals. A number of American composers and tunebook compilers, through music and commentary, pointed specifically to sacred song’s ability to bring the singer closer to God.

While some tunebook compilers directly quoted Watts, others put these ideas about singing and heavenly transport into their own words. Nehemiah Shumway used the preface of *The American Harmony* (1793) to set forth similar ideas about the singing of the psalms:

Nothing so much elevates the mind, raises devout affections, calms the swelling passions, calls home the wandering thoughts, and prepares the heart for the worship of the *supreme Being*, as the singing of psalms. It fills the mind with solemnity and awe, and, as it were, raises us above the things of this world, and gives us a taste of the angelic employment above.⁶²

Meanest Capacities (Boston: Benjamin Mecom for Thomas Johnston, 1760), front matter. Originally published in 1721.

⁶¹ Isaac Watts, *Hymns and spiritual songs*, 18th ed. (New York: H. Gaine, 1761), iii. Also quoted in James Maxwell, *Hymns and spiritual songs, in three books* (New York: Samuel Brown, 1768), preface.

⁶² Nehemiah Shumway, *The American harmony* (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1793), preface.

Even songs themselves spoke of such elevation of the soul to heaven. A 1795 broadside song entitled “The Young Convert’s First Experiences” describes this effect on the soul of the new Christian:

When converts first begin to sing,
Their happy souls are on the wing;
Their theme is all redeeming love;
Fain would they be with Christ above.⁶³

Here, singing is portrayed as a revelatory activity, in which the singer experiences an almost unimaginable closeness with God.

Given their abundance in tunebooks from this period, it seems that composers of psalmody found these images of souls in flight particularly appealing for musical text painting. Daniel Read’s “Amsterdam” sets a text by English minister Robert Seagrave that gives wings to the soul and moves it from earth toward heaven:

Rise my soul and stretch thy wings,
A better portion trace;
Rise from transitory things,
Tow’rds heav’n thy native place.

Read’s setting, shown in Example 2.5, portrays the upward movement with an arch-like melody in the tenor voice that rises as the wings are stretched. In the second phrase, the melody appropriately peaks on the word “heav’n”:

⁶³ “The Young Convert’s First Experiences, &c. Two Excellent Hymns; Composed for the Spiritual Comfort and Edification of All Well-Disposed Christians” (Boston: E. Russell, 1795). Accessed via *EAI*.

Example 2.5: Daniel Read, “Amsterdam,” in Nehemiah Shumway, *The American Harmony* (1793)

A M S T E R D A M.

Rise my soul and stretch thy wings, A better portion trace; Rise from transitory things, To w'nds heav'n thy native place.

The soul is also given wings in Nehemiah Shumway’s “Scotland.” The second half of the text compares the soul to a soaring eagle:

Swift as the eagle cuts the air,
We’ll mount aloft to thine abode;
On wings of love our souls shall fly,
Nor tire amidst the heav’nly road.

Shumway creates a feeling of ascension with a tenor line that reaches its peak with the words “mount aloft.” Flight is depicted with a flurry of eighth notes and a wide-ranging melody in the second half of this excerpt, shown in Example 2.6.

Example 2.6: Nehemiah Shumway, “Scotland,” *The American Harmony* (1793), mm.14-23

Swift as the eagle cuts the air, We'll mount aloft to thine abode; On wings of love our souls shall fly, Nor tire amidst the heav'nly road.

Billings provides a final example of a musical manifestation of the soul's flight in his anthem "Vital Spark," first appearing in *The Psalm-Singer's Amusement* (1781). Here, the text implies that song is the impetus for the movement of the soul; "sounds seraphic" immediately precede the flight. Like Read and Shumway, Billings paints this type of image with quicker-moving notes in an ascending pattern, but Billings does more to set the section apart. He changes from a lilting 6/8 time signature to a more urgent 2/4 (Example 2.7):

Example 2.7: William Billings, "Vital Spark," *The Psalm-Singer's Amusement* (1781), mm. 54-62

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Vital Spark" by William Billings. The score is written for four staves, likely representing four voices. The first system (mm. 54-62) is in 6/8 time, indicated by the '6' over the '8' in the time signature. The lyrics for this section are: "Heav'n opens foands seraphic ring." The melody is characterized by quick, ascending eighth-note patterns. The second system (mm. 63-66) is in 2/4 time, indicated by the '2' over the '4'. The lyrics for this section are: "Lend, lend your wings! I mount, I fly!" The tempo and feel change significantly with the time signature shift, becoming more urgent.

This perceived power of song to transport the soul and affect human emotions, as discussed by religious leaders and put into practice by composers, might extend even

further, boiling over into something more extreme, which authors described as “extacy” or “rapture.” Apparently, emotions could rise to a level of such intensity that the singer was driven into a state of total absorption in the contemplation of the divine. Numerous sources use this type of language to describe the effects of song on the soul. Preachers explained the importance of sacred song, encouraging their congregants to participate in the singing so that they might also experience such “celestial extacy” and “rapturous delight.”⁶⁴

Some tunes from the period capture this state of ecstasy through a combination of text and musical setting. “Charleston” takes Watts’s version of Psalm 126 as its text. It contrasts the original “mournful state” of the speaker with the joyful rapture that ensues after the revelation of God’s grace. Like so many of the texts of early American psalmody, an abrupt shift occurs midway through, presenting the ideal set-up for a fugging tune. There is also a shift into a first person perspective at the midway point, emphasizing the more personal nature of the experience of ecstasy:

My God reveal’d his gracious name,
And chang’d our mournful state,
My rapture seem’d a pleasing dream,
The grace appear’d so great.

Daniel Read’s setting (Example 2.8) distinguishes the two moods with opposing musical styles. The first couplet features slow-moving notes, mostly step-wise motion, and a homophonic texture in a triple meter. In the second half, a sprightlier duple meter, a frolicking imitative texture, and an abundance of leaping thirds and fourths could be interpreted as a depiction of the speaker’s rapture. Nearly everything about the music

⁶⁴ Some examples: Strong, “The Duty of Singing,” 16; Kinne, “Alamoth,” 8; Samuel Blair, “A Discourse on Psalmody” (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1789), 20-21. Accessed via *EAI*.

changes as the soul is transformed and elated. As in “Contemplation,” (Example 2.4, discussed earlier), Read appears to use the fugging texture, rising from low to high voices, as a musical indicator of overwhelming emotion.

Example 2.8: Daniel Read, “Charleston,” *The Worcester Collection* (1786)

CHARLESTON. 126th, D. W. C. M.

My God reveal'd his gracious name, and chang'd our mournful state, My rapture, &c.
My rapture seem'd a pleasing dream, The grace appear'd to great. My rapture, &c.

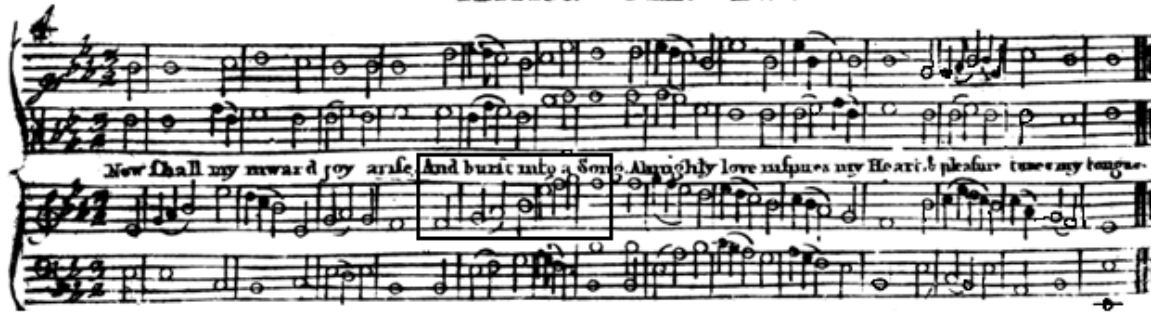
Billings also gives voice to the intense joy of the soul, although in a very different way, in his popular tune, “Africa.” The text, again by Watts, perfectly encapsulates the rapturous, yet very personal experience of the soul:

Now shall my inward joy arise
And burst into a Song
Almighty love inspires my Heart
And pleasure tunes my tongue.

Billings’s melody “bursts” along with the text, rising dramatically to the third scale degree, its highest point (see boxed section in Example 2.9):

Example 2.9: William Billings, “Africa,” *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770)

Africa C.M. DW.



As is apparent, the “pleasure” that is represented in musical settings like “Africa” and discussed in writings was by no means considered sinful. These sensations that resulted from singing emanated from the soul and were thought to have real and measurable effects on the body. The next chapter, which addresses the relationship between song and the body in the context of early American psalmody, will more closely examine the connection between the act of singing and physical pleasure.

The spiritual-physical experience of sacred song was also endorsed in scripture.

Andrew Adgate argued that the psalms themselves support such ecstatic practices:

With what rapture do [the authors of the psalms] describe its effects, with what fervour do they call upon their fellow-worshippers to join in this delightful duty: It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O thou Most High.⁶⁵

He adds that this state of total envelopment of body and soul through song is one of the highest goals of human existence:

When the union of the heart and voice is thus happily arranged; when sublime subjects of praise are accompanied with expressive harmony, and the pleasures of genuine devotion heightened by the charms of singing, we participate of the most pure, rational, noble, and exquisite enjoyments that human nature is capable of receiving.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Andrew Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns for the Use of Mr. Adgate's Pupils: and Proper for All Singing-Schools* (Philadelphia: Uranian Press by Young and M'Culloch, 1787), 4-5.

⁶⁶ Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns*, 9.

Like many others, Adgate described a sense of physical transportation, where the body is imagined to be lifted to some higher realm: “The soul forgets her confinement with the body, is elevated beyond the cares and tumults of this mortal state, and seems for a while transported to the blissful regions of perfect love and joy.”⁶⁷ Through this rapturous experience, the singer comes as close as is humanly possible to experiencing the eternal paradise of heaven: “Our most natural, our most just conception of the happiness of the heavenly world, is that which we have been describing, viz. sublime devotion accompanied with rapturous delight.”⁶⁸ For Adgate, sacred song brought the soul as near as possible to God: “The Song of Praise is an act of devotion, so becoming, delightful, and excellent, that we find it coeval with the sense of Deity.”⁶⁹ Sacred song’s ability to transport the singer to a place where he or she personally experienced the divine made it a central form of expression in a religious culture that highly valued emotionalism and individualism.

The Angelic Chorus

This closeness with God and the experience of heavenly bliss available through sacred song highlighted the similarities between humans and their heavenly counterparts: the angels. Religious leaders and psalmodists argued for the importance of singing by discussing the angelic choirs of seraphim and cherubim and pointing to deeply-held beliefs about heaven and resurrection. They considered singing to be an activity that united humans and angels; God created heavenly and earthly beings in similar forms,

⁶⁷ Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns*, 9.

⁶⁸ Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns*, 10.

⁶⁹ Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns*, 4.

with voices designed for praise. The singing voice and the exercise of it for the purpose of praise was common to both

Because of this connection to heavenly beings, some believed that song granted humans access to a taste of that which is known by the angels. The Reverend Aaron Kinne, speaking to members of a singing school in Groton, Connecticut, in 1798, explained the human ascent, through song, into the heavenly realm of the angels: “Exercised, or entertained, with this celestial art, [the soul] seems to forget itself, forsake its clayey tenement, mingle with immortal spirits, and unite in the employment, the raptures and the bliss of angels.”⁷⁰

Figure 2.2: Eighteenth-century depiction of the angelic chorus (singer at lower right and the choir of angels, above)⁷¹



⁷⁰ Kinne, “Alamoth,” 6.

⁷¹ Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs: in Easy Language, for the Use of Children ... Ornamented with Cuts from Original Designs* (Springfield, MA, 1788), 5.

William Symmes, pastor of a church in Andover, Massachusetts, also preached about this state of rapture, achieved through the act of singing, and how it might naturally flow from the elevation of the soul into the ranks of angels:

The practice of *singing praises unto* God in christian assemblies, is one appointed mean whereby the serious and devout soul is fitted for that which will be its everlasting employment. In this delightful exercise, it is sometimes carried forth in acts of holy joy and transport; and praise is advanced into rapture.⁷²

Symmes proposed a reciprocal relationship between singing and salvation: the more one sang, the closer one came to experiencing heaven. In other words, the likelihood of attaining that “everlasting employment” at the end of life was increased when the devout Christian trained the soul through singing.

Other writers cited the similarity to angels as evidence for a moral obligation to sing. The preface to Aaron Williams’s *The American Harmony* (1771) described what a great honor it was to be elevated to the status of angels in that regard: “Singing of *Psalms* is a Duty and Office angelical, and greatly recommended to us to practice as a Gospel Ordinance.”⁷³ The Reverend Lemuel Hedge further explained the bond with angels and the necessary use of the singing faculty:

Singing praises to God, was not designed to be the employment of angels only, but is a duty also incumbent upon *man*. God has given him a voice, and the faculty of speech, which he is bound to employ in praising and glorifying his Maker: Hence it is, that God has made *singing* a part of his worship; and he expects and requires of every one, that they worship him in that way, according to their ability and the capacity God has given them.⁷⁴

⁷² Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing,” 18.

⁷³ Aaron Williams, *The American Harmony, or, Universal Psalmist*, vol. 2 (Boston: Daniel Bayley, 1771), 4.

⁷⁴ Hedge, “The Duty and Manner of Singing,” 14.

Psalmody found this connection between angels and humans to be a powerful subject for their tunes. A number of the psalms call on heaven and earth to join together in song, and composers found these texts particularly inviting of musical settings.

“Lenox,” for example, sets Psalm 148, which exhorts the “tribes of Adam,” that is, all of humanity, to join the angels in their song of praise:

Ye tribes of Adam join,
With heav’n, and earth, and seas;
And notes divine,
To your Creator’s praise.
Ye holy throng of angels bright,
In worlds of light begin the song.

Lewis Edson’s musical setting (Example 2.10) features root position harmonies with rhythmic unison declamation for the majority of the tune. Only the line that refers to angels employs an imitative texture. The enhanced movement and rising register could be a portrayal of the heavens:

Example 2.10: Lewis Edson, “Lenox,” *The Worcester Collection* (1786)

The image displays a musical score for the hymn "Lenox" by Lewis Edson, page 56 of *The Worcester Collection* (1786). The title "Lenox. P. M." is centered at the top. The score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) and includes the following lyrics:

Ye tribes of Adam join With heav'n, and earth, and seas; And of-fer notes di-vine To your Cre-a-tor's praise.

Ye ho-ly throng of an-gels bright, In worlds of light, Be-gin the song.

The musical notation features a mix of whole, half, and quarter notes, with some passages in unison. The lyrics are printed below the staves, with some words in italics. The score is numbered 56 in the top left corner.

Justin Morgan's setting of the same text (Example 2.11) takes a remarkably similar approach:

Example 2.11: Justin Morgan, "Wethersfield," in Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (1990)

The image displays a musical score for the hymn "Wethersfield" by Justin Morgan. The score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) and includes the lyrics. The title "Wethersfield." is written above the first staff, followed by "Pf." (Piano), "148th", "D. W.", and "J. M. Morgan: 8". The lyrics are: "Ye tribes of a--dam join With heav'n&earth&fers. And offer notes divine, To your centers praise: Ye ho-ly thron'g of an-gels bright In worlds of light Begin the song. Ye ho-ly thron'g In worlds ho-ly thron'g". The score is in 4/8 time and features a variety of musical textures, including single notes, chords, and melodic lines.

While mortals and angels are portrayed with different musical textures, the union of heaven and earth through song takes center stage in these texts.

The importance of the association with angels lay in the belief that the souls of good Christians were destined to join this angelic chorus after death. Singing was a common feature in this world and the next and helped to smooth the transition between the two. In other words, a lifetime of singing spiritual songs was like an extended rehearsal for participation in the heavenly choir. Hedge again explained the significance of singing in this regard: "So may *we* prefer *singing* before all other christian duties, because it will never be laid aside—a whole *eternity* will be employed in singing anthems

of praise to God and to the Lamb.”⁷⁵ This line of reasoning suggested that an act that was to be performed for all of eternity deserved a great amount of attention on earth. To sing well and often was to prepare oneself for heaven.

A Sacred Duty to Sing

The singing of sacred song was not merely an enjoyable activity that could lead to intense spiritual experiences. These benefits to the singer notwithstanding, the praise accorded to God through singing was considered to be a solemn moral duty. Singing was deemed so critical as a means of attaining the religious ideals of the post-Great Awakening period that many authors cite it as an obligatory form of devotion.

The words of scripture, from both the Old and New Testaments, were often used to support this claim. Some of the longer sermons about sacred song offer extensive evidence for the obligation to sing to God. Joseph Strong preached a sermon exclusively on this topic at his parish in Simsbury, Connecticut, in 1773. Entitled “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship,” Strong’s address contained several pages of citations of scriptural support for the use of song as a means of praise or other communication with God. Among other Old Testament examples, he mentioned songs of praise by the Israelites after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, those by the Deborah and Barak after decisive military victories, and the instruction of the Levites in sacred music. From the New Testament, Strong named the canticles, or hymns, composed and sung by the Virgin Mary, Zacharias, and

⁷⁵ Hedge, “The Duty and Manner of Singing,” 18.

Simeon.⁷⁶ The Book of Psalms, an entire section of the Old Testament devoted to sacred song, was also an obvious example of scriptural support for singing. Within some of the psalms were further exhortations to song.⁷⁷ These were direct orders to the readers of scripture to engage in singing, and preachers certainly made note of this: “Some of [the psalms] contain express injunctions and exhortations hereto.—‘It is a *good thing*,’ says the Psalmist ‘to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name.’”⁷⁸ Scripture lent instant authority to the directives of religious leaders to engage in sacred song.

The authors and compilers of tunebooks also referred to these examples from scripture, though in less detail. That this biblical support for singing was well-known and generally accepted is obvious from the words used by Daniel Read and Thomas Nichols to introduce their respective collections of sacred song:

That the Singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, is a Duty incumbent upon all Denominations of Christians, is clearly evident from Sacred Writ. This Opinion is so prevalent among us, that, to offer Arguments to support it, is unnecessary and superfluous.⁷⁹

Among the many duties of religious worship, Singing Praises To God is plentifully verified in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Strong, “The Duty of Singing,” 3-9. These New Testament hymns, which have been regularly set to music throughout the history of Western music, are known as the Magnificat (Song of Mary), Benedictus (Song of Zechariah), and Nunc Dimittis (Song of Simeon).

⁷⁷ These “hymnic” psalms will be discussed in more detail in chapter three. See Table 3.1 for a listing of psalms with exhortations to song.

⁷⁸ Jonas Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music, in Public Worship” (Boston: Nicholas Bowes, 1770), 23. Delivered at an occasional lecture in Lexington, MA, “appointed to promote and encourage the divine use of vocal music, more especially in public worship,” on April 25, 1770. Clark was pastor of a church in Lexington. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁷⁹ Daniel Read, *The American Singing Book; or A New and Easy Guide to the Art of Psalmody* (New Haven: Daniel Read, 1785), preface.

⁸⁰ Thomas Nichols, *Hymns and Anthems: Composed on Divine Subjects, Agreeable to Sacred Scripture* (Albany, NY: Charles R. and George Webster, 1793), ii.

By referring to the solemn duty to sing at the outset, Read and Nichols both skillfully argued for the necessity of their publications and impelled readers to purchase and use them.

The actions of Christ and his apostles, along with the accounts of the practices of early Christians, were cited as further evidence to support this obligation incumbent upon all Christians to sing. Since the very beginnings of Christianity, authors noted, singing was an important way of worshipping and expressing religious beliefs. In the preface to his collection of biblically-based spiritual songs and hymns, John Mason recounted several instances of singing involving Christ, his apostles, and the early Christian communities of Paul's time:

Our blessed Saviour, immediately before he went out to suffer, sung an hymn, and his Disciples sung with him: after his ascension into heaven, the Apostles sung the praises of God, and taught others to do so. After them, the primitive christians sung; and so must the christians of this time: for if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. Should we be silent, even the Heathens might shame us.⁸¹

Mason seemed to consider singing as a particular mark of Christianity. He insisted that sacred song must be practiced by believers according to the examples given in scripture, lest the "Heathens," or non-Christians, outshine them in this regard. Zabdiel Adams, preaching about music at his parish in Lancaster, Massachusetts, similarly pointed to the actions of Christ and his followers as evidence that singing is a requirement for dutiful worship: "That [singing] is a duty under the gospel none can question, who consider that Christ, with his disciples early set an example of it; and that his Apostles have several

⁸¹ John Mason, *Spiritual Songs. Or Songs of Praise, with Penitential Cries, to Almighty God, upon Several Occasions. Together with the Song of Songs, Which Is Solomon's*, 15th ed. (Norwich, CT: John Trumbull, 1783), iii. Accessed via EAI. Mason's collection was reprinted throughout New England in at least 20 editions before 1800. Mason (c.1646-1694) was an English clergyman who "fell into that condition" of Calvinism and millennialism; his writings circulated widely in eighteenth-century New England.

times warmly recommended the practice.”⁸² A number of authors refer to this evidence only in passing, suggesting that it was a well-established part of the discourse that was known and understood by most readers.

William Tans’ur’s *The Royal Melody Complete: or The New Harmony of Zion*, which enjoyed great popularity in America, also looked to the Bible as a source for directives on singing. Tans’ur showed that the gospel evangelists, St. Paul, David (the supposed author of many of the psalms), and Christ himself all considered singing to be obligatory: “In our Saviour and his *Apostles’* Time, *Psalmody* was also recommended as a Christian Duty; ... There is scarce any Author in *holy Writ* but recommends this *Duty* as incumbent unto Men, almost in every Part of *Scripture*.”⁸³ Tans’ur traces the origins of this function of singing back even further, to before Christ and ultimately to the dawn of time, and he animates not only humans but the whole of creation in participating in this act: “Praising of God is as early as the Creation itself, for when Jehovah had laid the Foundation of the Earth;—*the Morning Stars sang together, and the Sons of Man shouted for Joy*.”⁸⁴ Several pieces of American psalmody from this period exemplify the grand scope of praise through song. The text of Asahel Benham’s “Wakefield,” for example, opens by inviting “ev’ry creature” to join in the act. The opening texture involving unison declamation by all four voices, shown in Example 2.12, is certainly not unique to this piece, but it may take on a new interpretation when paired such an inclusive text. Benham’s setting of the opening line also includes a melisma on the word “eternal,” an example of clever text painting.

⁸² Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 6.

⁸³ Tans’ur, *The Royal Melody Complete*, 6.

⁸⁴ Tans’ur, *The Royal Melody Complete*, 5.

Example 2.12: Asahel Benham, “Wakefield,” in Oliver Brownson, *Select Harmony* (1783)



Texts and tunes like these seem to express the true extent of the act of singing praises to God. Those who sang were joining into something far greater than themselves; they joined with every creature on earth and the angels in heaven.

Tans'ur continued his argument for the duty of singing by considering its ultimate purpose. He specifically mentions praise as the primary function of sacred song. While other sentiments can surely be expressed through music, the voice is especially tuned to praise its maker. Singing, Tans'ur claimed, is the ideal method of communicating praise. The two go hand-in-hand, and because of this divine purpose, the whole art of singing is elevated to a higher plane: “As Praise and *Thanksgiving* is a bounden and indispensable *Duty* from all Men unto God for ever, ... and as Musick is its *Copartner*, it is no less esteemed; but has the *Superiority* of all other *Arts* and *Sciences* whatsoever.”⁸⁵ Because it so beautifully and eloquently articulated the praise to God, which Tans'ur maintained was the ultimate purpose of humankind, he argued that sacred song was the greatest and most worthy expression of our humanity. As such, each person had a moral obligation to embrace this human purpose and sing praises. As a duty incumbent upon each individual,

⁸⁵ Tans'ur, *The Royal Melody Complete*, 5.

this squared with one of Reformed theology's central tenets—the belief in each individual's responsibility for his or her own, unique relationship with God.

Whose Duty?

While religious leaders encouraged all to participate in the act of singing for the praise of God and the benefit of their souls, at the same time they recognized that persons differed in their natural abilities. Singing was an art form, and some were more skilled at it than others. Some were endowed with a talent for singing and easily excelled at psalmody; others struggled to achieve even a mediocre level of performance. Preachers addressed both groups in their discussion of the moral duty to sing.

For those who had a natural gift, the obligation to use the singing voice was even greater. In order to illustrate this point, Ezra Weld referred to the biblical parable of the talents. In this story, told in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, a master entrusts his three servants with money, or talents. When the master returns, he harshly chastises the servant who buried his talent instead of making a return on it. Singing, Weld argued, was a similar talent, and when it is given, it must not be hidden, but properly invested and returned to God: "Psalmody is a duty, to the exercise of which, all men who are capable of it, are laid under inviolable obligation. ... Every natural endowment is a talent, the *great Donor* expects will be 'put out to exchangers, that at his coming he may receive his own with usury.'"⁸⁶ Others agreed, maintaining that when those with the ability to sing neglect to do so, they commit sin. Hedge explained, "When they have a voice and capacity for it, they are under moral obligations to perform it. And we cannot suppose,

⁸⁶ Weld, "A Sermon," 7-8.

but that the neglect of it ... is a criminal omission.”⁸⁷ All, it seems, were required to use their voices, but those with a special capacity for music were especially called to cultivate it. In one of his most elaborate settings, “An Anthem for Thanksgiving,” Billings draws attention to this universal obligation to sing. His interpolation of Psalm 148 includes a long litany of the members of God’s created order who are required to exercise praise in this way. In conclusion, Billings reiterates that there is to be “no exemption”:

Beasts & cattle,
Creeping insects,
Flying fowl,
Kings & princes,
Men & angels
Praise the Lord,
Jew & Gentile,
Male & female,
Bond & free,
Earth & heaven
Land & water,
Praise the Lord,
Young men & maids,
Old men & babes
Praise the Lord,
Join creation, preservation,
And redemption join in one;
No exemption, nor dissention,
One invention, and intention,
Reigns through the whole,
To praise the Lord,
Praise the Lord.

Billings uses textural variety to portray his text (see Example 2.13). A long series of voice pairings accompany the lines where two things are listed in the form “x & y.” Then, in the last ten measures, where this text pattern is broken (beginning at “Praise the Lord”), Billings brings all four voices together in unison declamation, representing the unity of all creation in echoing praise to the Creator.

⁸⁷ Hedge, “The duty and manner of singing,” 16.

Example 2.13: William Billings, “An Anthem for Thanksgiving,” *The Continental Harmony* (1794), mm. 69-92.

beasts & cattle, creeping insects, flying fowl, kings & princes, men & angels praise the Lord, Jew & Gentile, male & female, bond & free, ear & heaven.

land & water, praise the Lord, young men & maids, old men & babes praise the Lord, join creation, preservation, and redemption; in in

one; no exemption, nor dissent, one invention, and intention, reigns through the whole, to praise the Lord, praise the Lord.

This text illustrates the scope of the “universal choir,” which is led by God, the grand choirmaster, and extends from earth to heaven. Boston preacher Shippie Townsend described the broad, inclusive nature of singing using similar language: “The Choir is composed of the heavens and earth, every part of earth, the ends, the lower parts, the mountains, the inhabitants of the rock, the wilderness, the islands, they that go to sea, and

all that is therein: and the Lord at the head of them.”⁸⁸ According to Billings and Townsend, the act of singing animates *all* of God’s creation in the work of praise.

The protestation that one simply did not have the ability to sing must have been a common one, because preachers also frequently discussed those who lacked a natural talent for singing, or who believed that they did. The Reverend Jonas Clark, lecturing about the use of singing in public worship, acknowledged this argument, but reminded his audience that the less skilled singers might still participate to the best of their meager abilities: “All, indeed, cannot be supposed, to have had the gift of, the *ear* and *voice* for *music*; tho’ all might sincerely join in the devotion, intended and expressed in this part of the worship of God’s house.”⁸⁹ Clark continued, asking those who believed they were not skilled at singing and therefore exempt from practicing it to examine the root causes of their neglect. He suggested pride and bashfulness as possible reasons for a less talented singer to neglect that act of praise altogether:

It is readily granted, that some have not talents for this external act of devotion: some, that have neither ear, voice, nor genius for music—But is it not well known, that too many that might, with decency, at least, attend and bear a part in singing praise to the Lord, who, either through pride, or bashfulness, or from some other cause, neglect it—How such can excuse themselves, or answer it to their consciences and unto that God, whose praise they refuse to celebrate, and whose name they neglect to glorify ... Would to God, they might be led to think seriously of their neglect, before it is too late!⁹⁰

Clark concludes that such excuses are poor ones, indeed, and deeply offensive to God.

⁸⁸ Shippie Townsend, “A View of a Most Magnificent Singing-Choir. Presented to the Singing Societies of Every Denomination, and to All Lovers of Music” (Boston: J. Bumstead, 1793), 7, 12. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁸⁹ Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music,” 20.

⁹⁰ Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music,” 34-35.

While the best singers were obliged to use their God-given talents in the fullest way possible, perhaps by leading the singing in worship or participating in the choir, others were by no means exempt from participating. As William Symmes explained to his congregation in Andover, Massachusetts, the job of praising God through song belonged to everyone:

Choristers or quire-men soon obtained an office in the christian church; but no church has any warrant to commit the whole work of singing to them, and so exclude themselves, and the congregation. The Scripture shuts none out that can bear a part in a service so honorary to God, and so profitable to man.⁹¹

A similar argument is presented, though in a less direct way, in the form of an anonymous published dialogue from 1794 between a minister and a parishioner. This exchange, most likely exemplary, employs the Socratic method of inquiry and debate, typical of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century textbooks. The minister and the young man, named Billy, embody two opposing viewpoints about singing in worship. Billy believes that he is not a good singer. He feels that, when it comes to praising God, it is what is in his heart that counts, and he should therefore be exempt from singing. The minister confronts Billy about why he remains silent in church and proceeds to refute Billy's answers with evidence from scripture. Through question and answer, they come to the conclusion that singing sacred songs, especially the psalms, for the purpose of praising God is a necessary duty for even the poorest of singers.⁹²

Religious leaders seemed to agree that singing was an important duty for the faithful Christian worshipper, regardless of skill level. John Black flatly declared to his

⁹¹ Symmes, "The Duty and Advantages of Singing," 22.

⁹² "A Dialogue, between a Minister and Billy, a Young Parishioner: on the Subject of Singing Praises to God" (Danbury, CT: N. Douglas, 1794). Accessed via *EAI*.

Presbyterian congregation, “It is the duty of *all* to sing the praises of God.”⁹³ Others allowed for some rare exceptions, qualifying “all” to mean all who are capable to sing. The Reverend Oliver Noble, for example, named some minorities who were obviously exempt from this duty, like the deaf (tone deaf or without hearing), the dumb, and the mentally retarded. But, Noble reiterated that one needed a serious excuse such as one of these, and not merely a claim of mediocrity, in order to remove oneself from the moral obligation of devotion through sacred song. He summarized, “So it appears that but very few indeed, can excuse themselves, in the neglect of the duty we are considering, either in public or family worship.”⁹⁴ As a practical musician and composer, Elias Mann held similar beliefs about the participation of subpar singers. He claimed that most people could find themselves capable of singing even the three- and four-part harmonic settings common in most tunebooks of the day. Unlike the preachers, he attempted to quantify the situation in the preface to Solomon Howe’s tunebook, *Worshipper’s Assistant* (1799): “Very few are destitute of a voice for some part, not more than one in ten.”⁹⁵ The consensus seemed to be that most persons, if not all, were to some extent capable of singing. Only the most extraordinary impairments were permitted as excuses for neglecting this important duty in the course of worship. To otherwise decline to participate was considered a sin of omission.⁹⁶

The use of the voice as an instrument of praise, as it was designed to be used, was a sign of gratitude and humility; in contrast, the willful neglect of the singing voice

⁹³ Black, “The Duty of Christians in Singing,” 20-21. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ Noble, “Regular and Skilful Music,” 35.

⁹⁵ Howe, *Worshipper’s Assistant*, from the preface by Mann.

⁹⁶ Strong, “The Duty of Singing,” 24.

showed great disrespect for God's created order. This understanding of the singing voice seemed to apply equally to public and private forms of worship. Some pocket congregations of Puritans were antagonistic or ambiguous about the use of music in public worship, but the majority of religious leaders in New England held the opposite opinion, believing that music, namely song, was essential for proper worship. Ichabod Skinner expressed a typical sentiment, declaring, "The neglect of music, in public worship, is not merely indecent, but sinful."⁹⁷ Joseph Strong emphasized the value of sacred song in the home as well: "Singing performed in a proper religious manner, both in our public and family worship, is an important duty that may not be neglected by any who are capable of it."⁹⁸ There was no place, it seemed, where singing was not required of the devout Christian.

Nor, it seems, could the worshipper refrain from singing at inconvenient or difficult times. This topic came to the forefront in the 1770s, when the tensions of political unrest and fighting on American soil diverted some attention away from religious and leisure activities. Preachers warned that acts of worship, including singing, could not be put on hold during these trying times, even though New England was the site of great unrest and bloodshed during the war years. In spite of this, they claimed that acts of praise were always appropriate and requisite: "Singing praises unto God, is a duty that is never out of season."⁹⁹ Some went even further to suggest that the need for psalmody was greater in wartime, since the fate of the nation ultimately rested in God's hands. It was not good to provoke God to anger when the people were in such dire need

⁹⁷ Skinner, "A Discourse on Music," 13.

⁹⁸ Strong, "The Duty of Singing," 5.

⁹⁹ Symmes, "The Duty and Advantages of Singing," 6.

of divine favor. The Reverend Samuel-John Mills drew this connection between the state of the nation and the duty to sing for a congregation in Litchfield, Connecticut. Speaking on March 22, 1775, as the Continental Congress scrambled to assemble an army mere weeks before the “shot heard ‘round the world” that signaled the official start of war, Mills reminded the faithful of their ultimate duty to God above all else:

Some plead that the State of the Nation is such as rather wears a forbidding Aspect, that the Season is unsuitable for this Duty [to sing]. It is granted, that the darkest Cloud now hangs over us, that ever was known. But it is not granted, that God is any the less worthy of Praise on this Account. Our base neglect of this Duty is rather to be considered, as one Sin among others, which provokes God thus to threaten us.¹⁰⁰

At the time of Mills’s sermon, the future of the nation was still very much in doubt, and the need for trust in God was more apparent than ever. It seemed that American Christians could not afford to lay aside the important task of showing praise and gratitude through song.

The duty to sing applied to all people, seasons and contexts. As these accounts show, this act of praise was not just for the most talented singers. Nor was this gateway to divine understanding merely for the most learned theologians and philosophers. On the contrary, these benefits to the soul were available to all who had a voice to sing and the will to cultivate their God-given instrument. Psalmody invited each to experience a full range of emotions and to come as near as possible to heaven. Such a democratic framework for experiencing the divine embodied the prevalent Reformed religious

¹⁰⁰ Mills, “The Nature and Importance of the Duty of Singing,” 13.

climate in New England, which endorsed individual responsibility and a direct means of communication between God and each believer.

CHAPTER 3: SACRED SONG AND THE BODY

While the soul reflected the inward expression of psalmody, the body made possible its outward expression. For early New Englanders, the physical experience of performing psalmody was crucial to achieving the full effects of sacred song. Mere listening was not explicitly discouraged, but authors consistently argued that the physical act of singing carried the greatest benefits and evoked the strongest emotions. At its best, singing brought forth sensations of pleasure in the performer, resulting from the combination of bodily action and the sacred meaning of the text. When done properly, singing united the inward and outward expression of psalmody. Inwardly, the singer ideally felt a depth of devotion and internalized the religious meaning of the words he or she sang. Those internal feelings were then released through the physical and usually public act of singing. Most observers agreed that these two aspects were totally inseparable: in the true performance of psalmody, one could not exist without the other. Through this active participation in sacred song, each individual could contribute a unique voice to the communal act of praise through song.

Thus, the argument for a moral duty to sing, discussed in the previous chapter, rested largely on the body's particular capability to perform this outward expression. The solemn duty to sing was as much tied to the physiological construction of the human body as it was to scripturally-based religious beliefs. Viewed as natural, God-given, intricately constructed, and uniquely human, the voice was the preferred medium for

expressing religious sentiments. The body, it seemed, was made to sing. In turn, singing was good for the body. While theorists and religious leaders discussed these various justifications for the physical act of singing, American composers indulged in a near obsession with the singing voice, making it one of the focal points of their works.

That this attitude about the body, embracing it as a key component of the spiritual aspects of singing, prevailed in Revolutionary-period New England is not surprising. Life for the average colonist demanded both intense physical work and solemn piety. Daily reminders of the potential shortness of life surrounded them, so a constant state of religious devotion was important for attaining eternal life. A religious justification accompanied nearly all activities, from the most mundane aspects of everyday life to the grand ideals behind the American Revolution. New Englanders constantly had one foot in this world and one in the next. Psalmody helped to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, uniting body and soul in one act of praise.

Theories of Sacred Song and Embodiment

Modern theories of ritual action and embodiment inform this study of the relationship between song and the body in late eighteenth-century America. Psalmody flourished in that environment in part because of sacred song's ability to concisely embody the values of a society and connect to the rituals norms already in place. Stephen Marini's theory of sacred song assesses how the conciseness of the words and musical setting influenced the relationship between performers and the audience and the interpretation of the music by both. According to Marini, sacred song lyrics contain a "low density of information," meaning that their message is relatively simple, at least on

the surface.¹ While the core beliefs lying beneath the texts may be deeply theological and complex, the expression of those beliefs is more straightforward through the medium of sacred song. Song simplifies these hard-to-grasp beliefs. Marini adds, “sacred song makes it possible to sing what we cannot say, and singing adds meanings beyond the verbal sense of the words.”² The fact that the words are in the form of a song (and not merely poetry) is significant; the very act of singing amplifies and fills out these seemingly simple texts. One of the functions of singing, therefore, is to unite the singers around these core ideas that can be difficult or impossible to express in ordinary speech.

The importance of sacred song moves beyond the text-music relationship and also includes the physicality and movement surrounding a piece of music. The concept of “ritual” describes this relationship between the music and the activities that surround it. Marini names ritual as an essential corollary to sacred song: “For a song to be sacred, it must possess not only belief content but also ritual intention and form. Ritual is the defining performance condition for sacred song, as mythic content is its defining cognitive condition.”³ In the case of New England psalmody, ritual describes not only the usual movements of performance—the tuning of the voice, the placement of the performers—but also the physical actions taking place in the larger contexts where such music might be found, such as the singing-school class, the worship service, and the intimate social gathering. Part of the ritual environment of American psalmody was a communal performance setting. Singing was a social activity, and psalm tunes were

¹ Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5.

² Marini, *Sacred Song in America*, 93.

³ Marini, *Sacred Song in America*, 7.

rarely enjoyed alone. On one level, this social context naturally accompanies a style of music that required several voice parts singing in concert; on a higher level, it reflected a cooperative community spirit and the parallel religious concept, the Body of Christ, discussed in the final chapter. Marini's theory supports this observation about the early American context, as he believes that sacred song is, by its nature, social.⁴ Sacred music helped to form social bonds in both its worship-related, devotional, and educational contexts.

Other theories of ritual contrast with Marini's and offer other ways of understanding psalmody. One of Victor Turner's main contributions to the study of ritual is his explanation of the liminal state in which ritual actions may take place. He discusses a balance between hierarchical structure and communitarian ethos that is fundamental to society. Ritual plays an important role in that balance by creating a liminal space where individuals participating in the ritual are temporarily outside of the normal social structure.⁵ Contradicting Turner somewhat, Catherine Bell places ritual action firmly within the realm of everyday social life. She defines ritualization as "a culturally strategic way of acting" and argues that rituals must be understood not as isolated, paradigmatic acts but rather as ordinary parts of social activity.⁶ As a ritual activity and not merely an autonomous art form, sacred song in Revolutionary-period New England might be understood as both ordinary and extraordinary. It was part of the daily rhythm of the town and a vital component of a culture infused with religion. But

⁴ Marini, *Sacred Song in America*, 8.

⁵ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), especially chapter 3: "Liminality and communitas" (p. 94-130).

⁶ See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7-8.

singing was also a ritual activity that facilitated special experiences; it provided a liminal space for spiritual ecstasy and physical pleasure.

Because of the physical nature of singing and the emphasis on the singing body in late eighteenth-century writings on psalmody, its study requires a consideration of how sound was embodied in this context. Theories of musical embodiment, once applied almost exclusively to non-Western cultures, are now popular ways of understanding Western music as well.⁷ Now reformulated, theorization of the body provides one of the most promising and fertile areas of study in modern musicology, offering new insight into the intersection of dance and music, performance practice, and musical expressivity, among other topics. In the case of sacred song, a religious conception of the body informs these studies in a crucial way. It is clear that late eighteenth-century American religious leaders viewed the voice as a "human instrument" that was part of the body as it was created by God. The singing voice unified God's created order and human musical artistry. Furthermore, while choirs of many voices formed the collective embodiment of American psalmody of this period, particular bodies and particular voices offered their praise in this way. Singing was therefore both a communal and a very personal way of experiencing and communicating with the divine.

⁷ Seminal works in this early stage of music-body research include John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974). More recent studies include: Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Robert Walser and Susan McClary, "Theorizing the Body in African-American Music" *Black Music Research Journal* 14.1 (1994):75-84; Joseph Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59.1 (2006):113-84.

The Voice: Nature's Superior Instrument

Thoughts on the body's role in the practice of psalmody were influenced by a religious environment in New England in which the human voice was heralded as the most natural medium for expression of religious sentiments. The sermons of the Reverend Ralph Harrison (1748-1810), an amateur violinist, singer, and the compiler of at least one collection of psalm tunes (*Sacred harmony*, issued in two volumes), circulated in manuscript form throughout his lifetime. His writings appear to have been influential in the New World. They were later edited and published by his son, William, in *Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (1813).⁸ Harrison's musings on sacred music (from the fourth volume of that collection) made their way into the prefatory sections of several important American tunebooks, especially those explicitly designed for singing schools.⁹ He championed the cause of a natural and unforced method of musical composition and performance that brought out the voice's God-given qualities. The most oft-quoted passage from Harrison's sermon names nature as not only the source of sacred song but one of its most profound expressions:

Divine song is undoubtedly the language of Nature. It originates from our frame and constitution. The wise author of nature has kindly added to our other powers and faculties, the sense of harmony. He has ordained certain sounds to excite sensations of delight; he has made them the proper accompaniment and expression of the passions and affections of the mind.¹⁰

⁸ *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, vol. 29 (Manchester: Richard Gill, 1912), 141.

⁹ Some examples of tunebooks quoting Harrison: Andrew Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns for the Use of Mr. Adgate's Pupils: and Proper for All Singing-Schools* (Philadelphia: Uranian Press by Young and M'Culloch, 1787), 6-8; *A Selection of sacred harmony* (Philadelphia: William Young, 1788), front matter; John Poor, *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns, with Tunes Affixed, for the Use of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: John M'Culloch, 1794), 3-5. Accessed via EAI.

¹⁰ Ralph Harrison, *Sermons on Various Important Subjects*, vol. iv (Manchester: C. Wheeler and Sons, 1813), 235.

As Harrison explains, this naturalness is not coincidental; God, in his design for creation, gave man this particular gift. God was not only the “author of Nature,” and thus all harmony and music, but also the creator of the human voice. In other words, God created both song and the singing voice as uniquely human expressions.

Harrison goes on to describe how song, being the most natural of the arts, is also the most flexible. It easily adapts itself to myriad human emotions and sentiments. In this way, Harrison would argue, song is an ideal means of communicating with God. This versatility and the divine origin of the voice were often cited in tunebooks as reasons for the special preference for vocal music. God gave humans the ability to sing, and by combining language and art in this way, the voice was capable of echoing some of that divinity back to the Creator. As John Todd, a Presbyterian minister, preached in 1763, returning song to God as a means of praise is a most natural and universal human action:

To sing the praises of God, is so much the dictate of nature, that it has made a part of all religions, true and false: the *Greeks* and *Barbarians* made it a part of their worship to their deities: and thought its original so heavenly, that they ascribed the invention of it to their gods.¹¹

Todd notes that even non-Christians, the “Greeks” and “Barbarians,” have a voice and a natural inclination to use it. He argues that the voice is such a divine gift that even unenlightened pagans cannot but recognize its usefulness, although by honoring false gods, their use of the sacred instrument is perhaps misdirected. Nonetheless, Todd suggests that all humans have the potential to offer praise with their voice.

Many writers described the voice as a “gift,” bestowed by God upon man in the creation of the natural order of the world. In the preface to *The American Harmony*

¹¹ John Todd, “An Humble Attempt towards the Improvement of Psalmody: the Propriety, Necessity and Use, of Evangelical Psalms, in Christian Worship” (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1763), 5. Accessed via *EAI*.

(1771), Aaron Williams claims that music is God-given and describes how it might be used in light of its origins: “Hence it is, that all must allow *Musick* to be the *Gift* of God, ... which his infinite Wisdom hath made, in the first *Creation*; and is given to us as a *Temporal Blessing*, both for his *Service* and our own *Recreation*, after hard Labour and Study.”¹² Similar sentiments from Isaac Watts’s “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick” made their way into the 1760 American printing of Thomas Walter’s treatise on the rules of music: “The Art of Singing is a most charming Gift of the God of Nature, and designed for the Solace of our Sorrows and the Improvement of our Joys.”¹³ To return this “gift” to God was considered not only a solemn duty but one which follows naturally from the divinely created human person: “To whom shall the breath ascend in melodious accents, if not to him who first inspired it?”¹⁴ The voice was not the product of human invention, like other instruments, but rather a product of nature and therefore of God himself. Because of its divine origins, the voice was viewed as a natural and perfect instrument for sounding praise and thanksgiving to the Creator.

Given its rootedness in God’s created order, many observers claimed the voice as more advanced, mature, complex, and expressive than man-made instruments. In a passage from “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” Watts makes a case for the superiority of the singing voice above all other instruments:

Various *harmony*, both of the Wind and String, were once in use in Divine Worship, and that by Divine Appointment. It is certain then that the use of

¹² Aaron Williams, *The American Harmony, or Universal Psalmist*, vol. 2 (Boston: Daniel Bayley, 1771), 3.

¹³ From Isaac Watts, “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick” in Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note. Fitted to the Meanest Capacities* (Boston: Benjamin Mecom for Thomas Johnston, 1760), front matter.

¹⁴ Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns*, 9.

these instruments in common life is no unlawful practice, tho' the New Testament has not ordained the use of them in Evangelical Worship. But if the voice be happily capable of this Art, it is preferable to all instruments fashioned and composed by man: this is an organ formed and tuned by God himself. It is most easily kept in exercise, the skill is retained longest, and the pleasure transcends all the rest. Where an ode of noble and seraphic composure is set throughout to Music, and sung by an artful voice, while the spirit at the same time enjoys a devout temper, the joys of the soul and the sense are united, and it approaches to the scriptural ideas of the celestial state.¹⁵

Here, Watts argues that the voice is preferable to other instruments not only because of its natural and Godly design, but also because of its unique ability to affect the soul.

Many composers and tunebook compilers adopted this viewpoint, using it as a tool to promote their sacred vocal collections. Williams, for example, asserted the primacy of vocal music: “[Song] has the *Superiority* of all other *Arts and Sciences* whatsoever, by Reason it is employed in the *highest* Office that can be performed, by either *Men* or *Angels*; whereby we sound forth the *Praise* and *Glory* of the great Author of all created Harmony.”¹⁶ The fact that the voice, unlike other instruments, could combine music and sacred words allowed it to be put to a much higher purpose: that of praising God.

William Billings reiterated this superiority of the voice in his typically eccentric way in the introduction to *The Continental Harmony* (1794) and further emphasized that the voice can express and accomplish so much more than other instruments:

Such a conjunction of masculine and feminine voices is beyond expression, sweet and ravishing, and is esteemed by all good judges to be vastly preferable to any instrument whatever, framed by human invention. ... The most curious instrument that ever was constructed, is but sound,

¹⁵ From Watts, “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” found in a number of sources, including Daniel Bayley, *A New and Complete Introduction to the Grounds and Rules of Music* (Newburyport, MA: Bayley, 1764), iii-iv; also in Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick*, front matter iii-iv.

¹⁶ Williams, *The American harmony*, 3.

and sound without sense: while man, who is blest and endued with the faculties of speech can alternately sing of mercy and of judgment as duty bids, or occasion may require. The Royal Psalmist, who calls upon “everything that hath breath to praise the Lord,” has made this very beautiful distinction, where he says, “the *Singers* went *before*, the *Players* on *instruments* followed *after*.” Here you see the singers took the lead, while the instrumental practitioners humbly followed after.¹⁷

Here, Billings cites Psalm 68, which describes a grand procession of the tribes of Israel.

He notes that the singers led the train, in front of the other instrumentalists. For the early

Hebrew peoples, place and position in ritual formations were highly significant and

indicative of hierarchy. According to Billings’s interpretation, the singers at the front of

the procession represented the primacy of vocal music in that culture. Because of its

portrayal of favoritism for singers, this passage from Psalm 68 was popular for American

psalmodists. Timothy Swan also set this text in “Canton” (Example 3.1), illustrating the

“sweet singing Levites” with a section of imitative polyphony, rising from the lowest

voices to the highest:

Sweet singing Levites led the van,
 Loud Instruments brought up the rear.
 Between both troops a virgin train
 With voice and timbrel charm’d the ear.

Example 3.1: Timothy Swan, “Canton,” in Joseph Stone and Abraham Wood, *The Columbian Harmony* (1793), mm. 33-46



¹⁷ William Billings, *The Continental Harmony* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1794), xv. Emphasis in the original.

A secular text with a similar message was the inspiration for Elias Mann's longer set piece, "Ode on Musick." The poem by Alexander Pope may have been loosely based on Psalm 68, as it includes a litany of instruments that are awakened by the inspiration of the nine muses. The "breathing instrument," that is, the voice, is listed first.

Descend, ye nine, descend and sing;
The breathing instrument inspire;
Wake into voice each silent string,
And sweep the sounding lyre.
In a sadly pleasing strain
Let the warbling lute complain;
Let the loud trumpet sound
'Till the roofs all around
The shrill echo rebound.
While in more lengthen'd notes and slow,
The deep majestic solemn organs blow.¹⁸

Composers of psalmody naturally gravitated towards these texts that held the voice in high esteem, affirming its place of primacy in the created order. Viewed as a special, Godly instrument with unique capabilities, the voice granted access to Turner's liminal space, where the individual could temporarily participate in the divinely ordered creation and tap into a wide range of emotions beyond those available through common speech.

An Intricate Design

New England preachers asserted the superiority of the voice over other instruments by citing its divine origins. They also emphasized the expert construction of the human voice that surpasses that of anything manmade:

Whatever ingenuity may have been discovered, in musical instruments, of human structure; and however sweet and harmonious the sounds, when

¹⁸ Pope's original poem is entitled "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day." Mann's "Ode on Musick" appears in the *Worcester Collection* (1786).

touched by a skillful hand; yet, certain it is, No Organs are equal to those of divine construction;—no music so pleasant in itself—none so pleasant in the ears of the Lord our God, as the voices of the saints and people, tuned to sacred harmony and regularly employed in celebrating his praise.¹⁹

But of all instruments of music the natural faculty and organ of the human voice is the most noble and excellent.²⁰

Though mechanick instruments may have their use; yet the organ tuned by the hand of God, the human voice, is to be preferred to all other.²¹

These religious leaders argued that nothing conceived by humans could possibly equal the handiwork of the divine craftsman. Thus, no man-made instrument could match the voice. The Reverend Ichabod Skinner, speaking at a singing lecture in North Bolton, Connecticut, in 1796, described the versatility that God worked into the design of the voice. He makes the following, rather poetic analogy between man-made instruments and statues:

Instruments can never equal the human voice; the voice must always be more various, more manageable, and more significant than any single instrument. There is the same difference between the voice and an instrument, which there is between a living man and his statue.²²

¹⁹ Jonas Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music, in Public Worship” (Boston: Nicholas Bowes, 1770), 17. Preached at an “occasional lecture ... appointed to promote and encourage the divine use of vocal music, more especially in public worship,” in Lexington, MA on April 25, 1770. Clark was pastor of a church in Lexington. Accessed via *EAI*.

²⁰ John Mellen, “Religion Productive of Music. A Discourse” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1773), 5. Delivered in Marlborough, MA on March 24, 1773, at a singing lecture. Accessed via *EAI*.

²¹ Charles Stearns, “A Sermon: Preached at an Exhibition of Sacred Musick, in Lincoln” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1792), 5. Delivered April, 1792. Stearns was pastor of a church in Lincoln, MA. Accessed via *EAI*.

²² Ichabod L. Skinner, “A Discourse on Music” (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 7. Delivered February, 1796, at a singing lecture in North Bolton, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

The natural and divine construction of the vocal instrument was, according to many writers and composers, a justifiable reason for preferring it to other instruments, which merely imitated the music of the voice as a statue imitates its subject.

A number of works by American psalmodists center on this intricate design of the human body and its purpose as an organ of praise. Watts's version of Psalm 139, set in Oliver Brownson's "Litchfield," claims that the body itself is a proclamation of God's goodness, as each part is a miraculous embodiment of grace:

'Twas from thy hand, my God, I came,
A work of such a curious frame;
In me thy fearful wonders shine,
And each proclaims thy skill divine.

Brownson's polyphonic and melismatic setting of the second couplet, shown in Example 3.2, aptly portrays the complexity and sophistication of the body's design:

Example 3.2: Oliver Brownson, "Litchfield," *Select Harmony* (1783)

42 *Litchfield.* by Brownson. L.M.

In me thy fearful wonders shine, And each proclaims thy skill divine. And each proclaims thy skill divine. In me thy fearful wonders shine, And each proclaims thy skill divine. In me thy fearful wonders shine, And each proclaims thy skill divine.

As a part of this miraculous creation, the voice was indeed a spectacular display of God's skillful artistry. Another Watts text, from his second book of hymns, expresses similar awe at the human form and goes on to compare the whole body to a musical instrument:

When I with pleasing wonder stand,
And all my frame survey,
Lord, 'tis thy work, I own thy hand,
Thou built my humble clay.

Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one be gone.
Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long.

Here, the concept of “intonation” is applied to the fitness of both the instrument and the body. This metaphor was common in the religious rhetoric of the period, as the proper alignment, or intonation, of body, mind, and soul was of great concern. Billings's setting of this text extends the final couplet (Example 3.3) and makes use of a complex polyphonic texture that may be interpreted as text painting of the “thousand strings” of the bodily instrument:

Example 3.3: William Billings, “Creation,” *The Continental Harmony* (1794), mm. 31-61



achieving perfect intonation and one which recalls ancient Greek ideas about perfect intervals based on mathematical ratios.²³

Example 3.4: Nehemiah Shumway, “Lewisburgh,” *The American Harmony* (1793)



In this text, “heart” refers not to the anatomical organ that pumps blood through the body, but to the core of the human soul and its conscience. Hearts and souls are not musical instruments and thus cannot be tuned in a literal sense, but they can be refined and brought into proper alignment in a way that is similar to the process of tuning. Here, the outward intonation of the voices may be an auditory reminder of the inward intonation of body and soul. The Reformed idea that humans, although essentially depraved, might at times catch a glimpse of such harmony between body and soul, found special expression in psalmody, where moments of intonation were indeed possible with diligent practice and application.

²³ The preference for the “perfect” intervals – open fifths, octaves, and unisons – in the harmonies of early American psalmody and especially at cadences is likely an aesthetic choice that had at least some basis in the Pythagorean tuning system, in which those intervals whose ratios used the smallest numbers (e.g. 1:1, 3:2, 4:3) were considered the most consonant and thus designated as “perfect.” Explanations of this theory of intervals and the preference for perfect ones, are given in the introductory sections of several important tunebooks. See William Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer: or, American Chorister* (Boston: Edes & Gill for Elliot, Flagg, and Bass, 1770), 8-9; *A Selection of Sacred Harmony* (Philadelphia: W. Young, 1788), front matter; Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (New Haven: A. Morse, 1790), 12.

As a part of the intricate design of the human body, the voice also represented life itself. When the voice and its furnishing breath runs out, so too does the body's course on earth. The following passage from Psalm 46, which inspired settings by Billings, Brownson, and Amos Bull, among others, equates life and breath in this way and looks hopefully, beyond death, to the soul's eternity of praise:

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.

This psalm recalls the communion of heaven and earth in the act of praise through song; even though the voice is lost to the body in death, it is believed to be reborn to the devout soul as he or she enters the angelic chorus.

These writers and composers affirmed that humans were simply made to sing and so designed by God; to reject that purpose was, in essence, a rejection of God. Some delved further into this idea of the divine construction of the voice, citing specific physiological evidence. Samuel Emerson extolled the detailed nature of the vocal instrument in an oration from 1800: "Whoever attends to the mechanism of the human body, will find from the structure of the lungs and organs of speech, that the Almighty has there adjusted the most perfect musical instrument possible."²⁴

Aside from the parts of the body that allow humans to create sounds—the lungs, the mouth, the tongue, etc.—many authors pointed out that God also created a

²⁴ Samuel Emerson, "An Oration on Music" (Portland, ME: E. A. Jenks, 1800), 4. Delivered in Portland, ME on May 28, 1800. Accessed via *EAI*.

remarkably complex organ for receiving and perceiving musical sounds—the ear.

Emerson revels in its marvelous and mysterious design:

The organs of hearing are made to answer the tones of the most complex musical instrument, and indeed of every instrument in concert;—but how, and in what manner this is, can never be known: all that can be said is—the hand of Omnipotence made them, and the eye of Omniscience is alone able to trace the delicate texture.²⁵

Adams similarly concludes that the human sense of hearing is virtually inexplicable and attributable only to Godly design, but he further explores the range of human perception of sounds. Here, in a sermon preached in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1771, he wonders about humans' awareness of consonance and dissonance:

In the doctrine of concords, there is something absolutely unaccountable by man. Voices at some certain distances from each other, how pleasant soever in themselves, will grate and jarr; whereas other different distances (which are easily ascertained by fixed rules) they will mix and unite, and, by their union, produce concords, from a continued combination of which, springs harmony. Now why this is so, we are unable to say ... These different effects are by us inscrutable, and must be resolved wholly into the divine will.²⁶

Like the ear itself, Adams argues that the phenomena of consonance and dissonance are beyond our understanding and therefore clearly constructed by God. The Reverend Samuel Blair also preached about the many different effects that man could perceive through the ear, drawing a distinction between “inward” and “outward” effects, a theme that runs through much of the discourse about psalmody:

We are all very sensible of the communication of external sound through the organs of hearing. And not only of its different tones, as the high and the low, the clear, the soft, the shrill, and the harsh; but likewise of certain

²⁵ Emerson, “An Oration on Music,” 13.

²⁶ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 10.

more inward effects, which we usually designate by the epithets, sweet, or soothing, melting, or elevating, jarring, or disgusting.²⁷

It seemed that the ear could perceive more than just the objective characteristics of sound—its pitch, volume, and timbre. It could also perceive the underlying sentiments that the sound expressed. Many claimed that only God could be responsible for such a mechanism.

Furthermore, some argued that the voice and the organs for hearing it were part of a distinctly *human* body. While other animals might be able to make noises and respond to sounds, none could unite words and melody in the same way as humans. Nor could animals perceive or produce harmony or distinguish between dissonant and consonant sounds, a key feature of choral singing. This constituted one of the major differences between man and beast and, as such, enhanced the sacredness of the singing voice, making its use in worship even more necessary. In 1790, Pennsylvania minister John Black preached about the uniqueness of the human perception of harmony:

The author of our being has constituted us so, that we naturally and indeed, necessarily perceive and relish harmony in sounds ... The Creator hath given to some other animals a power to sing; but none of them discover any capacity for *harmony*: never has any choir of them been heard to perform any thing like it.²⁸

This unique ability of man to perceive harmony and enjoy its effects was used as an argument to support the practice of congregational singing. Preachers emphasized the necessity of *using* the gift, because it is what separates humans from beasts.

²⁷ Samuel Blair, “A Discourse on Psalmody” (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1789), 9. Delivered at a public concert given by Mr. Spicer, “master in sacred music,” at the Presbyterian Church in Neshaminy, PA. Accessed via *EAI*.

²⁸ John Black, “The Duty of Christians in Singing the Praise of God, Explained” (Carlisle, PA: Kline & Reynolds, 1790), 19-20. Black was pastor of the Upper Presbyterian congregation in Marsh-Creek, PA. Accessed via *EAI*.

Congregationalist minister John Mellen, speaking at a singing lecture in Marlborough, Massachusetts, in 1773, summarized this argument: “Nor did heaven endow us with the pleasing powers of harmony, above the brutes, that we should neglect the gift of God that is in us, and come before his presence with confused noise of artless sounds, like the congregated flocks, and lowing herds.”²⁹ The images of “congregated flocks” and “lowing herds” that Mellen used to contrast with the voice of man are utilized in other sources as well. Birds and beasts also appear in Zabdiel Adams’s sermon from 1771:

Man, as he is possessed of reason and a faculty of speech ... is capable of declaring articulately to all around him the glories of his heavenly King. For this end was his tongue given him, which therefore, in the psalms, is stiled his glory. And shall he suffer *so* noble, *so* distinguished a faculty to lie dormant? ... Shall man, tho’ his organs are framed to make articulate sounds, and his reason sufficient to enable him to produce harmony, talk, notwithstanding, the confused language of beasts, and chant the discordant songs of birds? No. ... For harmony was he made, and in melodious notes should he sing the praises of his God.³⁰

Even the nightingale, the songstress of the animal world, was no comparison to the voice of man. Introducing his collection of spiritual songs, John Mason poetically names singing as man’s purpose: “If I was a nightingale, I would sing like a Nightingale; but now I am a man, I will sing the praises of God as I live; and I would have you to sing with me!”³¹ This line of reasoning served as a moral justification for a participatory culture of sacred music. The birds and beasts could not be allowed to outshine man, the

²⁹ Mellen, “Religion Productive of Music,” 25.

³⁰ Zabdiel Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages of Church-Musick” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 9-10. Accessed via *EAI*. Delivered April 4, 1771 at a lecture in the First Parish of Lancaster, MA. A very similar passage, clearly styled on this one, appears in Timothy Langdon, “The Pleasure and Advantages of Church Music. A Sermon, Preached at a Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music” (Danbury, CT: Douglas and Nichols, 1797), 4. Accessed via *EAI*. Delivered at a concert of both vocal and instrumental music, in Danbury, CT, April 5, 1797.

³¹ John Mason, *Spiritual Songs: or, Songs of Praise, with Penitential Cries to Almighty God, upon Several Occasions*, 15th ed. (Norwich, CT: John Trumbull, 1783), 2. Accessed via *EAI*.

crown of God's creation. As a result, to be silent and not sing was, as Samuel-John Mills, pastor in Torrington, Connecticut, stated, "shameful":

Hath God given us a Voice, and shall we not praise him with it? When he
puts a Price into our Hands for this End, will we shamefully neglect it?
Shall the Birds, wild Beasts, and tamer Cattle resound his Praise, & yet
Man be silent? Shall we that were never made Dumb, make ourselves
so?³²

Because the voice was intentionally designed by God as an instrument unique to humans, it was held in high esteem. Psalmody, which featured the voice in combination with sacred words, allowed the individual to exercise his or her voice for its natural purpose of praise.

"Pleasure, Natural and Moral"

An equally important part of God's design of the human person was the capacity to experience physical pleasure. Writers observed that sacred song afforded a sort of pleasure that was as much a physical sensation as religious one, and it was portrayed in a positive light. At many points in the history of Christianity, religious leaders have claimed that sacred music ought not to excite too much pleasurable emotion, because these sensations might distract both the listener and the performer from the message of the sacred text. However, with the practice of psalmody in America, it seems that the pleasure attained by the singer was viewed as both natural and good. Ezra Weld implicitly derided the Catholic Church and its practice of suppressing pleasure through self-mortification in his sermon about singing: "But in this, where is the self-denial—the

³² Samuel-John Mills, "The Nature and Importance of the Duty of Singing Praise to God, Considered" (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775), 17. Delivered at Litchfield, CT, on March 22, 1775. Mills was pastor of a church in Torrington, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

pain—the mortification? Nay, but the exercise is replete with entertainment, with pleasure, natural and moral; delightful to the ear; cheering to the mind; profitable to the heart!”³³ The Westminster Catechism, a chief source of Presbyterian doctrine that was completed in 1647 and officially adopted by the American Presbytery in 1729, also embraced pleasure as a good and holy response to encountering God. At the very beginning, it poses the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever," argues that positive, pleasurable feelings can, and indeed should, result from the worship of God. Acts of devotion, such as singing, that helped to evoke this sort of response, clearly fit with the teachings of the Westminster Catechism, and its language influenced the discourse of sacred song in the late eighteenth century.

The physical act of singing naturally awakened dormant emotions and evoked feelings of pleasure. Like Weld, Billings advocated an unabashed pursuit of pleasure through sacred song and the avoidance of unnecessary pain its performance. He instructs his readers in choosing a voice part:

Sing the part which gives you least pain, otherwise you make it a toil, instead of pleasure; for if you attempt to sing a part which is (almost or quite) out of your reach, it is not only very laborious to the performer; but often very disagreeable to the hearer, by reason of many wry faces and uncouth postures, which rather resemble a person in extreme pain, than one who is supposed to be pleasantly employed.³⁴

By choosing the most natural part, a singer also chose the most pleasurable one.

According to Billings and other like-minded authors, naturalness, pleasure, and goodness

³³ Weld, "A Sermon," 23.

³⁴ William Billings, *The Singing Master's Assistant. Or Key to Practical Music* (Boston: Draper and Folsom, 1778), 14.

go hand-in-hand, and all of this is by God's design. Comfortable positioning of the body and enjoyable sensations accompany the natural performance of sacred song.

Some writers even referred to this experience of sacred music using quasi-sexual language: "Is the soul immersed in the pleasures of sense and voluptuousness? A sacred song sung by skillful and pleasant voices will arouse it from its lethargy."³⁵ Rather than distracting the mind from the message of the text, music awakened the senses, and the sensation of pleasure presumably enhanced understanding and led to an even deeper spiritual experience. As William Duke, author of *Hymns and Poems on Various Occasions*, put it, "Pleasure and duty go hand in hand; and the greater our satisfaction is, the greater is our religion."³⁶ In this way, the spiritual dimension of sacred song was thought to intertwine with the physical. Singing brought the singer into communication with the divine. At the same time, it brought great pleasure and could influence the religious receptivity of the singer, making him or her more open to receiving the imprint of God. As Zabdiel Adams explained in 1771, these pleasurable feelings are basically indescribable. One must participate in the singing to truly understand the rapture he speaks of:

Concerning the pleasure of it, but little is necessary to be said: For they who have a taste for musick know by experience its delight; whilst others cannot form any better conception of it, than a blind man can of colours. ...They who have their auditory nerves rightly strung ... are transported with joy and filled with rapture.³⁷

³⁵ Adams, "The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages," 15. The positive portrayal of bodily pleasure also explains the occasional use of the Song of Solomon, a poetic book of the bible that presents the erotic love of a man and woman as an allegory for the relationship between God and Israel, as a text for psalmody. See, for example, John Mason, *Spiritual Songs*.

³⁶ William Duke, *Hymns and Poems, on Various Occasions. By a Member of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Samuel and John Adams, 1790), v. Accessed via *EAI*.

³⁷ Adams, "The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages," 11.

The Reverend Weld of Braintree Massachusetts echoed these sentiments: “*Pleasure*, in the common acceptation of the word, is by no means sufficiently expressive of his sensations. The effect may be a transport, an extacy of joy unspeakable.”³⁸ Both the sensation of pleasure and the sense of hearing that made it possible were awesomely mysterious. Not surprisingly, preachers argued that this, too, was by heaven’s design. Several sources described the physiological construction of the ear and the larger nervous system, emphasizing a real, physical sensation that occurs when music is perceived. In the case of consonant harmony, this sensation is described as intensely pleasurable:

[Psalmody] is a *pleasing exercise*. God hath so formed the ear, and constructed the human creature, that the harmony of sounds should be productive of sensations, exquisitely delightful.³⁹

Harmony simply considered, operates mechanically upon the nervous system, and is attended with sensations of pleasure.⁴⁰

The nerves of the human body are probably a system of chords, which vibrate with intense pleasure to the touches of harmony. And, how can this pleasure be better applied, than to excite affection and love to him whose counsel was wonderful in the formation of man? ... Most men, if there be general similarity of constitution among them, may not only hear and relish musick, but feel it as distinctly and intensely, as the sensations of heat and cold.⁴¹

These sources acknowledge that music was experienced in a very physical way and that the perception of musical sounds involved the whole body. The act of singing involved the body not only in the production of the sound but also the reception of it. It was seen as a complex and somewhat mystifying process. Such descriptions served as a

³⁸ Ezra Weld, “A Sermon, Preached at a Singing Lecture” (Springfield, MA: Ezra W. Weld, 1789), 11. Given in Braintree, MA, on May 21, 1788. Accessed via *EAI*.

³⁹ Weld, “A Sermon,” 23.

⁴⁰ Weld, “A Sermon,” 18.

⁴¹ Stearns, “A Sermon,” 9-10.

justification for the entire practice of psalmody, looked down upon as unsophisticated by some observers. Since God so intricately formed the organs required for singing and those for perceiving the pleasurable sensations of harmony, the argument went, those special gifts demanded cultivation and use. This evidence reveals attitudes about sacred song that combined its physical and spiritual dimensions. For those who wrote about psalmody in late eighteenth-century New England—namely preachers, orators, composers, and tunebook compilers—the physical and spiritual seemed to be two sides of the same coin. One could not exist without the other. God, they argued, formed the body in just such a way as to promote harmonious singing. Humans, then, were required to capitalize on this bodily construction and, fittingly, to use it to praise the one who made it so. Nor were the religious and musical communities the only ones who thought about sacred song in this way. Those who attended singing schools, church services, and public lectures and concerts—in essence, all of New England society—could expect to hear about both the body and soul in relation to song.

Singing Does a Body Good

Embracing a holistic view of singing, most writers agreed that the act had crucial physical components which were rich in religious meaning. That singing involved the body was fairly obvious, but many also argued that it was good for the body. Ancient ideas about the ability of music, instrumental or vocal, to affect the mood of the listener were alive and well in eighteenth-century America, even if colonists may have been unfamiliar with the theory of the modes set forth by the Greeks. An organized theory of the connection between certain musical modes and bodily states came to fruition with

writers such as Guido d'Arezzo and Adam of Fulda. Recycled again and again, these ideas were repopularized in the eighteenth century, largely because of theorist Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739). It is unclear whether most Americans were acquainted with this work or the "doctrine of the affections"; nonetheless, the idea that music could incite something within the body and cause physical changes was undoubtedly present.

In the American context, writers seemed more focused on the positive emotions that could be roused by music, rather than the melancholic ones. For example, the introduction to a collection of military songs from 1779 claimed that the songs contained therein would raise the spirits and therefore contribute to an overall physical health: "[These songs] will probably excite some unusual feelings of candor and good humour, that, however ill they may suit the temper of a Critic's mind, will certainly contribute to the health of his body."⁴² This attitude extended to sacred song as well. Psalmody was thought to be as good for the body as it was for the soul.

Many believed that the music had a tangible and curative effect on ailments of many types, from physical to psychological to spiritual. William Tans'ur's *The Royal Melody Complete*, a mixture of theoretical treatise and tunebook, develops the idea of curative song: "It is likewise *The Soul's Dispensatory*, of all *Medicines*, for its several *Diseases*: Wherein are *Lenitives* for tender Wounds: *Corrosives* for Inveterate; *Cures* for the Infected, *Preservatives* for the Sound; *Cordials* for the Weak; and *Restoratives* for the Relapsed."⁴³ Tans'ur suggests that the sacred tunebook is akin to a pharmacy, full of the

⁴² *Songs, Naval and Military* (New York: James Rivington, 1779), xi. Accessed via EAI.

⁴³ William Tans'ur, *The Royal Melody Complete: or The New Harmony of Zion* (Boston: W. McAlpine, 1767), 7.

best medicines to heal whatever ails. He goes on to discuss some of the more specific benefits of the physical act of singing: “It is a great Preservative to *Health*, and strengthens all Parts of the Breast, and clears the Lungs; it helps a stammering Speech (as I know by Experience) to a true Pronunciation of *Words*.”⁴⁴ By strengthening and preserving the body, sacred song contributed to an overall sense of well being in its practitioners.

New England orators and preachers also emphasized song’s potent effects on the body. Samuel Emerson gave a speech on the topic in 1800 in Portland, Maine. In this excerpt, he refers to listeners as “patients” and to music as a “charming cordial” and a “panacea” to illustrate his point about its healing powers:

May we not fairly infer, that much advantage might be derived to the healing art by the application of this charming cordial?—How often do we see the most inveterate diseases brought on, and incurably fixed, by the corroding hand of sorrow and affliction. Is it not reasonable to suppose, that the early, and skilful application of Music to such patients, would have operated as a panacea, and lighted up the crimson of health in the wan cheek of disease.⁴⁵

Zabdiel Adams also speaks of music as a type of medicine in a sermon given in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1771. He names a number of ways that tunes can heal the person: “Sounds have an immediate and powerful influence on the nervous system. ... Accordingly history gives an account that diseases have been cured, unchastity corrected, seditions quelled, passions raised or calmed, and even madness occasioned by tunes.”⁴⁶ Here, Adams indicates several different categories of illness—physical (“diseases”),

⁴⁴ Tans’ur, *The Royal Melody Complete*, 9-10. This passage was copied into the introductory sections of several tunebooks, including Williams, *The American Harmony* (1771), 4.

⁴⁵ Emerson, “An Oration on Music,” 14.

⁴⁶ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 12-13.

moral (“unchastity”), mental (“madness”), and even social (“seditions”). By citing such a wide range of potential infirmities and asserting music’s ability to heal them all, he presents an example of the holistic attitude towards sacred song that prevailed in early America.

That sedition neared the top of Adams’s list of social ills reveals the close relationship between politics, religion, and sacred song at this time as well. An avid patriot himself, Adams was related to some even more well-known patriots in the relatively small world of pre-Revolutionary New England. John Adams, who would later become the nation’s second president, was Zabdiel’s first cousin, and legendary founding father Samuel Adams was a more distant cousin. Sedition, or acts of disloyalty against a lawful authority, was a chief concern during these nation-building years of American history; in 1798, John Adams signed the Sedition Act into law, which set out harsh punishments for a number of acts of dissent against the new regime. Because music could potentially quell such rebellion, it was viewed as a valuable tool for maintaining the health of society.

William Symmes, a Congregationalist minister, seemed to agree with Adams’s claims about music’s powers and noted that it could profoundly affect military outcomes:

Strange things have been related of the power of music, in curing diseases of the body—in exciting or allaying the passions of men—in reviving the spirits, or dissipating rage or melancholly... Certain it is, that men are capable of feeling its force: And have not been a little indebted to it for their military achievements.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ William Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing Praises unto God” (Danvers, MA: E. Russell, 1779), 14. Delivered at an occasional lecture in Andover, MA. Symmes was pastor of the First Church in Andover. Accessed via *EAI*.

Although Symmes speaks here about music in general, he later talks specifically about sacred vocal music and its healing powers: “In such a state of exultation, when the *high praises of God are in the mouths* of his servants; how will it soften pains, take off the edge of affliction, and overcome the fears even of death itself.”⁴⁸ Whether in wartime or peacetime, whether for soldiers or civilians, sacred song was believed to be like an anesthetic, to “take off the edge” of pain or sorrow.

Some preachers gave scriptural support for their beliefs about sacred song’s medicinal qualities. The story of Saul and David, from the Old Testament book of first Samuel, seemed to provide the best example. Saul, jealous of David because of David’s greater military success, becomes possessed by evil spirits. David is able to cure Saul with music. Jonas Clark, a Congregationalist pastor in Lexington, Massachusetts, adapted this message to suggest that sacred music might cure several similarly serious afflictions:

As, when *David played skilfully on the harp, the evil spirit departed from Saul*; so, in many instances, the *mechanical* effects of music, vocal, or instrumental, have been equally surprizing and wonderful. —Diseases, that have defied the power of *medicine* and baffled the *physician*’s skill, have not been able to resist its charms.—And if the best accounts do not deceive us, in some cases, it is the best, the only remedy—Poisons are expelled, senses restored, and even life itself has often been saved, by the powerful energy and reviving charms of music.⁴⁹

Clark claimed that music could heal the most severe afflictions, even ones that threatened the very life of the affected individual. Thus, music was seen as an agent for restoring physical health. Many preachers agreed and added that music could act as a preservative to health for those who were not afflicted with disease.

⁴⁸ Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing,” 15.

⁴⁹ Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music,” 26.

Song's ability to heal notwithstanding, the singing voice of an individual could serve as an indicator of that person's overall health and wellness. Symmes's sermon on singing from 1779 embodies this holistic attitude toward health, stating that pleasant feelings, bodily health, and a good singing voice go hand-in-hand: "Nor on the contrary, is it at all strange that man whose frame is so exquisitely constructed and tuned, should please himself with the harmony of sounds; when his body is healthy, his heart chearful, and his voice at command."⁵⁰ John Mellen, in describing the benefits of singing for church and for the larger society, also spoke of singing as part of a total healthy lifestyle. Here, he mentions good singing, good exercise, good morals, and good time management, all in the same passage:

Let all our singing bands be regular and orderly in their whole behaviour. Let regular singers be regular walkers. Shun bad company, and expel the vicious and debauched from your musical societies. Keep good hours, and measure time well, in other respects as well as in your tunes.⁵¹

This attitude about health that included all aspects of the individual's life was commonplace in writing of many kinds from this period. In the primarily religious writings, like sermons, one can find discussion of physical health and its relationship with the soul. Similarly, in late eighteenth-century texts devoted primarily to physical health, there is discussion of spiritual wellness and its effects on the body. For example, in a 1761 instructional booklet entitled *Health: An Essay on Its Nature, Value, Uncertainty, Preservation, and Best Improvement*, the author notes that outward signs of health tend to accompany a sound religiosity in the individual:

⁵⁰ Symmes, "The Duty and Advantages of Singing," 5-6.

⁵¹ Mellen, "Religion Productive of Music," 33-34.

Establishment in the Faith, which is attended with all the happy Symptoms of an healthful Mind, a clear Head, a warm Heart, a regular Conversation, a florid Complexion, *i.e.* an uniform Course of Life, which makes it visible, that things are well in the Soul, as a good Complexion usually shews when it is so in the Body. When there is that Activity in Religion, that shews ‘tis our *Meat and Drink to do the Will of our Father which is in Heaven*.⁵²

Here, the author uses the language of the body, speaking of complexions and nourishment (“meat and drink”) to describe spiritual wellness. As one might expect, he goes on to encourage the regular practice of activities that benefit the soul, just as he encourages exercise for the body.

That man was made up of both body and spirit was almost universally accepted in the deeply religious culture of late eighteenth-century New England. Furthermore, the two natures seemed so closely connected that the health of one was largely dependent on the other. Sacred song served as a sort of connective tissue between body and soul: “As man is compounded of body and spirit, the design of music is to make both natures to harmonize together.”⁵³ Music could unite the two into one purpose and manifest the workings of the soul into bodily action. It was believed that song, as an especially physical and personal type of music, could “raise and animate us to action”; it could literally move the body to extraordinary lengths and “propel it to deeds of virtue and piety beyond the ordinary reach of principle devoid of this aid.”⁵⁴ Sacred song offered a salve for both body and soul, embracing the personal and emotional aspects of the new Reformed religious climate. On the one hand, it lent a corporeal sensuality to the spiritual

⁵² B[enjamin] Grosvenor, *Health. An Essay on Its Nature, Value, Uncertainty, Preservation, and Best Improvement*, 3rd ed. (Boston: J. Kneeland, 1761), 114-15. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁵³ Skinner, “A Discourse on Music,” 11.

⁵⁴ Elias Mann, *The Northampton Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Northampton, MA: Daniel Wright & Co., 1797), iv. Blair, “A discourse on psalmody,” 16.

side of man, “that our spiritual deadness may be enlivened, by the warmth of animal feelings.”⁵⁵ On the other, it molded the body into a holy instrument that felt as if it was flying to the heavens.

Gestures

The importance of the body in the performance of sacred song is apparent in the practical instructions found in late eighteenth-century American tunebooks. That singing was understood as a physical act is clear from discussions of bodily expression and the many lessons on proper use of the vocal instrument, including manipulations of the mouth, tongue, lips, and breath in sacred tunebooks. But the physical elements of singing went beyond those actions that produced sound. Commentators often spoke of other gestures that accompanied singing, such as the movements of the hands. In addition, the different voice parts that comprised the typical psalm tune were given specific characters, *embodied* in a lifelike way and cast as a part of the larger choral body. This found its greatest expression in a unique subgenre of psalmody—songs that, rather redundantly, address the act singing. In each case, authors and composers imply that embodiment of the music is key to reaping the greatest spiritual rewards from it.

Gestures were thought to enhance both the spiritual and physical enjoyment of song and, as such, were highly encouraged by most writers of practical instructions for singing. Congregationalist minister Joseph Strong mentions gestures in a 1773 sermon about the improvement of congregational singing: “Singing in the worship of God, is to be performed with such bodily gestures as are most expressive of becoming reverence

⁵⁵ Skinner, “A Discourse on Music,” 11.

and devotion.”⁵⁶ Strong does not elaborate, but he might have been referring to facial expressions or bodily movement in time with the music.

Chauncy Langdon, in the introduction to *Beauties of Psalmody* (1786), names a number of specific gestures and body positions to be avoided. From these, one can infer which postures were preferable for singing:

It ought likewise to be the Care of every Performer to behave with Decency and Solemnity, especially when singing sacred Words, and to avoid as much as possible all awkward Gestures, such as looking about, whispering, standing or sitting not erect, having their Faces distorted with Wrinkles, their Eyes strained, and their Mouths open too wide: all which frequently disgust Spectators.⁵⁷

Langdon’s admonishments suggest that a proper singing body should be standing or sitting tall, with relaxed facial muscles and natural movements. All extraneous gestures that did not enhance the meaning of the song were to be avoided.

One important music-related gesture was beating time. Instructions on how to beat out the pulse with one’s hand or arm were included in the “rudiments” section of many tunebooks, and such gestures were certainly common in the performance of sacred song.⁵⁸ Billings’s *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), which served as a model for many subsequent American collections, includes a section entitled “Of Time in its various Moods, and how to Beat it in each of them.” In it, Billings gives detailed instructions for the movement of the hands in each “mood.” The moods, as understood by Billings and his contemporaries, were essentially equivalent to modern time signatures,

⁵⁶ Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), 12. Delivered at a singing lecture in a parish in Simsbury, CT, on March 18, 1773, “on occasion of introducing regular singing into public use in the worship of God there.” Accessed via *EAI*.

⁵⁷ Chauncey Langdon, *Beauties of Psalmody* (New Haven: Daniel Bowen, 1786), preface 2.

⁵⁸ Andrew Adgate, *Rudiments of Music* (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1788).

although some distinction was made between slower and faster versions of the same time signature. An *adagio* mood (slow 4/4), for example, might be interpreted with two different motions:

You may Beat it two several Ways, either with your Hand once down, and once up in every Bar, which is called Minim [half note] Beating, or twice down and twice up which is called Crotchet [quarter note] Beating. Where the Tune chiefly consists of Minims, I would recommend the first, but where the Musick consists of letter Notes, I would recommend the latter to be the easiest and plainest Way, because every Crotchet is exactly one Second, which is very natural and easy Motion.⁵⁹

A similar section in the *Worcester Collection* (1786) gives another method of beating each of the four pulses the *adagio* mood: “*First*, lightly strike the ends of your fingers: *Secondly*, the heel [sic] of your hand. *Thirdly*, raise your hand a little and shut it partly up: *Fourthly*, raise it still higher and throw it open at the same time; which completes the bar.”⁶⁰ From these descriptions, it is clear that the motions of beating time did not correspond exactly to modern conducting patterns. In the context of early American psalmody, such movements were probably not intended, as they often are today, as performance directions given by one leader for the benefit of a group of singers. Rather, beating time seemed to be a way for each singer to engage his or her body in the act of singing. Billings suggests movements that are “natural” and “easy” as opposed to ones that are awkward or contrived; the physical gestures were to be a natural extension of the song itself and part of the expression of the whole person.

Furthermore, many composers, tunebook compilers, and singing-school instructors emphasized the importance using the body correctly when singing. Nehemiah Shumway, for example, in the introduction to *The American Harmony* (1793),

⁵⁹ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 14.

⁶⁰ *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1786), 8.

recommended that “decency in the position of the body, and in beating time, are strictly to be adhered to.”⁶¹ Others waxed rhapsodic when discussing the effect that such gestures had on their spiritual experience. Aaron Williams compared the beating of the outward pulse of the music with his hand to his own inner pulsations:

Whenever I sing myself, methinks, the very Motion that I make with my Hand to the Musick, makes the same Pulse and Impression on my Heart; it calls in my Spirits, is diffuses a Calmness all round me; it delights my Ear and recreates my Mind, it fills my Soul with pure and heavenly Thoughts.⁶²

Here, Williams likens the movement of hands to the “movements” of the heart, aptly describing the connection between body and soul that is strengthened by the physical gestures surrounding singing. James Lyon described a similarly holistic approach to sacred song, where the body and soul move in tandem:

There is something in *Poetry* and *Musick* admirably suited to divine Subjects; and it is natural for the Soul, when struck with any Thing surprizingly *great, good, or new*, to break forth, beyond the common Modes of Speech, into the most rapturous Turns of Expression; accompanied with correspondent Attitudes of Body and Modulations of Voice.⁶³

It seems no accident that sacred song became the most prominent manifestation of the cultural pursuit for holism. Late eighteenth-century American religious leaders and composers deemed poetry and music the most suitable arts for conveying religious devotion; song united the two and exploded the expressive potential of sacred words and ideas. Because it was so deeply expressive, song animated the body, mind, and soul

⁶¹ Nehemiah Shumway, *The American Harmony* (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1793), 18.

⁶² Williams, *The American Harmony*, 4.

⁶³ James Lyon, “The Lawfulness, Excellency, and Advantage of Instrumental Musick in the Publick Worship of God Urg’d and Enforc’d, from Scripture, and the Example of the Far Greater Part of Christians in All Ages. Address’d to All (Particularly the Presbyterians and Baptists) Who Have Hitherto Been Taught to Look upon the Use of Instrumental Musick in the Worship of God as Unlawful” (Philadelphia: William Dunlap, 1763), 9. Accessed via *EAI*.

together. Movements of the body, which flowed naturally from the act of singing, enhanced the singer's experience and reinforced the unity of the whole person.

The Choral "Body"

The image of the singing body was also applied on a more metaphorical level to the larger chorus of voices. Like the human body, the choir is made up of several parts—in this case, voices—that each have different roles in helping the larger whole to function. Each individual voice contributes, according to its skill and strength of volume, to the choir. Furthermore, each of the voice parts acts as one entity, relying on the others to produce pleasing harmony and counterpoint. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, four-part *a cappella* harmony was the normal texture of American psalmody. The parts consisted of bass, tenor, counter (often called altus), and treble. The tune's melody was usually held in the tenor, in the middle of the texture.⁶⁴

In performance, the parts not only had to work together to achieve harmony, but they needed to be assigned and proportioned properly. Singers were cautioned to take care in choosing a voice part that suited their particular physical abilities. They ran the risk of "squeaking" if, on the one hand, attempting a part that was too high, or "grumbling" if, on the other, they chose one too low.⁶⁵ Aside from individual assignment

⁶⁴ From what is described by composers of psalmody and in the introductory sections of tunebooks, the compositional method was mostly additive. The melody was written first, and then a bass part was composed against the tenor, setting the harmonic foundation for the piece. Next, a treble voice was composed against the bass; intervals formed against the tenor may also have been taken into account, but in some cases it is clear that they were not, creating some of the characteristic dissonances amongst upper voices. Finally, the counter was written to fill out the texture; often the counter or altus is the least melodically interesting line because of this "filler" role. Occasionally, tunes were written in the older style, consisting of only three parts, eliminating the counter altogether, since it was thought to be the least essential of the parts.

⁶⁵ See Nicholas Temperley, *Bound for America: Three British Composers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 147.

of parts, some tunebooks, especially those printed after 1780, give instructions as to the proportioning of the voices for the entire group:

Care should be taken, in singing companies, to have the parts properly proportioned; one half the strength of the voices should be upon the bass, the other half divided upon the other parts.⁶⁶

One very essential thing is to have the parts properly proportioned. Three upon the bass, one upon the tenor, one upon the counter, and two upon the treble (in general) is about the proportion required by the laws of harmony.⁶⁷

The insistence on such a large proportion of bass singers—half of the group for Swan, and three out of seven in *A Selection of Sacred Harmony*—might come as a surprise, given the modern-day preference for a more balanced choral sound. That such a bottom-heavy sonority was seemingly ideal in the early American performing context suggests a different aesthetic norm. Billings claimed that choirs arranged in such a way produced the most pleasing sound. In *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), he waxed rhapsodic about the bass-heavy choir, describing their sound as “so exceeding Grand as to cause the Floor to tremble, as I myself have often experienced.”⁶⁸ Billings thought that this proportioning of the choir, like many other aspects of singing, was rooted in nature. He apparently believed that most (male) singers were natural basses:

I think we ought to take a grateful notice, that the Author of Harmony has so curiously constructed our Organs, that there are about three or four deep voices suitable for the Bass to one for the upper parts, which is about the proportion required in the laws of Harmony.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Timothy Swan, *The Federal harmony. In three parts* (Boston: John Norman, 1788), 17.

⁶⁷ *A Selection of Sacred Harmony*, front matter 12.

⁶⁸ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 18. Billings elaborates in a footnote: “All Notes that descend below G Gamut in the Bass, occasion an agreeable Tremor. But in my Opinion double D, viz. (an Octave below the Middle Line of the Bass) is the most commanding and Majestick of any Sound in Nature.”

⁶⁹ Billings, *The Singing Master's Assistant*, 14-15.

The musical style of psalmody may also have had something to do with the proportioning of voices. Perhaps the preponderance of bass helped to emphasize the movement between mostly root-position harmonies, a characteristic of vocal music from this period. This extra weight on the root of the chord (and the preference to double it in four-voice textures) might be what these authors mean when referring to “the laws of harmony.” Billings surely felt this way, as he also called for a large proportion of basses and described that voice part as the “foundation”:

Let the Three upper Parts be Sung by the best Voices upon Earth, and after the best Manner, yet without a sufficient Quantity of Bass, they are no better than a Scream, because the Bass is the Foundation, and if it be well laid, you may build upon it at Pleasure. Therefore in order to have good Music, there must be Three Bass to one of the upper Parts.⁷⁰

In a culture that valued singing not only as a religious activity but also as an educational one, perhaps the larger number of bass singers also helped to keep the other voices in tune and aware of harmonic motion. Furthermore, if the excerpts above are typical, the performing forces for psalmody were usually quite small in numbers. In the absence of keyboard or other continuo-type instruments, such as a cello, the extra harmonic support provided by a preponderance of bass singers may have been helpful in small groups of performers.

Besides being properly proportioned, the different lines of the texture also needed to act their part and embody a certain identity. Evidence suggests that these characteristic identities of the voice parts remained fairly constant from piece to piece. The authors of American tunebooks, especially those published toward the end of the century, seemed to have a fairly uniform conception of how each part was to behave:

⁷⁰ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 18.

A Selection of Sacred Harmony (1788): “The voices on the bass should be majestic, deep, and solemn; the tenor, full, bold, and manly; the counter, loud, clear, and lofty; the treble, soft, shrill, and sonorous.”⁷¹

Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (1790): “The voices for the bass should be grave and majestic; for the tenor, steady and engaging; for the counter, soft and captivating; and for the treble, transporting and angelic.”⁷²

William Billings, *The Continental Harmony* (1794): “Now the solemn bass demands their attention, now the manly tenor, now the lofty counter, now the volatile treble.”⁷³

These descriptions pertained not only to the performance of the parts but also to their composition. The performers were to embody the character of the voice part, and composers were to write them in such a way as to bring out their natural qualities.

Ideas about the proper characters for the voice parts made their way into the pulpit as well. Preachers discussed them, usually in the context of describing how each part, with its unique qualities, worked together with the others to produce the most pleasing sound. In 1771, Zabdiel Adams’s sermon on sacred song included this account of the voice parts:

The clear and lofty notes of the Counter; the soft, but full sound of the Tenor; the sprightly and acute consonance of the Treble; the manly, the solemn and the grand echo of the Bass, all conspiring together, and uniting in one charming symphony, give the soul such delight as is beyond description glorious!⁷⁴

Adams found the combination of the voices, with their unique and complementary natures, to be especially pleasing to the ear. The Reverend Charles Stearns, pastor of a

⁷¹ *A Selection of Sacred Harmony*, front matter 12.

⁷² Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (New Haven: A. Morse, 1790), 12.

⁷³ Billings, *The Continental Harmony*, xxviii.

⁷⁴ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 11-12. A nearly identical sermon, which included this same passage, was given by Timothy Langdon in 1797: Langdon, “The Pleasure and Advantages of Church Music,” 5.

church in Lincoln, Massachusetts, in 1792 offered a description of the voices in counterpoint: “The firm and steady tenor, the acute and sprightly treble, the clear and lofty counter, breaking in turn, like echoes, through the swelling, majestick bass.”⁷⁵ In this sort of texture, the listener had the opportunity to consider each voice in turn.

Furthermore, these descriptions may be interpreted as having gendered qualities, reflecting the roles men and women played in sung performance. Typically, men sang the bass and women sang the counter or altus. The tenor (melody) would usually be sung by men, and the treble usually by women, although a few persons of the opposite sex might sing either line in their own range.⁷⁶ Regardless of who sang them, the tenor and treble, based on the descriptions above, clearly had different and heavily gendered identities. The tenor, the most essential line of the texture, embodies masculine stability and confidence, depicted with such adjectives as “manly,” “bold,” and “steady.” In contrast, the treble is flightier and less self-assured, being “soft,” “shrill,” and “volatile.” Yet, the more feminine treble is not without its own sort of power. While not loud and boisterous,

⁷⁵ Stearns, “A Sermon,” 10.

⁷⁶ While women were active consumers of psalmody in the early American context, attending singing schools and performing sacred music alongside men (and often on the same voice parts as men) in both public and private venues, their role in creating this music is less clear. There are no known examples of American tunes from this period composed by women, but because attributions are often inconsistent, partial (surname only), or missing altogether, the possibility cannot be ruled out. At least one New England woman, Bridget Fletcher of Boston, penned the texts for a few “hymns and spiritual songs,” published in 1773; as in many earlier tunebooks, these strictly metered texts were to be sung to familiar melodies. Fletcher’s collection, however, belies some of the cultural bias against women the artistic arena. The title identifies her as the deceased wife of Timothy Fletcher: *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. Composed by Bridget Fletcher, the Wife of Timothy Fletcher, Late of Wesford, Deceased, “She Being Dead Yet Speaketh”* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1773). Accessed via EAI. The opening words of the preface to this collection offer a clearly misogynist qualification that brings attention to the author’s gender: “It is expected that every candid reader will be ready to make allowances for the many inaccuracies of a female pen, when he considers that the advantages of females in general are but small, in comparison of those of the other sex.” Another collection of hymn texts by a Philadelphia woman, Rebecca Wilkinson, similarly points to the author’s gender by including “By a Lady” in the title: Rebecca Wilkinson, *Sermons to Children: to Which Are Added Short Hymns, Suited to the Subjects. By a Lady* (Philadelphia: W. Young, 1795). Accessed via EAI.

it is nonetheless “transporting” and “angelic,” seemingly capable of evoking that deeply spiritual and perhaps rapturous state for listener and performer alike. The “captivating” counter, another characteristically feminine voice part, might be ascribed similar powers.

Billings made a special note about the gendered qualities of the voice parts in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, addressing the standard practice of having performers of both sexes singing the tenor and treble parts. He defined the treble as “the 3rd Octave above the Bass, adapted to Feminine Voices in either Sex” and the tenor as the “leading” part, presumably for the strongest voices, be they male or female.⁷⁷ Billings insisted that each individual was to sing the part that most matched the natural qualities of his or her voice, and in no way were they to contrive their voices to fit a particular part:

A man cannot sing a proper Treble without counterfeiting a Woman’s Voice, which is very unnatural, and in the Ears of most Judges very Disagreeable: Neither can a Woman sing a proper Tenor without counterfeiting a Man’s Voice, which is also unnatural and disagreeable: But a Man may sing a Treble the Eighth below, and a Woman a Tenor the Eighth above, and then they will act upon Principles of Nature, and may make good Music, for every Eighth or Octave in Effect is the same.⁷⁸

Once again guided by the laws of nature above all else, Billings suggests the use of octave faburden in the inner parts where it seems natural for the singers, be they male or female. With these doublings, four parts became, in essence, six, resulting in fuller-sounding performances of psalmody. More importantly, the gendered qualities of the voices were maintained while the male or female performers sang in an octave that was comfortable and natural for them. Whether possessing a masculine, feminine, or other type of character, each voice part was expected to play its role. In so doing, they could

⁷⁷ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 21.

⁷⁸ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 11.

best fit together and complement one another. The responsibility for creating this appropriate interplay fell both on the composer, who had to write parts that highlighted the natural, characteristic tendencies of each voice part, and the performers, who had to embody this identity.

The proper balance and blend of the different voice parts was especially important in tunes with polyphonic textures, where each voice is more independent and able to display its unique character. These textures, which might be found in fusing tunes or anthems and other long pieces with alternating sections of homophony, imitative counterpoint, and freer polyphony, required more of the composer's skill. In the preface to what is considered his most adventurous collection, *The Continental Harmony* (1794), William Billings emphasizes the complexity of this compositional endeavor: "The grand difficulty in composition, is to preserve the air through each part separately, and yet cause them to harmonize with each other at the same time."⁷⁹ The ability to achieve this delicate balance between independence and unity in an aesthetically pleasing and harmonically sensible way was highly esteemed in the relatively small circle of New England composers and tunebook compilers.

The challenges that polyphony posed to composers were not without reward; by all accounts, these intricate sections were especially invigorating and exciting for listeners. Billings seemed particularly fond of imitative polyphony, here describing in dramatic terms its exhilarating effects in the popular fusing tune genre:

It is an old maxim, and I think a very just one, viz. *that variety is always pleasing*, and it is well known that there is more variety in one piece of fusing music, than in twenty pieces of plain song, for while the tones do most sweetly coincide and agree, the words are seemingly engaged in a

⁷⁹ Billings, *The Continental Harmony*, xxxi.

musical warfare; and excuse the paradox if I further add, that each part seems determined by dint of harmony and strength of accent, to drown his competitor in an ocean of harmony, and while each part is thus mutually striving for mastery, and sweetly contending for victory, the audience are most luxuriously entertained, and exceedingly delighted; in the mean time, their minds are surprizingly agitated, and extremely fluctuated; sometimes declaring in favour of one part, and sometimes another.⁸⁰

Billings goes on to detail the way in which this type of polyphony brings out the unique aspects of each of the voice parts. Using rich imagery and poetic language, he elaborates on this “musical warfare” between different characters represented by the voice parts:

Now the solemn bass demands their attention, now the manly tenor, now the lofty counter, now the volatile treble, now here, now there, now here again.—O inchanting! O ecstatic! Push on, push on ye sons of harmony, and Discharge your deep mouth'd canon, full fraught with Diapasons; May you with Maestoso, rush on to Choro-Grando, And then with Vigoroso, let fly your Diapentes About our nervous system.⁸¹

Besides the imagery of warfare, Billings also hints at a sexual and erotic interpretation. David Stowe interprets Billings’s description of a good fugging tune as nothing short of an “aural orgasm.”⁸² Modern observers look to passages like this as examples of Billings’s gift of rhetoric and the general impassionedness with which composers and performers of early American sacred song approached the music.

The tensions between individual voices and the whole construction of the fugging tune mirror similar issues in homophonic tunes. Each voice part (and each individual voice singing that part) plays a specific role, and all are necessary to produce a pleasant sound. This tension extends to larger trends in American theology as well. Praise, a

⁸⁰ Billings, *The Continental Harmony*, xxviii.

⁸¹ Billings, *The Continental Harmony*, xxviii. See also David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 57-58.

⁸² Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*, 57-58.

common act, nevertheless requires individual effort. Part of the radical shift in religious thought at this time was an acceptance of individual responsibility for molding one's spiritual life. Sacred song offered a practical way of acting out the push and pull between individual and communal devotion.

Songs about Singing

American psalmodists seemed to embrace the singing voice and its potential to portray individual characters and enact the drama of personal striving in a group setting. They wrote pieces that highlighted the musical versatility of the voice parts and the unique qualities each possessed. A careful comparison between older tunebooks, consisting entirely of English compositions, and newer ones that contain a large number of native compositions reveals subtle changes to this effect. While older tunebooks largely collected un-texted tunes that were set to certain meters and might be paired with any number of Watts's versifications of the psalms, the newer tunebooks with greater representation from American composers tended to contain texted music in which a particular psalm was paired with a particular tune. For example, a typical older-style tunebook from the 1760s would be titled like this one:

*Tunes in Three Parts, For the Several Metres in Dr. Watts's Version of the Psalms; Some of Which Tunes Are New. This Collection of Tunes Is Made from the Works of Eminent Masters; Consisting of Six Tunes for Short Metre; Eight for Common Metre; Seven for Long Metre; and a Tune for Each Special Metre. To Which Are Added the Gamut, with Directions to Learners of Music.*⁸³

Even though it boasts some new tunes, a common front-page sales pitch, the user of this and similar collections would expect all tunes to appear un-texted.

⁸³ This tunebook published in Philadelphia for Armbruster, 1764.

As the native school of psalmody gathered momentum in the 1770s, compositional choices began to reflect aspects of particular texts, and the un-texted approach became less favorable. While most composers continued to use Watts's versifications of the psalms as the primary source material for their texts, they gravitated toward certain types of psalms; they drew disproportionately from the category of "hymnic" psalms. Psalms from this group typically begin with an exhortation to song, such as "Sing unto the Lord...", "Sing praises to God...", etc., and continue to enumerate the great deeds that God has done to merit such celebratory honor. This exhortation is usually presented in the imperative form with the implied "you" (singular or plural) as the subject, or perhaps in the first person plural form ("Let us sing ..."). These psalm texts, listed in Table 3.1, clearly connect the physical act of singing with the spiritual act of praising God. Late eighteenth-century tunebooks teem with these texts and other exhortations to song. Even the physiological components of vocal production receive special attention: the lips, tongue, teeth, mouth, and breath are all frequent text images in this repertory, all pointing with poetic language to the act of singing. Table 3.2 shows the large proportion of tunes that refer to singing in some way in selected tunebooks.

Table 3.1: The hymnic psalms⁸⁴

Psalm & Verse	Exhortation to Song
9:11	“Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion”
21:13	“So will we sing and praise thy power”
30:4	“Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his”
33:3	“Sing unto him a new song”
47:6	“Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King”
66:2	“Sing forth the honour of his name”
67:4	“O let the nations be glad and sing for joy”
68:4	“Sing unto God, sing praises to his name”
81:1	“Sing aloud unto God our strength”
92:1	“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises”
95:1	“O come, let us sing unto the Lord”
96:1	“O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth”
98:1	“O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things”
100:2	“Come before his presence with singing”
105:2	“Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him”
135:3	“Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant”
138:5	“Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord”
145:7	“They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness”
147:1	“Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God”
149:1	“Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song”
150:6	“Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord”

Table 3.2: References to singing in selected tunebooks

Collection and Year	% of Songs with Reference to Singing*
<i>The New-England Psalm-Singer</i> (1770)	51% (65 / 127)
<i>The Singing Master's Assistant</i> (1778)	68% (48 / 71)
<i>Select Harmony</i> (Law) (1779)	38% (22 / 58)
<i>The Chorister's Companion</i> (1782)	41% (30 / 73)
<i>Worcester Collection</i> (1786)	32% (46 / 143)
<i>Federal Harmony</i> (1788)	31% (40 / 128)
<i>The Continental Harmony</i> (1794)	52% (26 / 50)
*Includes the words “sing,” “song,” and “singing,” as well as “voice,” “lips,” “breath,” and “tongue” where they are clearly used to describe the act of singing.	

⁸⁴ This categorization is adapted from Hermann Gunkel’s influential study, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. T. M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), originally published in German 1927. Psalms were not generally categorized by topic until the mid-nineteenth century and not formally critiqued in this way until Gunkel’s writings. It is not likely that the Yankee tunesmiths would have known these as “hymnic psalms.” Nevertheless, they clearly recognized them as a group and favored them. My list is more expansive than Gunkel’s, including several psalms that he did not categorize as hymnic but which clearly exhort the reader to sing.

A further indication of the importance of the hymnic psalms is their presence on the title pages of numerous American tunebooks and collections of hymns from the late eighteenth century.⁸⁵ These were more than mere space-fillers or decorative additions to the title pages. Having these quotations from hymnic psalms so prominently displayed served three purposes. First, it offered a preview of the content of the collection, including songs for whom God is the audience. Many drew texts primarily from the category of hymnic psalms. Second, a quoted hymnic psalm on the title page served as a justification for the whole practice of psalmody. The text was scriptural, and hence, immediately imbued with importance and generally accepted as authoritative. The author of the psalm exhorts the reader to sing praise to God, implying that this is a moral duty. The composers, by setting these sacred texts to music, facilitated the goal of a direct communication with God. Finally, the quotations served as general instructions to the users of the tunebooks. They were to carry out this order in a most literal way, using their breath, tongues, and lips to form the notes and sing to God.

But this obsession with the singing voice in New England went even further, as it infiltrated non-Biblical sacred texts and became the focal point of more elaborate pieces—anthems and odes—that were normally found at the back of tunebooks. Through both text and music, these songs address techniques of vocal production, expression, the mechanics of four-part polyphony, and the ins and outs of choral singing. We might say that these are no longer songs about singing, but songs about *how* to sing. This small but

⁸⁵ Just a few examples include John Stickney's *The Gentleman and Lady's Musical Companion* (1774), which quotes Psalm 149 on its title page, Daniel Bayley's *Essex Harmony, or Musical Miscellany* (1785) – Psalm 149, *Worcester Collection* (1786) – Psalm 147, Billings, *The Continental Harmony* (1794) – Psalms 68 and 87, *A Pocket Hymn Book, Designed as a Constant Companion for the Pious* (5th edition, 1786), Abraham Wood's *Divine Songs* (1789), and *Evangelical Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* (1791).

significant subgenre of tunes goes beyond a mere description of singing as an act of worship and actually instructs the singer as to how precisely that should be done.

“Down Steers the Bass” is an example of this sort of pedagogical composition. With a text by Boston clergyman Mather Byles, it details the various voices of the choir entering in turn. Byles’s descriptions of the voice parts are similar to those by other writers, with each embodying a certain identity. The bass is “grave” and “majestic” in its low range, the treble “shrill,” the tenor soft, gentle, and “melodious,” and the altus “aspiring.” In the second half of the poem, Byles explains how the parts blend to produce chords and harmony and then how they interact together in counterpoint.

Down steers the bass with grave majestic air,
And up the treble mounts with shrill career;
With softer sounds, in mild melodious maze,
Warbling between the tenor gently plays;
But if the aspiring altus joins its force,
See! Like the lark, it wings its tow’ring course;
From the bold height it hails the echoing bass,
Which swells to melt and mix in close embrace.

Though diff’rent systems all the parts divide,
By music’s chords the distant notes are ty’d;
And sympathetic strains enchanting winde
Their restless race till all the parts are join’d.
Then rolls the rapture thro’ the air around
In the full magick melody of sound.

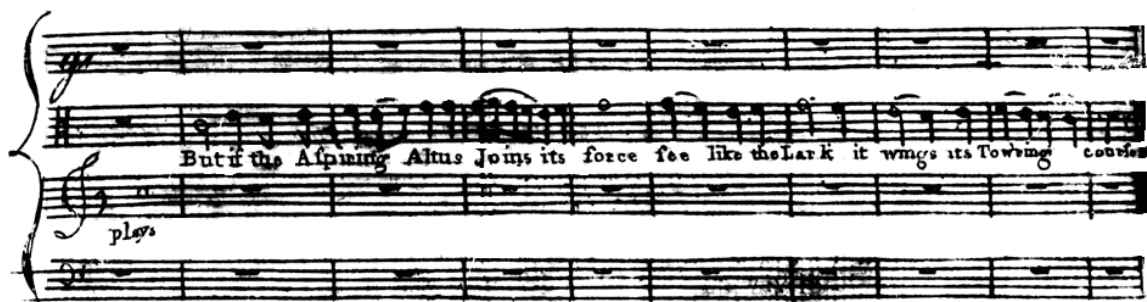
In this poetic language, Byles gives each voice part a distinct personality. As parts of the choral body, each behaves differently, and their complementary natures make the most pleasant-sounding whole. Their interactions are rather human as well, as they “mix in close embrace” and run a “restless race.” Byles gracefully applies the religious concept of the Body of Christ—unity in diversity—to music by referring to the visual aspect of

psalmody notation: although divided by “diff’rent systems” on the page, “music’s chords” bring the “distant notes” together into harmonious union.

Billings’s setting of this text appears as an anthem entitled “Consonance” in his fourth tunebook, *The Psalm-Singer’s Amusement* (1781), shown in Example 3.5. A series of *solis* for each voice part accompanies the first six lines, in which the particular characters of each are described. Billings enhances the meaning of the text by having each group of singers embody its voice part’s description in a literal way. The bass section opens with a bold, leaping gesture outlining tonic and dominant harmonies. This is followed by a high, meandering treble line and a tender melody for the tenor, marked “*piano*.” The ornamental figures of the altus solo are likely used to paint the image of the lark, which Byles uses to represent that part.

Example 3.5: William Billings, “Consonance,” *The Psalm-Singer’s Amusement* (1781)

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Consonance An Anthem Words from D^r Byles". The score is written on four staves, each with a different clef and key signature. The lyrics are written below the staves, and the musical notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The lyrics are: "And up the Treble mounts with thrill", "Dance then the Bass with grace and merriment", "Car ear", "Piano with softer sounds in mild melodious maze Warbling between the Tenor's song".



Daniel Read set the same text, appearing in *The American Singing Book* (1785), but took a slightly different approach, allowing each voice to continue in counterpoint as the next one enters (Example 3.6). Similar to Billings's setting, each voice part embodies a distinct shape and character, as directed by the text.

Example 3.6: Daniel Read, "An Anthem," *The American Singing Book* (1785)

AN ANTHEM. Words by D^r Byles.

 A musical score for "An Anthem" by Daniel Read. It features a grand staff with three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano voice, the middle for the Alto voice, and the bottom for the Bass voice. The lyrics are: "Down steers the Bass with grave majestic air, And up the Treble mounts with shrill career; With softer sounds, in mild no-
the Tenor gently plays, warbling between warbling be...tween the Tenor gently plays: warbling between the". The music is in a single system, showing the voices entering and moving in counterpoint.

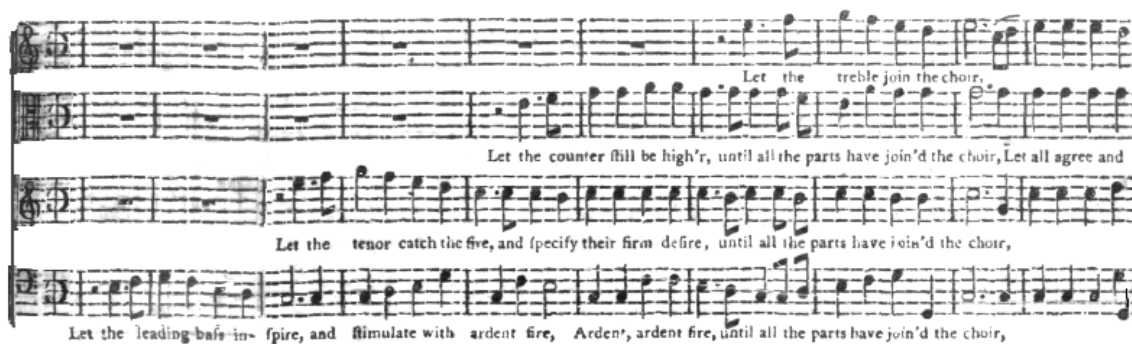
Billings seemed particularly fond of this type of text that gave the different voice parts specific traits to embody. The text of "O Praise God," set as an anthem in Billings's *The Continental Harmony* (1794), is loosely based on Psalms 149, and 150, both hymnic

psalms. In this text, the voice parts are cast as characters in a drama, with each catching the excitement of the others as the piece builds. The use of the verb “inspire” and the images of “ardent fire” and “firm desire” probably indicate the Holy Spirit:

Let the leading bass inspire,
And stimulate with ardent fire,
Let the tenor catch the fire,
And specify their firm desire,
Let the counter still be higher,
Let the treble join the choir;
Until all the parts have join'd the choir;
Let all agree and join with me
To praise the Lord.

Billings animates the music (Example 3.7) with an imitative texture, adding voices from the lowest to the highest. Then, the texture shifts to homophony as the voices slow and come together in longer notes that declaim the last line. This line is given special musical treatment because it names the ultimate purpose of the exercise at hand: the voices are used for praise.

Example 3.7: William Billings, “O Praise God,” *The Continental Harmony* (1794), mm. 30-46





It might seem strange or redundant to use the vocal genre of psalmody to talk about singing. If one is already singing, why is it necessary to sing *about* singing? These self-reflexive songs about singing demonstrate not only the unique wit of some of America's first composers but also a keen awareness of the functioning of the voices of the choir and their interactions as part of the whole body of performers. These references to the act of singing *within* songs are a particular mark of late eighteenth-century New England psalmody. This culture valued the physical act of singing more than mere listening.

The Yankee tunesmiths considered the singing voice not only an instrument with expressive capabilities but also a Godly instrument and a distinctly human one. The voice was viewed as a natural and God-given gift; because the voice was so formed by God, it was made to express a broad range of emotions and thus was the ideal vehicle for expressing religious truths. Deemed better than all the other instruments, the "breathing instrument" found a special place in the cultural landscape, as it aptly embodied the

tension between individual and communal praise characteristic of religious thought in colonial New England.

CHAPTER 4: SACRED SONG AND THE MIND

As part of their holistic view of singing, early Americans recognized a third major part of the human person that could benefit and be made healthy through sacred song—the mind. The mind and the soul were intimately connected, because the mind was the place for contemplation of divine thoughts and the use of rational faculties to affirm religious beliefs. The mind and body necessarily worked together to allow the person to function. The mind processed sensory input from the body and instructed it on how to react to stimuli: “Between the senses and the mind, there is the most intimate connection. By the former, the latter is easily affected.”¹ In the case of sacred song, the mind served two key functions. Firstly, through study and application, it allowed the body to produce harmonious sounds and achieve musical literacy. This function was directly related to broader trends in religious thought at the time, as a movement for greater biblical literacy accompanied the desire for musical literacy. Diligent study and application of the Bible was believed to produce a person in tune with the will of God; the cultivation of the voice was thought to have a similar effect. Secondly, once those musical sounds were

¹ Ezra Weld, “A Sermon, Preached at a Singing Lecture” (Springfield, MA: Ezra W. Weld, 1789), 15. Delivered in Braintree, MA, on May 21, 1788. Accessed via *EAI*. Since the 1970s, the fields of musicology, cognitive science, and psychology have collaborated to produce much research on the topics of musical perception and cognition. Eighteenth-century Americans seemed to believe that music had significant (mostly positive) effects on mental functioning. With the continual improvement in technology for measuring the effects of music (both listening and performing) on the brain, we now have more evidence to support that which was intuitive to practitioners of early American psalmody. Relevant recent studies on this topic include Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Penguin, 2006); and Marc Leman, *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008).

produced, the mind absorbed and processed them, uniting the meaning of the words to the musical medium. As with the body and soul, the mind was thought to be made healthy and whole by sacred music. The system of education for both children and adults present in late eighteenth-century New England relied heavily on singing instruction as a means of improving the mind in particular and the whole person in general. The presence of singing schools and the widespread publication of tunebooks and instructional manuals attest to the importance of singing in the teaching and learning culture of the time. Instruction in singing was a chief means of incorporating the religious ideals of learned spirituality into daily life in New England.

Moral Thinking

In relation to the mind's role as processor of musical information, one of the effects of sacred song that many observers of American psalmody noticed was an increased receptivity to religious ideas. Instruction in singing was believed to afford the learner a number of mental benefits. In the first place, it served to clear the mind of unholy thoughts, be they "evil" or merely "trifling," thereby reducing the desire and occasion to sin. Psalmody then filled this mental space with a suitably challenging activity that brought an appropriate sort of pleasure. Congregationalist minister Ezra Weld expounds on these benefits for the mind:

The acquirement of more skill, and greater frequency in the exercises of psalmody, would doubtless be attended with very salutary effects. They would serve, not only as an expulsory mean, to the usurped dominion of other *lords and lovers*; but greatly assist in the restoration of the soul to the obedience of its only rightful Sovereign and Owner. *That* time, which is now wasted in vain amusement; and the breath which is lost in trifling, and often worse conversation, might in this way be improved to the most valuable purposes. This would unite the pleasures, and the interests of men

together. While it prevented much evil, it would be fruitful of great peace, and pleasantness.²

Psalmody, Weld argued, assisted the mind in making moral decisions because it combined desire and virtue. To sing sacred songs was both enjoyable and good, uniting “pleasures” and “interests” into one act. It was therefore able to take the place of vices than might be pleasurable but morally wrong or indecent.

Sacred song presumably made the mind suppler and more open to the deeper meaning of the words being sung. It cleared the way for intense mental work on sacred themes: “vocal music ... surprisingly prepares the mind for the sublimest, and most vigorous exertions and meditations.”³ Lecturers and singing-school masters spoke and wrote about the effects on the mind, but sermons on the topic held even more sway. Preached from the pulpit, the words of ordained ministers were believed to be divinely inspired. By drawing a connection between the voice and the mind, preachers suggested that psalmody would align the whole person more closely with God. The Reverend Weld, for example, offered a poetic explanation of sacred song’s effects on the mind in a 1789 sermon:

Sacred harmony to the mind, is like the perspective to the eye; it enlivens, strengthens, and prepares for the more ravishing view, and contemplation of the object. It warms the heart; it elevates the mind to God; to the triumphs, as it were, of immortality; to an anticipation of the joys of just men made perfect.⁴

² Weld, “A Sermon,” 18.

³ Oliver Noble, “Regular and Skilful Music in the Worship of God, Founded in the Law of Nature, and Introduced into His Worship, by His Own Institution, under Both the Jewish and Christian Dispensations” (Boston: Mills and Hicks for Bayley, 1774), 4-5. Delivered at the North Meeting-House in Newburyport, MA, “at the desire of the church and congregation” on February 8, 1774. Noble was pastor of a church in Newbury. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁴ Weld “A Sermon,” 14.

Like perspective, sacred harmony lends a sense of depth, clarity, and focus to the mind. Another preacher noted that this helps the listener affirm his or her faith, so that when we sing, “our hearts are disposed to receive the great truths of religion, our minds are prepared to digest and improve the instructions we receive, and thus our faith is confirmed.”⁵ Singing was thought to bring the truths of religion to light, giving the singer a lucid understanding of his or her faith.

Sacred song, with its combination of harmonious sound and edifying lyrics, was believed to clear the mind of immoral thoughts and fill it with holy ones. The Reverend Zabdiel Adams described sacred music as “an enemy to all malice, to impure imaginations and un-hallowed desires.”⁶ Some preachers argued that this effect, like so many others, was by Godly design:

The harmony of Zion, leads the mind to God. By the divinity of the subject, the melody is sanctified, and the latter becomes an auxiliary to the former in the promotion of virtue. This was the benevolent design of the Creator, in forming the mind to discern, and to be delighted with the harmonious proportions of sound.⁷

By leading the mind to God, psalm singing was thought to inspire morality and right beliefs. Thus, learning how to sing properly, itself a mental challenge, was seen as the chief means to attaining such holy thoughts. Congregationalist minister Aaron Kinne spoke of these benefits to the singing schools of Groton, Connecticut, in 1798. He praised the efforts of teachers and students, touting sacred song’s ability to “fill the mind with

⁵ Jonas Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music, in Public Worship” (Boston: Nicholas Bowes, 1770), 27. Delivered at a lecture in Lexington, MA, “appointed to promote and encourage the divine use of vocal music, more especially in public worship” on April 25, 1770. Clark was pastor of a church in Lexington, MA. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁶ Zabdiel Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages of Church-Musick” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 14. Delivered at a lecture in the First Parish of Lancaster on Thursday April 4, 1771. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁷ Weld “A Sermon,” 17.

lofty and grand conceptions,—inspire it with noble sentiments.”⁸ Weld also preached about the benefits of studying music: “the study and exercise of harmony” is a means to “better dispose and qualify the mind, for the high and noble contemplations of religion. The pleasing sensations of harmonious, well proportioned sounds on the nervous system, are attended with the most friendly effects on the mental powers.”⁹ Weld went on to name the mind as the site of moral decision-making, a place where the person sorts out all of the different good and bad choices that he or she is faced with. He asserted that sacred song served the vital function of pushing people towards the morally right decisions: “The psalms, and hymns, to which the tunes are usually set, at once instruct, and solemnize; invite, and even compel the mind to a choice of virtue, and goodness.”¹⁰ Song, it seemed, aided the person in making virtuous choices, and this had obvious benefits for both the individual and society.

The sung texts themselves often addressed this topic of moral thinking. Psalms and other texts about the mental obstacles to Christian living were common subjects for American psalmodists. Part of Watts’s version of Psalm 119, for example, petitions God for relief from the “vain desires” that prevent holy thoughts:

My soul lies cleaving to the dust.
 Lord, give me life divine.
 From vain desires and ev’ry lust
 Turn off these eyes of mine.

Justin Morgan’s setting of this text, “Plesant Valley,” shown in Example 4.1, appeared in several tunebooks, including *Federal Harmony* (Asahel Benham, 1790). Morgan makes

⁸ Aaron Kinne, “Alamoth. An Address, Delivered to the Singing Schools, in the First and Second Societies in Groton” (New London, CT: S. Green, 1798), 8. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁹ Weld, “A Sermon,” 16.

¹⁰ Weld, “A Sermon,” 26.

use of an imitative texture for the second couplet, perhaps to portray the speaker's distracted mind:

26

Pleasant Valley. T^l. 119th 16th part. C. M. Morgan.

My soul lies close--vined to the dust. Lord give me life di--vine

From vain desires

From vain desires & every lust Turn

From vain desires, & every lust, Turn off these eyes of mine. from vain desires & every lust —

From vain desires and every lust Turn off these eyes of mine

every lust Turn off these eyes of mine. From vain desires and every lust, from vain desires —

off these eyes of mine. From vain desires and every lust, from vain desires and every lust turn off these eyes of mine

I send the joys of earth away,
Away ye tempters of the mind;
False as the smooth deceitful sea,
And empty as the whistling wind.

Example 4.2 shows one setting of this text, “Newport” by Daniel Read. Read employs minor key, as the speaker’s control over the sinful thoughts remains ambiguous:

Example 4.2: Daniel Read, “Newport,” *The Worcester Collection* (1786)



Texts and settings such as these may have served as a reminder to singers of the importance of moral thinking, and the act of singing itself prepared the mind for virtuous thoughts. In addition, these mental benefits might remain long after the actual singing was done. Many sources claimed that the poetic and musical setting of sacred words allowed the message to be retained in the memory for much longer than if it had been expressed in simple prose:

Moral and religious truths, and indeed, any matter whatever, thrown into plain and agreeable verse, generally makes a more lasting impression on the memory, than prose compositions; and when they are frequently repeated, or sung, the effect will be proportionally more lasting and strong.¹¹

¹¹ John Black, “The Duty of Christians in Singing the Praise of God, Explained” (Carlisle, PA: Kline & Reynolds, 1790), 18. Black was pastor of the Upper Presbyterian congregation of Marsh-Creek, PA. Accessed via *EAI*.

The lasting imprint of sacred verse was an effect, like many others, that was thought to be particularly useful the raising and instruction of the young, as we will see.

Furthermore, sacred song was thought to heal a variety of mental afflictions and restore the mind to a state of calm and high functioning. Weld named a number of mental illnesses that might be helped by the practice of psalmody:

But to the *pleasures*, must be added the *usefulness* of psalmody. The natural tendency of musick to dispel the gloomy affections of the mind; disperse the darkening clouds of melancholy, and anxious cares, is great indeed, and truly admirable.¹²

Modern observers would likely see the mental problems Weld mentions—“anxiety,” “melancholy,” and “gloomy affections” —as symptoms of depression. By suggesting music and especially sacred song with its encouraging texts as a cure for mental afflictions, eighteenth-century New Englanders were channeling the theories of ancient philosophers and seventeenth-century music theorists while at the same time anticipating what modern music therapists now know about chemicals released into the brain while listening to music or creating it. Adams also affirmed the ability of sacred song to clear away mental illnesses; he bolstered this claim with the poetry of Alexander Pope in “Ode for Musick on St. Cecilia’s Day”: “Musick can soften pain to ease, and make despair and madness please.”¹³ Early Americans seemed to believe that these effects were particularly evident in sacred vocal music, in which both the medium and the message combined to

¹² Weld, “A Sermon,” 13-14. English texts on melancholy, especially Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Henry Cripps, 1638), circulated in New England. Burton discussed music as a remedy for melancholy, citing ancient and modern examples of individuals whose madness or depression was cured through music. Sacred music, he noted, was especially powerful in this respect; it could “expel the greatest griefs, ... extenuate fears and furies, appeaseth cruelty, abateth heaviness, and to such as are watchful is causeth quiet rest; it takes away spleen and hatred” (Vol. ii, 227-232).

¹³ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 18.

produce healing effects. Just as it was a salve for the body and soul, music was also believed to still the tumultuous mind and heal its many afflictions.

Learning to Sing: Another Sacred Duty

The words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, “I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also,” served as the main scriptural support for what observers of early American psalmody saw as a crucial connection between the soul and the mind in the act of singing. Paul’s letters contained instructions on a variety of religious activities for the new Christian communities he was establishing and overseeing in modern-day Greece and Turkey; roughly 1700 years later, his words seemed to ring true for the relatively new Christian communities in America. Perhaps styling themselves after St. Paul, religious leaders in the New World offered advice on how to go about building religious communities. Paul’s insistence on the combination of spirit and understanding lay at the core of much Protestant theology in Europe and the New World. It was part of the justification for Bible translations and services in vernacular language. For sacred vocal music, clear text settings that did not obscure the words aided in this quest for understanding.

When it came to the important act of singing, preachers suggested that these words of Paul be a guide. They recommended that singers keep them constantly running through their minds. A number of sermons from this period address the need for the type of mental engagement that Paul speaks of to accompany the spiritual movements and physical gestures of singing. Jonas Clark, preaching to believers in Lexington, Massachusetts, expanded on Paul’s charge: “We are to sing praises *with understanding*.

That is, *intelligently*, with regard to ourselves, as well-knowing, or entering into the spirit of the matter and subject of what we sing.”¹⁴ It is not enough, Clark explains, to merely go through the motions of sacred song, hoping for some sort of spiritual enlightenment as a result. On the contrary, the singer must be fully conscious of the significance of the act and must have an understanding of the words being sung. William Symmes agreed, saying that in the act of singing as in other religious activities, the soul is, essentially, lost without the engagement of the mind:

In order to render the practice of this divine art a reasonable and acceptable service; we must enter into the true sense and spirit of the sacred song. To sing without knowing the meaning of the words, or attending to the matter of the song; is as unedifying as to hear a prayer in an unknown tongue. In this as well as in other respects, *that the soul be without knowledge it is not good.*¹⁵

That the singer is in communication with God through the song makes this mental commitment even more necessary. To converse with God thoughtlessly would be a grave offense. Tans’ur reminds his readers of this point: “Let us always remember to whom we do Sing ... and that we do it with *sincere, pious, and devout Affections*; and with due *Attention of Mind.*”¹⁶ Without attention of mind and true understanding, song was hardly an exercise of praise, according to the ideals of Reformed theology.

That singing was a sacred duty, based on the nature of God’s creation, directives from the Bible, and established norms for worship, was well understood by late eighteenth-century religious leaders and congregations. Some believed that this duty

¹⁴ Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music,” 24.

¹⁵ William Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing Praises unto God” (Danvers, MA: E. Russell, 1779), 11. Delivered at a lecture in Andover, MA, April 6, 1779. Symmes was pastor of the First Church in Andover. Accessed via *EAI*.

¹⁶ William Tans’ur, *The Royal Melody Complete: or The New Harmony of Zion* (Boston: W. McAlpine, 1767), 13.

implied that efforts must necessarily be made to ensure that the singing was done well, with full understanding and proper methods. Not surprisingly, many composers and compilers referred to the Pauline directive and the duty to learn well the methods of singing in the introductions to their collections. In doing so, they alluded to religious attitudes about sacred song that included not only Paul's writings, but those of Augustine, Calvin, and leaders of the Reformed churches that dominated New England's religious landscape. By implicitly citing this long tradition of theological support for the practice of psalmody, composers and compilers highlighted the necessity of their publication, appealing to the morality and religious obedience of the reader. William Billings, in the preface to *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), his first tunebook, reminded the reader of this particular duty:

It would be needless in me to attempt to set forth the Usefulness and Importance of Psalm-singing, which is so universally known and acknowledged, and on which depends no inconsiderable Part of the Divine Worship of our Churches. But this much I would say, That he who finds himself gifted with a tunable Voice, and yet neglects to cultivate it, not only hides in the Earth a Talent of the highest Value, but robs himself of that peculiar Pleasure, of which they only are conscious who exercise that Faculty.¹⁷

The Reverend Samson Occom opened his 1774 collection of hymn texts with similar words, emphasizing this obligation to learn well the methods of singing: "There is great Engagedness, in these Colonies, to cultivate Psalmody; and I believe it to be the Duty of Christians to learn the Songs of Zion, according to good Method or Rule."¹⁸ By learning

¹⁷ William Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer: or, American Chorister* (Boston: Edes & Gill for Elliot, Flagg, and Bass, 1770), 2. From the preface, dated October 7, 1770.

¹⁸ Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations* (New-London, CT: Timothy Green, 1774), 3.

to sing properly, good Christians put their minds to a virtuous and morally necessary purpose.

Religious leaders, as voices of authority on the uses and obligations related to sacred music, confirmed the importance of the act of singing and, of equal importance, the process of learning how to sing well. They argued that each believer owed God the best presentation of the voice as possible, according to his or her abilities. Therefore, all singers, from the best to the worst, were called to embrace their natural singing abilities or lack thereof, and work to improve them to a higher level. The emphasis on “all” echoed the hymnic psalms and their inclusive language. Psalm 98, for example, exhorts, “make a joyful noise unto the Lord, *all* the earth.” The Reverend Weld explained the theological basis for this requirement: “That he who formed the organs for praise, should be praised in the use of them in the best manner, and with the best design, is altogether reasonable, and therefore requisite.”¹⁹ Oliver Noble similarly noted the divine origins of the voice, which demanded a response of diligent effort to develop one’s skills: “This excellent art, has been introduced into the worship of God by his *own* special institution, ... which should animate all that are capable of it, to a sacred ambition to learn, in some good measure, this important art, and to get skill in music, especially in psalmody.”²⁰

No excuse could be made for failing to properly cultivate the voice; the “sacred ambition to learn” the art of psalmody was nothing short of a moral obligation. Like the duty to sing, the duty to *learn how to sing* did not except anyone for want of ability. Preachers stated that persons simply could not claim inability to sing until they had made

¹⁹ Weld, “A Sermon,” 21.

²⁰ Noble, “Regular and Skilful Music,” 5.

earnest attempts to learn. The Reverend Joseph Strong presented such an argument on the occasion of introducing regular singing into public worship at his church in Simsbury, Connecticut: “Men ought then to be convinced that it is their duty, in the first place, to take pains to learn and go into proper methods for that purpose, before they have a right to look upon themselves excusable in a neglect, for want of capacity.”²¹

Furthermore, many argued that the failure to learn the proper methods of singing and to improve as much as possible constituted a sin. Zabdiel Adams added that it was also possible to “misimprove” the voice by practicing the wrong kind of song: “They, who are furnished with musical organs, and either do *not* improve them at all, or *misimprove* them by singing profane and vicious songs, are chargeable with guilt; ‘to *them* it is sin.’”²² Dr. H. Farnsworth, speaking at the conclusion of a singing school in Otsego, New York, elucidated this argument about the sinful neglect of the voice using the biblical parable of the talents, a popular reference for the topic of singing. The voice, Farnsworth claimed, is a gift that must not be hidden, but used and improved: “Those who neglect to cultivate the voice bury a great talent, for which they will be obliged to give an account.”²³ These authors asserted that the voice was a gift that needed to be used—not only used, but used *properly* and to an appropriate end. Regardless of whether an individual’s voice was good, mediocre, or poor, he or she was obliged to improve it as much as possible.

²¹ Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), 16. Delivered at a singing lecture at a parish in Simsbury, CT, on 18 March, 1773. Accessed via *EAI*.

²² Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 31.

²³ Dr. H. Farnsworth, “An Oration on Music” (Cooperstown, NY: Elihu Phinney, 1795), 17. Delivered at the court house in Cooperstown, NY, April, 1794, at the conclusion of a singing school taught by Nathan Billings (no apparent relation to William). Accessed via *EAI*.

Held accountable for the improvement of their God-given instruments, Americans looked for institutions to help them advance their singing skills. In the context of colonial New England, this duty to learn how to sing well was brought to fruition through two closely related channels—the singing school and the tunebook. The singing school, in conjunction with the church, was the major musical institution in New England in the eighteenth century, and the sacred tunebook served as a primary source for both musical and moral instruction.

Singing Schools

The main venue for learning about the practical art of singing in eighteenth-century New England was the singing school. Despite what its name implies in a modern context, the singing school was not a permanent institution housed in a particular building, but rather a mobile and flexible entity. The typical format consisted of a class taught two or three nights a week for two or three hours, lasting for the duration of about three months. Singing schools generally fit into the annual rhythm of life in the colonies, going into session in the summer, after the crops were planted but before the harvest.²⁴ In addition to their regular jobs, most composers in early America also worked as singing-school masters.²⁵ These teachers, like the preachers of the Awakening era, were mostly

²⁴ David P. McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-Century Composer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 20.

²⁵ Nearly all of the “Yankee tunesmiths” were active in their other professions throughout their careers as composers. In addition, most had short stints of military service. Justin Morgan also left behind a well-used personal library that revealed strong interests in politics, elocution, geography, creative writing, mathematics, and homiletics. See Appendix C for a summary of educational backgrounds and professions of early American composers.

Figure 4.1: Images of Late Eighteenth-Century Singing-School Sessions²⁶



A group of children gather around a singing-school instructor.



Two young women (foreground) and two young men (background) look together at tunebooks.

²⁶ Taken from Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs: In Easy Language, for the Use of Children ... Ornamented with Cuts from Original Designs* (Springfield, MA, 1788), frontispiece and back cover.

itinerant, offering practical knowledge about singing to even the most remote parts of New England.

The sacred tunebooks used for public worship and private devotion were equally useful in the context of the singing school. This dual purpose was often indicated by the compilers in marketing and introducing their publications. Many used words similar to those of Simeon Jocelin in *The Chorister's Companion* (1782), asserting that their collections were created so “that the schools and congregations might be furnished with a collection of tunes, particularly calculated for the purpose of worship.”²⁷ Some tunebooks were produced for a specific educational institution, such as John Poor's *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns, with Tunes Affixed, for the Use of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia* (1794).

Using sacred tunebooks as instructional texts, teachers covered the rudiments of music, such as note-reading, tone production, and ensemble singing, and also basic theology, morality, and manners. Classes were usually held in church buildings and supported with church funds or through the donations of “subscribers,” making them free of cost to the participants.²⁸ Many religious leaders encouraged attendance at singing school in order that the pupils might attain some of those benefits that pointed the mind towards God. Sermons and occasional public lectures about sacred song highlighted the

²⁷ *The Chorister's Companion: or Church Music Revised* (New Haven, CT: Simeon Jocelin and Amos Doolittle, 1782), preface 1.

²⁸ For example, the published plan for the establishment of Andrew Adgate's singing school in Philadelphia proclaims: “It is the object of the subscribers to establish a free school for the spreading the knowledge of vocal music; the trustees, therefore, invite every person who wishes to be possessed of this knowledge to apply to Mr. Adgate ... that his name may be entered as one of the school, and his instructions commence, for which there will not be required of him even the smallest compensation.” The pupils of Adgate's school apparently gave twelve vocal concerts between June, 1785 and June, 1786 as a way of returning this investment to the community. See “Plan of Mr. Adgate's Institution for Diffusing More Generally the Knowledge of Vocal Music” (Philadelphia: B. Towne, 1785). Accessed via *EAI*.

solemn duty to learn to sing and extolled the many benefits for the practitioner. Like public worship, the singing-school session was a significant and widely attended event in the daily life of the New England town.²⁹ Attendees included townspeople of all ages and professions. Singing was seen not only as a useful skill, but also as a necessary religious activity and a pleasurable part of social life.

Although singing schools had been a feature of American life since at least the 1720s, several cultural, religious, and demographic factors combined to bring the singing-school movement to a peak in the late eighteenth century.³⁰ With the passage of time since the original settlement and the accompanying rise in the numbers of American-born citizens, many eighteenth-century New Englanders came from families in which memories of life in Europe were several generations past. With each successive generation, the connection to English theory treatises, discussed below, grew fainter, and congregational singing took a turn for the worse around mid-century, in the opinions of many observers. In addition, the push for political independence seemed to run parallel with an increased consciousness of cultural achievements.

Many church leaders expressed concern that singing, a central act of worship and an important means of communication with God, was steadily declining in quality in New England. Isaac Watts, though he never visited America, nonetheless decried the generally poor quality of psalmody wherever it was practiced: “While we sing the Praises of our God in his church, we are employed in that part of worship which of all others is the nearest a-kin to heaven; and it is a pity that this, of all others, should be performed the

²⁹ See Alan Clark Buechner, *Yankee Singing Schools and the Golden Age of Choral Music in New England, 1760-1800* (Boston: Boston University for the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, 2003).

³⁰ David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86-87.

worst upon earth.”³¹ The cause of poor performance in early American churches could be traced to the rote method of learning songs that was prevalent in the early part of the century, especially in rural parts of New England. With this system, the faithful would learn songs by memory; as a result, the practice of reading music fell by the wayside, and numerous variations of the same tune often led to confusion in performance. More than a mere aesthetic problem, this system was seen by some as a shameful misuse of the God-given vocal instrument and therefore as offensive to God. Thomas Symmes’s 1720 pamphlet, entitled *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing, or, Singing by Note*, reacted against rote singing, advocating instead that music-reading, or “singing by note” replace the largely oral tradition in place.³²

Perhaps embarrassed by the poor quality of singing in some congregations, religious leaders and musicians alike encouraged a “regular” method of teaching and learning musical skills. “Regular” singing referred to the practice of reading music by note, through a learned method; it contrasted with the “usual” method of singing by ear or rote repetition. Regular singing, it was argued, improved the quality of psalmody and therefore produced a more pleasing and proper offering to God.³³ Thus, the solemn duty

³¹ Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 18th ed. (New York: H. Gaine, 1761), preface A2. Originally published in 1707.

³² Thomas Symmes, *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing, or, Singing by Note; in an Essay, to Revive the True and Ancient Mode of Singing Psalm-Tunes, According to the Pattern in Our New-England Psalm-Books; the Knowledge and Practice of Which Is Greatly Decay'd in Most Congregations* (Boston: B. Green for Samuel Gerrish, 1720). The debate between advocates of regular singing and those of rote singing was ongoing throughout the eighteenth century. While instruction in singing eventually became the norm, it remained a subject of controversy and was by no means universally accepted in all churches.

³³ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 34-37; Lemuel Hedge, “The Duty and Manner of Singing in Christian Churches” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1772), 22-35. Delivered at a singing lecture in Warwick, MA, on January 29, 1772. Accessed via *EAI*.

to sing, which was emphasized by religious leaders throughout New England, naturally implied a duty to learn how to sing properly.³⁴

Furthermore, some claimed that scripture itself, the ultimate authoritative source, supported a learned tradition of singing by note. In the preface to his 1793 collection of hymns and anthems, Thomas Nichols cited a few biblical passages where formalized instruction in singing is implied. He includes, once again, some of St. Paul's directives to the earliest Christian communities:

But whether the scripture hath left us destitute of any rule for singing, is what now comes under consideration. For a just decision of this matter observe, that, under the law-dispensation, when the ark was brought from the house of Obed-edom, Obananiah, chief of the Levites, instructed about the song, because he was skilful, 1 Chronicles xv, 22. By this it appears, that they had some rule for singing, otherwise skilful instruction would have been useless. Again, when the foundation of the temple was laid, they praised the Lord; and they sung together by course, &c. Ezra iii, 11.

And in the gospel day, we have the example of Paul, to sing with the spirit & with the understanding also, 1 Cor. xiv, 15—*“Therefore, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”* Col. iii, 16.³⁵

The same biblical passages were used to support seminary training for clergy, as churches looked for a more learned approach to many aspects of worship. Paul's mention of “teaching and admonishing” was interpreted as a direction to impart not only the meaning of various types of poetic texts but also the *means* of performing them. According to

³⁴ Samuel-John Mills, “The Nature and Importance of the Duty of Singing Praise to God, Considered” (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775), 5-6. Delivered at Litchfield, CT, on March 22, 1775, “occasioned by a public meeting of the singers in that place and publish'd at their desire.” Mills was pastor of a Church in Torrington, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

³⁵ Thomas Nichols, *Hymns and Anthems: Composed on Divine Subjects, Agreeable to Sacred Scripture* (Albany, NY: Charles R. and George Webster, 1793), ii-iii. The passage from Corinthians can also be found in Hedge, “The duty and manner of singing,” 16, and on the title page of John Todd, “An Humble Attempt towards the Improvement of Psalmody: The Propriety, Necessity and Use, of Evangelical Psalms, in Christian Worship” (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1763). Accessed via *EAI*.

advocates of regular singing, learning *how* to sing, as well as *what*, ensured a more complete understanding of the religious message and a greater offering of praise to God. This method called for a fuller engagement of the mind in the act of worship. According to this interpretation of Paul, eighteenth-century Americans were required to receive instruction in singing, just as the early Christians had done.

The quest for musical literacy accompanied a parallel movement for general literacy, especially for the purpose of reading the Bible. With the Great Awakening's emphasis on the individual, each believer became accountable for developing a faithful Christian lifestyle and a relationship with God. As this responsibility shifted from the clergy to individuals, the ability for all persons to be able to read and understand scripture became more important. Before they were supplanted by grammar texts in the early nineteenth century, Bibles were generally the primary texts used by school children for learning to read, and literacy was therefore directly associated with the ability to read scripture.³⁶ This use of the Bible as a reading primer was likely due to its accessibility to most segments of the New England population, but also because of the tangential benefits of the lessons in the text itself. Pupils learned not only about syllables, sentences, subjects, and verbs; they also absorbed the Christian morality present in the passages they read. In a similar way, musical literacy granted the pupil access to the lessons found in the texts of psalmody. To read the words was not enough; music added depth to their meaning. The conviction that all people should be able to not only read the Bible but understand it and apply its lessons probably also undergirded the pursuit of musical

³⁶ Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 118.

literacy. Like Bibles, sacred tunebooks offered the tools for learning a skill as well as the opportunity for moral development through their content.

This desire for religious formation through sacred song, a brewing distaste for rote singing, and the further development of printing presses in New England fueled a dramatic increase in the printed repertory of psalmody in the 1760s and 1770s. Of course, the mere availability of more tunebooks did not make the people in New England towns more musically literate. The singing school filled this gap, helping to translate the newly-printed material into actual changes in the practice of psalmody. American editions of Tans'ur's musical-theoretical works appeared in 1767, and this formed the basis of singing-school lessons and the instructional materials printed in the introductory sections of tunebooks.

Singing schools not only helped to correct the shortcomings of early American educational institutions and meet the religious and aesthetic needs of churches. They also had important social functions. Singing was thought to be an excellent source of entertainment. As such, singing-school sessions were important events in the life of the community. Especially in smaller towns, where itinerant singing-school masters from hubs like Boston might visit only once or twice a year, the singing-school classes were highly publicized events that were not to be missed. Like Sunday morning worship, the singing school was attended by all who were able-bodied and who wished to be considered part of the community. In a historical account of his hometown of Woodstock, Vermont, Henry Swan Dana recalls, "Good singing was esteemed as a main source of enjoyment, and furthermore an indispensable part of church worship ... Everybody went

to the singing-school.”³⁷ The singing-school meetings offered an opportunity for young and old alike to gather, mingle, and catch up on community gossip.

However, it should be remembered that these classes were not mere entertainment; their educational and religious purposes always lay at the forefront. It was hoped that those who came for sheer enjoyment and to be seen by their fellow citizens might benefit spiritually and intellectually as well, even if those benefits were unintentional. Andrew Adgate, a tunebook compiler and singing-school instructor in Philadelphia, named a number of salutary side effects:

[Singing] is not only in itself delightful and profitable, but it gives animation to the other parts of public worship. It relieves the attention, recruits the exhausted spirits, and begets a happy composure and tranquility. It is peculiarly agreeable as a social act, and that in which every person may be employed. Nor is it the least of its benefits, that it associates pleasing ideas with divine worship, and makes us *glad when we go into the house of the Lord*. It is also a bond of union in religious societies, promotes the regular attendance of their members, and seldom fails of adding to their numbers. The early Christians found their account in a remarkable attachment to psalmody, and almost every rising sect have availed themselves of its important delights and advantages.

Adgate goes on to summarize his belief in the tangential benefits that come to all who attend singing school: “They who come to sing may learn to pray ... they whose only wish was to be entertained may find themselves instructed and improved.”³⁸ Even if they were unaware of it, singing-school attendees were nonetheless being formed mentally and spiritually.

On the surface, it may seem odd that colonists focused so much on the singing voice and on an institution geared specifically towards instruction in singing, an arguably

³⁷ Henry Swan Dana, *History of Woodstock, Vermont* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1889), 221.

³⁸ Andrew Adgate, *Select Psalms and Hymns for the Use of Mr. Adgate's Pupils: and Proper for All Singing-Schools* (Philadelphia: Uranian Press by Young and M'Culloch, 1787), 10-11.

unnecessary skill in the subsistence economy of colonial New England. That these early public educational institutions, among the first for the general population, became staples of New England society, demonstrates that singing instruction was indeed critical and touched on other vital aspects of everyday life. The popularity of the singing schools for both adults and children sheds light on the perceived necessity of such institutions. For a young country that lacked many formalized musical institutions, the relationships between music teachers and patrons and students were vital to the growth of a musical culture in America. Singing schools were at times progressive institutions, reforming and improving congregational singing in places where rote singing or the “usual way” was believed to be threatening the quality of worship. They educated and helped to form the conscience based on religious beliefs. Singing schools served a social function, uniting people from different walks of life and providing a structured environment for youth to mingle. They even contributed to the economic life of the New England town, providing the supporting income for many of America’s earliest composers. That these quasi-religious, quasi-disciplinary musical institutions were centered on singing confirms the importance of that activity in the life of the community.

Tunebooks and Theory Treatises

The pedagogical function of the singing school brought forth a certain type of musical composition aimed at reinforcing musical skills, facilitating sight-singing, and stressing the moral and religious meaning of the text. Sacred tunebooks, because of their usefulness and versatility in many contexts—the singing school, public worship, and the home—appealed to a broad segment of the population; several collections were widely

popular and enjoyed numerous reprintings. Most composers in late eighteenth-century New England were deeply connected to the churches and singing schools and dependent on them for their artistic livelihood. It is no surprise, then, that they wrote for the performing forces most readily available to them—i.e., singing-school students and church congregations.

Before Americans were composing their own sacred songs and compiling their own tunebooks, they relied on a number of popular English theory treatises and tune collections for their musical instruction, private devotion, and public worship. For the various religious, political, and personal reasons that the first English-speaking settlers came to America, they brought little with them across the ocean. Thus, the items that they did bring were probably objects of great personal or cultural importance. Sacred song was certainly a vehicle for expressing important religious beliefs, and, in the form of psalters and hymn-books, it was a relatively portable cultural marker. While the late eighteenth century brought waves of new sacred vocal compositions in America, these did not arise out of a cultural vacuum. Since the mid-seventeenth century, collections of psalms and hymns, most having been printed in England, were circulating throughout the colonies. The main psalters were those by Ainsworth, Day, Hopkins, Este, Tate & Brady, Ravenscroft, and Playford, as well as the Bay Psalm Book.³⁹ Because of the characteristic absence of music in these early tunebooks and the strength of the rote method of learning tunes, the earliest settlers probably had a very limited repertory of sacred song.

Around mid-century, the marketing, structure, and content of tunebooks shifted to reflect the greater emphasis on teaching and learning brought about by the singing-school

³⁹ Hamilton C. MacDougall, *Early New England Psalmody: An Historical Appreciation, 1620-1820* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 25-26.

movement. William Billings's *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1778), for example, was clearly arranged to function as a singing-school textbook, moving progressively from simple to more complex pieces.

One marked change in the content of tunebooks is the appearance of anthems and other longer pieces in most collections printed after 1780. As the ranks of skilled singers grew, songs which demanded more musical literacy, such as fusing tunes, anthems, and odes, became commonplace additions to the sacred tunebook. The distinguishing characteristic of a fusing tune is imitative counterpoint and staggered entrances of the voices. Whole tunes were occasionally composed in this texture, but more commonly, longer pieces would feature short sections in the style of the fusing tune. Other than a loose association with imitation amongst voice parts, the fusing tune had little relationship to the European fugue. Strict rules about counterpoint, "real" and "tonal" answers, and the like, were completely foreign to the American fusing tune. Nonetheless, the similar names invited confusion and unfavorable comparisons, especially from American music historians throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Disparaging critique of the fusing tune was popular in the 1800s, as the field American cultural history was taking shape. John Hubbard, for example, attacked the fusing tune for its obfuscation of text in an address to the Middlesex Musical Society in 1807. See Hubbard, "An Essay on Music, Pronounced before the Middlesex Musical Society, Sept. 9, 1807" (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1808), 17-19. In *Early New England Psalmody*, Hamilton MacDougall considered the fusing tune as a poor replica of the European fugue: "The 'fuguing tune' as written by the New England composers in William Billings's day was only a pitiful imitation of that part of the fugue known as the 'exposition'" (95). MacDougall's incorrect spelling of the American genre indicates the degree to which it was falsely conflated with the European fugue. Irving Lowens's study, "The Origins of the American Fusing Tune," (*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 6 (1953): 43-52) was something of a turning point in attitudes toward the fusing tune, as Lowens took a less comparative approach to the genre and contextualized its development in America. More recent studies explore the variety of stylistic approaches to the fusing tune. For example, see Maxine Fawcett-Yeske, "Stylistic Development in the Fusing Tunes of William Billings," *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* (1996, special issue for the 250th anniversary of the birth of William Billings): 32-46.

Anthems were less directly related to any type of European art music, and so were not as harshly criticized. Anthems adapted the texture and harmonic idiom of psalmody to longer and more prosaic texts. Their texts may or may not have been based on the psalms; often, they adapted other parts of scripture or featured newly-written sacred texts by the composer or someone else. Ralph T. Daniel gives four defining features of the eighteenth century anthem in America: (1) a through-composed setting; (2) freer treatment of the text; (3) variety of texture; and (4) a level of difficulty that requires some training and rehearsal.⁴¹ Odes shared the same musical features as anthems, but their texts were almost always non-scriptural and tended to focus on a specific subject, such as nature, art, or an important occasion, such as a military victory, political event, or holiday. These ode texts were usually only loosely sacred, or at least less obviously sacred than anthem texts; they more frequently included adaptations of contemporary poets. What fusing tunes, anthems, and odes all had in common is that they were more technically difficult than the standard, mostly homophonic, squarely-phrased psalm tunes that had circulated in tunebooks for decades. Composers considered these “set pieces” (an umbrella term for these longer and more technically challenging *a cappella* works) to be a greater accomplishment because of their length and difficulty. While they eventually became displays of the composer’s skill, the original purpose of set pieces was to fill a gap in a sociomusical environment where more accomplished, singing-school-trained singers needed more challenging works to perform. Groups of singing-school alumni that might be termed choirs performed these more challenging works.

⁴¹ Wallace McKenzie, “Anthems of the Sacred Harp Tunesmiths,” *American Music* 6.3 (1988): 249.

A few anthems from this period were explicitly didactic, offering specific musical challenges to groups of more advanced singers. Billings's "Modern Musick" from *The Psalm-Singer's Amusement* (1781), for example, is a longer anthem that takes singing about singing to a new level. Its text, written by Billings himself, is basically a tutorial on how to use and to contrast the many shades of the human voice through musical features and techniques such as melodic shape, texture, tempo, time, and mode. Within this instruction is another description of the different characters of the voice parts in the choir. Of special interest is Billings's illustration of the different "moods" or time signatures and how they should be used for the best effect.

We are met for a concert of modern invention;
 To tickle the ear is our present intention.
 The audience are seated
 Expecting to be treated
 With a piece of the best,
 With a piece of the best.
And since we all agree
To set the tune on E,
 The author's darling key
 He prefers to the rest,

Pitching

Bass: Let the bass take the lead
And firmly proceed,
Till the parts are agreed
Tenor: Let the tenor succeed
And follow the lead,
Till the parts are agreed
Counter: Let the counter inspire
The rest of the choir,
Inflam'd with desire
Treble: Let the treble in the rear
No longer forbear,
But expressly declare
All: To fuge away.

Voice parts

*Then change to brisker time
And up the ladder climb
And down again;
Then mount the second time
And end the strain.*

Quick time “mood” (meter)

*Then change the key to pensive tones and slow
In treble time; the notes exceeding low
Keep down a while, then rise by slow degrees;
The process surely will not fail to please.*

Slow time “mood” (meter)

*Thro’ common and treble we jointly have run;
We’ll give you their essence compounded in one.
Altho’ we are strongly attach’d to the rest,
Six-four is the movement that pleases the best.*

Compound meter

*And now we address you as friends to the cause;
Performers are modest and write their own laws.
Altho’ we are sanguine and clap at the bars,
‘Tis the part of the hearers to clap their applause.*

Another depiction of musical performance appears in Elias Mann’s “Ode on Musick.”

Here, Alexander Pope’s poetry describes a musical rise and fall while, presumably, the singers perform an accompanying crescendo and decrescendo:

*Hark! The numbers soft and clear,
Gently steal upon the ear;
Now louder and yet louder rise,
And fill with spreading sounds the skies;*

Crescendo

*Exulting in triumph now swell the bold notes,
In broken air trembling, the wild musick floats;
‘Till by degrees remote and small,
The strains decay and melt away,
In a dying, dying fall.*

Decrescendo

While such novelty set pieces were not found in every tunebook, their occasional presence displays a lighthearted attitude and a special appreciation for the compositional and performance possibilities of sacred vocal music. One can clearly imagine how these pieces might be used in singing schools to instruct pupils in musical techniques in a fun

and challenging way. Set pieces of increasing difficulty and with unique subject matter set American tunebooks apart from the older, English ones that had been circulating for decades. They represent an absorption and expansion of those influences.

Along with psalters and hymn-books, colonists also read theoretical treatises. The number of practical guides to music theory in circulation in New England since the very first settlements suggests a high value placed on learning about music. The works of William Tans'ur, an English psalmodist and theorist whose publications were widely known and appreciated, probably laid the groundwork for the understanding of music theory in late eighteenth-century New England.⁴² The introductory materials in Tans'ur's very popular *The Royal Melody Complete* and the later "Introduction to Practical Music" in *Compleat Harmony* (1736) were the main theoretical materials for many early American composers. Other musical-theoretical works that colonial composers may have been exposed to included Christopher Simpson's *Compendium or Introduction to Practical Music* (1669) and John Playford's *An Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (London, 1674).⁴³

It is difficult to assess the impact of such theoretical works on both American composition and on the learning and performing of sacred song in the American context. While these materials about how to compose and read music were certainly available, it is not known what function they served. It seems that there are two main ways in which English musical-theoretical writings affected the American sacred music scene. First,

⁴² McKay and Crawford, *William Billings*, 47-48.

⁴³ Daniel Taddie, "Solmization, Scale, and Key in Nineteenth-Century Four-Shape Tunebooks: Theory and Practice," *American Music* 14 (1996): 43. Nicholas Temperley traces the descent of American psalmody from English country psalmody in *The Music of the English Parish Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 190-203. Similarities in style can be partially attributed to common treatises and collections such as these.

they set the trend for the content of tunebooks throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. American tunebooks functioned both as collections of tunes and as instructional manuals. As more of them contained printed music, sections at the beginning containing information about how to read music and sing properly became nearly ubiquitous. These introductory “rudiments” sections instructed the user in basic music theory and literacy. In some cases, the “rudiments” section of the tunebook comprised a greater number of pages than the tunes themselves. These books were more like instruction manuals, with psalm tunes appended as exercises for practicing the rules learnt in the main part of the text.⁴⁴ Practically speaking, these instructions seemed more attuned to musical novices than the more formal English treatises, but their presence affirms the value of having theoretical materials alongside actual music for the purposes of teaching and quick reference for the user. American compilers did not, apparently, design these sections on their own. Rather, they copied them, more or less, from other collections. As a result, the internal structure of the “rudiments” sections was remarkably consistent from tunebook to tunebook, revealing the strong influence of English theory treatises. Sections covering the following topics were usually included:

- Clefs
- Scale or gamut
- Duration of notes and rests
- Other characters used in music (e.g. flats, sharps, repeat signs, slurs, ties)
- Time signatures (“moods”)
- Key signatures
- Consonance and dissonance (“concorde” and “discord”)
- Vocal ornaments, such as optional (“chusing”) notes, trills (“shakes”), grace notes (“graces”), improvised passing tones (“transitions”), appoggiaturas (“leading notes”)
- Syncopation

⁴⁴ See, for example, Andrew Law, *The Musical Primer; or The First Part of The Art of Singing*, 2nd ed. (Cheshire, CT: William Law, 1794).

While the tunebooks with sections on musical rudiments as well as psalm tunes and anthems for singing served as the main materials for singing-school teachers and attendees, occasionally other publications sought to contribute to this system of musical education. Although the methods for music-reading presented in tunebooks were widely standard, some creative authors proposed alternate methods. Advertisements for the tunebooks published by Samuel Gerrish, for example, boasted a singing method using letters instead of notes, addressed to common folk— “children, or people of the meanest capacities.”⁴⁵ Benjamin Dearborn sought to simplify the process with a different notation system altogether that did not use staves. His ideas, set forth in *A Scheme, for Reducing the Science of Music to a More Simple State* (1785), suggested two main benefits of such a system. First, it would be more amenable to learners who had no experience with traditional musical notation. Second, it would be a boon to music printers, who would not have to bother with the tedious process of printing staves and other special musical characters.⁴⁶ While Gerrish’s and Dearborn’s systems and others like them never entered the mainstream of New England singing society, their presence indicates a fascination with singing instruction that sparked pioneering ideas on the subject.

A second effect of English theoretical treatises on American psalmody was a keen awareness of the “rules” associated with musical composition. Music, especially song, was governed by a number of guidelines about genre, voice leading, meter, text setting, harmony, melodic curve, and almost anything else imaginable that ensured good

⁴⁵ Advertisement reprinted in Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: Norton, 1964), 44.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Dearborn, *A Scheme, for Reducing the Science of Music to a More Simple State, and to Bring All Its Characters within the Compass of a Common Fount of Printing-Types; Especially Calculated for the Convenience of Learners* (Portsmouth, NH: Dearborn, 1785). Accessed via EAI.

aesthetics, technical facility, and smooth performance. American composers of the late eighteenth century went on to follow such guidelines to varying degrees, but their reactions show an acute sensitivity to this system of rules. William Billings, for one, explicitly acknowledged this compositional environment by not so much denouncing the “rules” but proclaiming an independence from them. In the introduction to *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), the first of his six tunebooks and the first entirely by an American composer, Billings declared that a flexible approach to the rules was best and that each individual composer had to draw inspiration from nature:

Nature is the best Dictator, for all the hard dry studied Rules that ever was prescribed, will not enable any Person to form an Air any more than the bare Knowledge of the four and twenty Letters, and strict Grammatical Rules will qualify a Scholar for composing a Piece of Poetry, or properly adjusting a Tragedy, without a Genius. ... I don't think myself confin'd to any Rules for Composition laid down by any that went before me. ... I think it is best for every *Composer* to be his own *Carver*.⁴⁷

Some historians dismissed Billings's rhetoric as a defiant example of “sheer Yankee pigheadedness.” Nevertheless, he seemed to put into words the internal struggle of all composers who worked within a framework of compositional norms.⁴⁸ Billings's discussion of the “rules,” especially the relationship between inspired “genius” and strict technique here echoes similar issues for composers from vastly different places and times.

The attitude towards rules for composition expressed by Billings was at least partially due to a belief that the source of music should be more natural and less mechanical or intellectual. Indeed, if theoretical treatises were one source of influence on

⁴⁷ Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 19-20.

⁴⁸ Dorothy D. Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1970), 79.

early American psalmody, nature itself was another (and perhaps more important) one. Again, a connection with larger theological trends is evident. While the intellectual understanding of religion was highly valued, this was balanced by a more spiritual approach that looked to God's creation as a source of revelation. The untamed state of nature represented God's ingenuity and supreme authority. By taking nature as the guide for musical composition, Billings and his like-minded contemporaries injected psalmody with the same inspired originality. A natural approach applied to both the creation of the music (composition) and the interpretation of it (performance). This sentiment can be detected in many of the most popular American tunebooks from the late eighteenth century. The introduction to Timothy Swan's *The Federal Harmony* (1788) takes the usual format, explaining the rudiments of music, the basics of pitch, rhythm, and harmony, and the rules for proper performance. But towards the end of this introductory section, Swan qualifies the material:

Notwithstanding all that has been or can be said [about the rules of music], ... the best way is to sing with ease and freedom, and without confining yourself to any certain rules for practicing musick, any further than can be adapted in a natural and easy manner, there being nothing forced or unnatural in good musick.⁴⁹

For Swan, "good" music was, by definition, natural. By slavishly following the rules, a composer might create a piece that was technically correct, but nonetheless somehow artificial or unnatural and hence, in Swan's opinion at least, bad. Asahel Behham also exhibits a healthy skepticism for a heavy reliance on the intellectual guidance of theory. He juxtaposes art and nature: "Art is a good assistant when it has nature for its guide; but

⁴⁹ Timothy Swan, *The Federal Harmony. In Three Parts* (Boston: John Norman, 1788), 17.

when it takes the lead it runs away with all the music.”⁵⁰ One can easily see the relationship between Benham’s “art,” by which he means the intellectual side of composition and performance, and Swan’s forced unnaturalness, or artifice.

The esteem for naturalness in composition stems largely from the sacred message behind the music. Nature, that is, God’s created order, was nearly always viewed by American Protestant Christians as superior to man-made artifice. The goal of the New England tunebook was not merely to present a selection of the best and most aesthetically pleasing psalm tunes. It was at the same time an artistic object and a practical text with didactic and religious aims. Users could expect not only moral instruction through the texts they sang but also practical advice about how to improve their natural instrument, the voice, and become better readers of printed music.

As such, these tunebooks were indispensable resources for both personal devotion and public instruction in the singing schools; in both cases, they were thought to be necessary parts of one’s instruction in psalmody. The pieces contained therein were often arranged from the easiest to the most challenging, and they sometimes exhibited an etude-like focus on a specific interval, figuration, or textual image. More challenging genres, such as the anthem and the fugal tune, emerged from this sociomusical environment in which the more advanced singers in church choirs or singing schools desired settings with higher difficulty. The balance of these elements determined the musical makeup of the new tunebooks, because their publication success depended on their usefulness as singing-school texts. Thus, sacred tunebooks were characterized by a mixture of artistic, pedagogical, and religious elements for a variety of skill levels.

⁵⁰ Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (New Haven, CT: A. Morse, 1790), 11-12.

The authors of tunebooks reminded their readers of the ability of their collections to assist in achieving these important educational and formational goals. Daniel Read, for example, prefaces *The American Singing Book* (1785) with a reminder of the duty of proper singing and a further endorsement of the singing school and its necessity in a society that hoped to realize the goal of a more learned art. Read claimed that his tunebook was a functional text that facilitated learning the rules of music both on an individual basis and through the public venue of the singing school:

Scripture also informs us, that all the Duties of the Christian Church should be performed with Decency and in Order; and Singing being an important Part of Divine Worship, claims particular Attention and ought to be conducted with great Propriety. This, however, will be impracticable, unless the Rules of Psalmody are well understood, and closely adhered to. Hence the Necessity of Schools for the Instruction of Children and Youth, in this pleasing Art, and hence I have been induced to publish the Contents of the following Sheets, wherein I have endeavoured to lay down the Rules of Psalmody, in as plain and familiar a Manner as possible.⁵¹

Later, Read criticized those who felt they could get by without a proper understanding of the rules of singing. By foregoing instruction, he claimed, one can only gain a very superficial understanding of the art. Like Billings before him, Read compares music and literature to this end:

It is as inconsistent for one to attempt singing any tune, till acquainted with the rules, as for a child ignorant of the alphabet to think of reading the bible with propriety. Some, I am sensible, who are unacquainted with the rules, have, by hearing others, learnt to sing a tune nearly right; so a child unable to read a single word may by observation joined with a strong memory, repeat several pages from an author; but as the latter cannot justly be called a reader; so neither can the former claim the title of a singer.⁵²

⁵¹ Daniel Read, *The American Singing Book; or A New and Easy Guide to the Art of Psalmody* (New Haven, CT: Daniel Read, 1785), preface 1.

⁵² Read, *The American Singing Book*, 23.

Composers and tunebook compilers were aided in this effort to promote their publications and the singing schools by New England preachers. As the voices of religious authority, preachers emphasized the solemn duty to learn how to sing well and encouraged their congregants to devote time and energy to this exercise. William Symmes, pastor of the First Church in Andover, Massachusetts, urged that “proper care should be taken to tune and modulate the voice, as well as to understand the rules of this divine art.”⁵³ Instruction in singing, it seemed, could benefit learners of all skill levels. Ezra Weld spoke particularly about those believers who were rather poor singers and who claimed to not have the capacity to learn or improve. To these, he advised that even “a small proportion of time, dedicated to the purpose of instruction, would furnish ability.”⁵⁴ Preachers also supported the outlay of funds to provide this instruction. Samuel Blair, a Pennsylvania-born Presbyterian minister who pastored congregations in Boston from 1766 to 1769, gave a discourse in psalmody in which he indicated the necessity of monetary support for singing schools: “It is our bounden duty at least, to aim at the most perfect execution; and, at the same time, to make decent sacrifices of time and expence in laying such a foundation of knowledge in the art, as shall enable us both to please and profit on every proper occasion.”⁵⁵

The call for money to acquire facilities and instructors for singing schools was answered not only by the weekly offerings of congregants but occasionally by authors and composers as well. A few collections of sacred song were seemingly published for

⁵³ Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing,” 12.

⁵⁴ Weld, “A Sermon,” 19.

⁵⁵ Samuel Blair, “A Discourse on Psalmody” (Philadelphia: John M’Culloch, 1789), 26. Delivered at a public concert given by Mr. Spicer, master in sacred music, under the superintendency of the Rev. Mr. Erwin. Blair was pastor of a Presbyterian Church in Neshaminy, PA. Accessed via *EAI*.

the explicit purpose of fundraising for singing-school ventures. *Hymns on Various Subjects* (1793) was such a publication, offered by Andrew Fowler, rector of St. Peter's Church in Cortland, New York. Fowler wrote the text to thirty-six new hymns in standard metrical poetry so that they might be paired with any number of existing tunes. As a supporter of a new singing school in the area, he vowed to put the proceeds of his publication toward the building project: "For having prevailed upon the trustees of my own church, to erect a building for the purpose of a Free-School, I found myself obliged to take every honest method I could, to raise a fund for the support of the same."⁵⁶ The number of subscribers listed at the back of Fowler's collection indicates that the fundraising project was fairly successful. With this level of support from the clergy, tunebooks flourished, singing schools attracted many pupils, and New England congregations recognized the importance of learning to sing properly.

"Furniture for the Minds of Children"

The advantages brought about by instruction in singing were thought to have particular value for the youth of New England society. Not only were their fresh minds more receptive to the learning of a new skill; they were especially in need of practicing virtuous activities like singing. The youth were notorious, as they are in most societies, for occasional unholy behavior involving sins of the flesh and general idleness of mind and body. According to compilers, singing-school masters, and religious leaders alike, the impressionable youth were in the direst need of instruction in psalmody. The act of singing, they argued, would engage their minds and make them more receptive to

⁵⁶ Andrew Fowler, *Hymns on Various Subjects* (New York: John Harrisson, 1793), iv. Fowler was rector of St. Peter's Church in Cortland, NY and St. Philip's Chapel in Philip, NY.

religious truths, while at the same time satisfying their desire for pleasurable activity. Two of Isaac Watts's hymn collections, designed specifically for the instruction of children—*Divine and Moral Songs for Children* and *Divine Songs, Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (both first published in 1715)—enjoyed widespread popularity and numerous reprintings throughout the Northeast.⁵⁷ These two works outlined the main educational and moral benefits of teaching young people to sing and laid the groundwork for thought on this subject in colonial New England. Both contained the same prefatory material. Therein, Watts spoke of sacred song as “furniture for the minds of children.” Like furniture, the songs were at the same time decorative, functional, and downright necessary for everyday living. The minds of children were akin to rooms in which objects could be arranged.⁵⁸ The furniture metaphor emphasized the importance of song as a solid presence in the mind; it took up space that might be otherwise filled with frivolous things, and it grounded the individual, giving him or her something concrete to dwell on when left alone.

With his opening lines, Watts indicated the seriousness of the endeavor at hand, addressing “all that are concerned in the Education of Children”:

It is an awful and important Charge that is committed to you. The Wisdom and Welfare of the succeeding Generation are intrusted with you beforehand, and depend much on your Conduct. The Seeds of Misery or Happiness in this World, and that to come, are oftentimes sown very early, and therefore whatever may conduce to give the Minds of Children a

⁵⁷ A number of hymnals like these, designed specifically for children, circulated in early America. See, for example, Christopher Smart, *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (Philadelphia: William Spotswood, 1791), and *The Village Harmony, or Youth's Assistant to Sacred Musick* (Exeter, NH: Henry Ranlet, 1796). All accessible via EAI.

⁵⁸ Watts's metaphor is similar to those found in St. Teresa of Avila's mystical writing, *El Castillo Interior* (The Interior Castle, 1577), which describes “rooms” of the soul.

Relish of Virtue and Religion, ought in the first Place to be proposed to you.⁵⁹

He asserted that the development of future generations lay in the hands of the adults who teach and mold them. Watts then supported the use of sacred verse to achieve this end with examples from scripture:

Verse was at first design'd for the Service of God, tho' it hath been wretchedly abused since. The Ancients among the *Jews* and the *Heathens* taught their Children and Disciples the Precepts of Morality and Worship in Verse. The Children of *Israel* were commanded to learn the Words of the Song of *Moses*, *Deut. 31: 19-20*. And we are directed in the New Testament, not only to sing with Grace in the Heart, but to *teach and admonish one another by Hymns and Songs*, Eph. V. 19.⁶⁰

Having argued for the duty to instruct children in singing as was done in the days of Moses and Paul, Watts outlined four main advantages that sacred songs, like those found in the present collection, would have for children. These four points were absorbed into the rhetoric of late eighteenth-century American composers, compilers, and religious leaders, who, decades later, also sought to promote the improvement of young people through tunebooks and singing schools.

Watts first claimed that children would find singing pleasurable; the activity was, in a sense, its own reward. Through the process of learning music and memorizing sacred songs, children could fulfill their desire for fun and leisure in a wholesome way. His first advantage states,

1. There is a greater Delight in the very learning of Truths and Duties this Way. There is something amusing and entertaining in Rhymes and Metre, that will incline Children to make this Part of their Business of Diversion: And you may turn their very Duty into a Reward, by giving them the

⁵⁹ Isaac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1773), I; Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*, 7th ed. (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green for D. Henchman, 1730), i.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs*, ii; Watts, *Divine Songs*, i-ii.

Privilege of learning one of these Songs every Week, if they fulfil the Business of the Week well, and promising them the Book itself, when they have learnt ten or twenty Songs out of it.⁶¹

That youth, in particular, might find singing enjoyable was certainly a strong selling point for any tunebook. The combination of religious texts and pleasing melodies would be attractive, one might imagine, to teachers and parents hoping to both entertain and educate their children. The connection between singing and a general state of contentment was a compelling reason for parents to make sure their children obtained musical literacy. Daniel Bayley prefaced his mostly instructional manual, *A New and Complete Introduction to the Grounds and Rules of Music* (1764), with a reminder of this relationship: “Happy the youth who has a bright and harmonious constitution, with a pious turn of soul, a *cheerful spirit*, and a relish of sacred melody!”⁶² Similar words open Solomon Howe’s *Worshipper’s Assistant* (1799, preface by Elias Mann), urging the reader not to miss the prime opportunity to properly educate and socialize the young while at the same time glorifying God: “Should we attend with care, we may easily see the *vast* advantage our youth might make in those arts which capacitate the mind for the social enjoyments, which by good improvement, are harmony to God and happifying to men.” Mann goes on to argue that it is downright neglectful to deny one’s children of such a fruitful and enjoyable activity: “As a rational service required by God, and pleasant to every generous and social mind; it would be highly criminal in us to leave our offspring destitute of that knowledge which God commends and every wise man loves.”⁶³

⁶¹ Watts’s four points are found in his *Divine and Moral Songs*, ii; and *Divine Songs*, ii.

⁶² Daniel Bayley, *A New and Complete Introduction to the Grounds and Rules of Music* (Newburyport, CT: Daniel Bayley, 1764), iv.

⁶³ Solomon Howe, *Worshipper’s Assistant* (Northampton, MA: Andrew Wright, 1799). From the preface by Elias Mann, dated 14 February, 1799.

Preachers endorsed singing as a beneficial activity for children of all ages. In fact, many believed that even infants were receptive to sacred song and encouraged early and frequent exposure. The Reverend Samuel Blair pointed to the Moravian communities of Eastern Pennsylvania as examples of early introduction to the pleasures of singing, both at home and in the setting of public worship:

I cannot help observing, that, the society of Moravians have discovered a singular attention to the operations of nature in the infant state. They seem to consider it as a point of religion, not only to entertain them in nurseries with soft and blandishing strains of voice, but to carry them daily into their houses of worship, that, there, their little tender frames may be harmonized into sweetness and peace.⁶⁴

The emphasis on early exposure was echoed by the Reverend John Black, a Presbyterian. Black was so convinced of the necessity of singing schools and instruction in psalmody that he rated it as important as learning how to read:

Let us, therefore, cultivate church music ourselves, and promote the cultivation of it in our children. The earlier in life any one begins, the greater progress he will make; and hence, those societies are certainly to be commended, who make it a part of school education, and have their children trained to sing, at the same time they are taught to read.⁶⁵

When children were instructed in psalmody at a very young age, he argued, they were given a greater opportunity to excel at that art, and their minds were vastly improved in the process.

For older children, singing was a fun, social activity preferable to all others because it instilled morals and a habit of reverence in the process. Sacred song, as the Reverend Jonas Clark of Lexington, Massachusetts, argued, was an appropriate diversion for both boys and girls: “It is, most certainly, a laudable ambition, in all, but especially in

⁶⁴ Blair, “A Discourse on Psalmody,” 29.

⁶⁵ Black, “The Duty of Christians in Singing,” 20.

youth, of both sexes, to strive to excell in a study so pleasant, in an art so profitable, and in that, which, by divine grace, may qualify them to glorify God.”⁶⁶ Ezra Weld also encouraged the youth to seek pleasure through sacred song, because in so doing, they might replace and render unnecessary their less Godly pleasure-seeking pursuits:

To improve the hours of leisure, in modulating the voice to the proportions of musick, and practising in the arts of singing, are exercises, full of entertainment, and soon become much preferable to those vulgar sports, and pastimes, by which in numerous instances, the flower of life is miserably wasted, and a foundation laid for future contempt and wretchedness.⁶⁷

The “contempt and wretchedness” that Weld portended was also a concern for Watts. In his second point, Watts claimed that sacred verse engaged the mind in such a way as to keep the temptation of sinful thoughts at bay. The poetic language of song, he argued, aided in the memorization of sacred words. Songs essentially filled up the mind with holiness, leaving little room for anything else:

2. What is learnt in Verse is longer retain’d in Memory, and sooner recollected. The like Sounds and the like Number of Syllables exceedingly assist the Remembrance. And it may often happen, that the End of a Song running in the Mind, may be an effectual Means to keep off some Temptation, or to incline to some Duty, when a Word of Scripture is not upon the Thoughts.

The use of verse as a memorization device was commonly recognized and employed in the eighteenth century.⁶⁸ The application to religious teaching was especially emphasized.

⁶⁶ Clark, “The Use and Excellency of Vocal Music,” 33-34.

⁶⁷ Weld, “A Sermon,” 25.

⁶⁸ These attitudes toward sacred song as it was applied to the education of children anticipated much later research on the connection between intelligence and instruction in music. Beyond its ability to enhance memorization, modern specialists in music education recognize a number of similar ways in which exposure to music improves the minds of young children. Positive effects have been noted in the areas of mathematical and special reasoning, emotional intelligence, social skills, and reading comprehensions. Proponents of Kindermusik, a international early childhood education program begun in Germany in 1960s and brought to the United States in the 1970s that combines listening, music-making, and dancing for 0- to 7-year-olds, argue that music has behavioral benefits as well. For a summary of this research, see Eric

Ebenezer Dayton concurred with Watts's assessment, publishing a book of religious doctrines in the form of poetry "to promote godliness and increase religious observance, amongst youth, in a special manner." Dayton explained his choice to use poetry, stating that "truths in verse are easier learned by heart than in prose, and as much easier, and longer retained in memory."⁶⁹ The addition of tunes to the poetic language further deepened the imprint on the mind. It was hoped that children would not merely remember the words they had sung but also absorb their meaning. Ichabod Skinner, a preacher from North Bolton, Connecticut, discussed song's ability to prepare impressionable minds to understand religious truths:

The general effect of music on the mind, is to soothe and harmonize the affections, and thus to prepare it for moral influence, and even for the reception of truth itself. Particularly on young and tender minds, nothing has a more happy influence; it prepares the way for attention.⁷⁰

Singing schools seemed the perfect place for children to practice this attention to Christian morality through the structure of poetry and music. Part of Watts's version of Psalm 95 was a popular text in American tunebooks because it presented a pithy summary of the form and function of psalmody:

Come let our voices join to raise
A sacred song of solemn praise.
God is a sov'reign King; rehearse
His honour in exalted verse.

Jensen, *Arts with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 21-35.

⁶⁹ Ebenezer Dayton, *A Concise, Poetical Body of Divinity* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1769), iii. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁷⁰ Ichabod L. Skinner, "A Discourse on Music" (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 9-10. Accessed via *EAI*.

This text about the act of singing “exalted verse” confirmed the importance of poetic translations of religious texts and the singing schools and tunebooks that allowed for continual rehearsal of praise through poetry and song. It is no surprise that Oliver Brownson set this text and placed it on the first page of his own compilation, *Select Harmony* (1783). Combined with the message of the text, its simple melody and phrase structure (Example 4.3) make it an ideal tunebook opener:

Example 4.3: Oliver Brownson, “Ninety-Fifth Psalm Tune,” *Select Harmony* (1783)



By using the tools of meter, rhyme, and melody to both instruct and praise, composers, compilers, and singing-school teachers offered children a way to practice a pleasing art and the principles of Christian morality at the same time.

Thirdly, Watts employed the furniture metaphor to argue that sacred song gave children an advantage by providing foundational words and melodies to think about while alone. Again, he presupposed that without something to occupy their attention, youth would turn to troublesome or sinful activities.

3. *This* will be a constant Furniture for the Minds of Children, that they may have something to think upon when alone, and sing over to themselves. This may sometimes give their Thoughts a divine Turn, and raise a young Meditation. Thus they will not be forced to seek Relief for an Emptiness of Mind out of the loose and dangerous Sonnets of the Age.

The rejection of secular song, the “loose and dangerous sonnets of the age,” was also present in Watts’s poetry and became a theme in some American tunes, like Billings’s “Norfolk” (Example 4.4):

Let the old heathen tune their song,
Of great Diana and of Jove,
But the sweet theme that moves my tongue,
Is the Redeemer and his love.

Example 4.4: William Billings, “Norfolk,” *The Continental Harmony* (1794)

Norfolk. Words by Dr. Watts.

Let the old heathen tune their song, Of great Diana and of Jove, But the sweet theme that moves my tongue, Is the Redeemer and his love, But the sweet theme that moves my tongue, Is the Redeemer and his love.

Eighteenth-century preachers were keen to enumerate the many sins that would be prevented by turning the youth away from “heathen” songs and instead engaging them with sacred song. By singing religious texts, their minds might be profitably exercised instead of sitting idle and rife for temptation. Zabdiel Adams spoke on these benefits of musical instruction in 1771:

How much better is it for youth to spend their leisure hours in learning so pleasant and profitable an art, than to pass them, as is too often done, “in

rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness,” to the disgrace of human nature, the destruction of their characters and estates, their health, and their souls.⁷¹

The Reverend John Mellen’s discourse on sacred song, delivered in Marlborough, Massachusetts, in 1773, reiterates this argument and justifies the singing school as an institution to help the young achieve these positive effects:

Pleasant it is to see so many accomplished for this business [of teaching psalmody], on the one hand, and so many disposed to receive instruction, and industrious to learn, on the other. To how much better purpose is time spent in this way, than many others, to which young people, especially, are often addicted and inclined? How much vice and mispence of time in mere vanity, may be prevented by it?⁷²

Like Mellen, Samuel Blair had clearly witnessed a fair amount of misbehavior and idleness in his dealings with youth. He looked to education in psalm singing as a means of maturing their speech and actions and turning their hearts and minds toward Christ:

I would also beg leave recommend it, as an useful and elegant branch of Christian education. To the youth of both sexes it is alike ornamental and expedient. ... Their occasional interviews, moreover, instead of being dissipated in frivolous frolic and chit-chat, or poisoned with frothy ebullitions of wit and impurity, may be seasoned with such innocent and instructive amusement, as, alone, shall captivate the heart, prompt it to moral reflection, and charm it into habits of sweetness and wisdom.⁷³

With so many potential distractions for the youth, singing was viewed as a welcome and wholesome alternative.

Composers, who were often employed as singing-school instructors, also emphasized the educational benefits of psalmody. Oliver Holden, prefacing *The Union Harmony* (1793), referred to those “happy effects” enumerated by religious leaders: “If

⁷¹ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 26.

⁷² John Mellen, “Religion Productive of Music. A Discourse” (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1773), 31. Delivered in Marlborough, MA, March 24, 1773, at a singing lecture. Accessed via *EAI*.

⁷³ Blair, “A Discourse on Psalmody,” 27-28.

provision should be made, whereby the youth at a certain age might be taught the first *principles* or *rudiments* of music, its happy effects would very soon be discovered in our *worshipping assemblies*.⁷⁴ Watts's version of the closing verses of Psalm 45, set by Timothy Swan in Example 4.5, emphasized these benefits for children and their parents:

O let thy God and King,
Thy sweetest thoughts employ;
Thy children shall his honour sing,
In palaces of joy.

Example 4.5: Timothy Swan, “Lisbon,” in Oliver Brownson, *Select Harmony* (1783)



This psalm suggests that the habit of praising God through song is passed on to future generations, and when children learn to sing, they dwell happily in “palaces of joy.”

Others lauded the singing school as an excellent establishment for the mental and moral development of children. Significantly, this was an activity in which both young men and young women were encouraged to participate. The mixing of the sexes, which certainly presented an occasion to sin in other scenarios, was through psalmody transformed into a wholesome social interaction. Like many other preachers of his day, William Symmes addressed his comments on the avoidance of vice through singing to both boys and girls:

⁷⁴ Oliver Holden, *The Union Harmony, or Universal Collection of Sacred Music* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), iii. From the preface, dated August, 1793, Charlestown, MA.

My young Friends of both sexes—We greatly rejoice to find you so attentive to an act of religious worship, which requires so great purity and elevation of spirit; when ... there seems to be such a general dissipation of thought and laxity of morals. Devotion will ever be your surest and sweetest resource. The ambition of excelling in the religious art of psalmody is laudable. The time that is spent in tuning and modulating the voice; and in acquiring a competent skill in this useful art is not lost. How many heart-achs would it prevent, if youth in general spent no part of their time in worse pursuits?⁷⁵

Rather than encouraging “worse pursuits,” singing on the contrary gave youth the opportunity to do something good for their community. Singing in choirs or in the occasional concert at the close of the singing-school session provided a chance for public service that was rare for young people, especially girls. Speaking at such an event—the concluding concert for a singing school in Cooperstown, New York—Dr. H. Farnsworth noted, “the fair sex, are seldom ever favored with the opportunity of serving their community, by public performance, except through the medium of music.”⁷⁶ In the preface to the appropriately named *Social Harmony* (1798), Asahel Benham also spoke of the salutary effect of singing on the minds of youth and on society in general, leading them toward virtue and away from vice:

Should measures be adopted whereby youth, at a suitable age may be taught the elements of vocal Music, the salutary effects would soon be manifest as a shining ornament to our societies and worshipping assemblies—Psalmody makes impressions on the mind which lead to virtue, and at the same time diverts it from dangerous habits.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Symmes, “The Duty and Advantages of Singing,” 23-24. Concern over the vices of children seemed to be a theme in both sacred and secular instructional literature of the day. A popular collection of stories from 1789, *Vice in Its Proper Shape, or, The Wonderful and Melancholy Transformation of Several Naughty Masters and Misses into Those Contemptible Animals Which They Most Resemble in Disposition* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1789) gives a picture of the common misbehaviors of the youth. The children described in it possess a number of vices: laziness, overeating, talking too much, rudeness, vulgarity, and gossiping.

⁷⁶ Farnsworth, “An Oration on Music,” 7.

⁷⁷ Asahel Benham, *Social Harmony* (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1799). From the preface, dated September 6, 1799, Wallingford, CT.

Some considered these positive effects on the minds and morals of youth to be so great as to constitute, yet again, a duty. Ezra Weld explained what he saw as a solemn obligation for parents: “We cannot but infer it the duty of parents, to make the acquirement of skilful harmony, a part of the religious education of their children. By this, the soft, and gentle passions of the mind, are promoted; and serious, good affections, and conduct, advantageously recommended.”⁷⁸ That instruction in singing was considered to be such a vital part of the general and religious education of children speaks to its important role in the formation of New England societies. The evidence suggests that New Englanders believed that sacred song and vice were inversely proportional. The more one sang, the less one would be embroiled in sin. On a larger scale, then, the more a society sang, the more pious it would be. William Tans’ur reminded readers of this conviction in the preface to *The Royal Melody Complete*, which enjoyed numerous American printings: “‘where Psalmody is most used, those *Churches* are generally the most filled,’ it having a great Influence over the Minds of most People, especially *Youth*, and keeps them from other Vices on the Lord’s Day.”⁷⁹ Here, Tans’ur draws a direct parallel between singing and church attendance. Furthermore, he suggests that when one is present at church, it prevents engagement in sin.

Finally, Watts argued that sacred song was “furniture for the minds” of youth not only on Sunday and in the house of worship, but every day and in every place. He particularly pointed to the family as a support for the practice of psalmody and the home as a place for continuous worship through song:

⁷⁸ Weld, “A Sermon,” 25.

⁷⁹ Tans’ur, *The Royal Melody Complete*, 9.

4. These *Divine Songs* may be of pleasant and proper Matter for their daily or weekly Worship, to sing one in the Family, at such Time as the Parents or Governors shall appoint; and therefore I have confin'd the Verse to the most useful Psalm-Tunes.⁸⁰

By making a habit of singing sacred song in all contexts, families and, on a higher level, societies, could imbue everyday life with the sort of moral principles that psalmody embodied. Calvin, for one, discouraged the distinction between sacred and secular aspects of life, calling instead for a Godly approach to work, home life, and all other facets of daily living. As most people spent the majority of their time at home, it made sense for preachers to encourage religious practices there. Weld urged the adoption of sacred song in the home, which he claimed would bring all the enumerated benefits of singing and create a healthy pattern for religious life in all contexts: “These delightful and happy effects might be experienced in families, were the practice of singing the praises of God, introduced as a part of their domestick sacrifices.”⁸¹ For eighteenth-century New Englanders, private devotion of this type went hand-in-hand with public church services as an important means of worshiping God. The opening pages of Watts’s versifications of the psalms, one of the most important texts for American psalmodists, addresses this devotional purpose:

The chief Design of this Work was to improve *Psalmody* or *Religious Singing*, and to encourage the frequent Practice of it in public Assemblies and private Families with more Honor and Delight; yet the Author hopes the reading of it may also entertain the Parlour and the Closet with devout Pleasure and holy Meditations. Therefore he would request his Readers at proper Seasons, to peruse it thro’; and among 340 sacred Hymns they may

⁸⁰ From Isaac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1773), ii-iii, and Watts, *Divine Songs: in Easy Language, for the Use of Children*. Both collections were printed throughout the colonies in multiple editions, well into the nineteenth century.

⁸¹ Weld, “A Sermon,” 18.

find out several that suit their own Case and Temper, or the Circumstances of their Families and Friends.⁸²

The preface to an instructional manual about singing also points to smaller settings as important locations for psalmody, asking its readers to study diligently, “Hoping that the Consequence of it will be, that not only the *Assemblies of Zion* will *Decently & in order* carry on this Exercise of Piety, but also it will be the more introduced into private *Families*, and become a part of our *Family-Sacrifice*.”⁸³ It seems that nearly any place could be the right place for psalmody:

Meet and right it is to sing,
Glory to our God and King:
Meet in ev’ry time and place,
To rehearse his solemn praise.⁸⁴

Many American compilations included tunes that specifically addressed this daily, devotional purpose of psalm singing. They used images like the rising sun to signify daily, patterned behavior. Compare the texts of Billings’s “Aurora” and “Morning Hymn” and Jacob French’s “Devotion”:

"Aurora"
Awake my soul, awake,
Awake look up and view,
The glor'ous sun, who has begun
His daily task anew.

"Morning Hymn"
Once more my soul the rising day
Salutes thy waking eyes.

⁸² Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap and G. Noel, 1760), iv.

⁸³ Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note. Fitted to the Meanest Capacities* (Boston: J. Franklin, 1721) ii. This preface is dated 18 April, 1721, and signed by Stephen Salisbury and fifteen others, including Cotton and Increase Mather.

⁸⁴ This hymn text by Methodist Charles Wesley can be found in a number of American collections, including Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns*, 42.

Once more my voice thy tribute pay
To him that rolls the skies.

"Devotion"

Awake my soul and with the sun,
Thy daily task of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth and early rise,
To pay thy morning sacrifice.

All three settings, shown in Examples 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8, are similar: each is in the key of C, and their forms are comparable, as each composer employs an imitative texture for the second couplet:

Example 4.6: William Billings, "Aurora," *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1778)

64 **Aurora, a Morning Hymn. S. M.**

A-wake my foul, a-wake, A-wake look up and view The glorious fun, who has be-gun, His dai-ly talk a-new. The glorious fun, who has begun, The glorious fun, who has begun His dai-ly talk a-new. His dai-ly talk a-new. The glorious fun, who has begun His dai-ly talk a-new. glorious fun, who has be-gun The glorious fun, who has begun His dai-ly talk a-new. His dai-ly dai-ly dai-ly

68 *Morning Hymn.* :S: Words by Dr. Watts.

Once more my soul the rising day salutes thy waking eyes. Once more my voice thy tribute pay to him that rolls the skies, &c.

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DEVOTION. L. M.

Awake my soul and with the sun, Thy daily task of duty run; Shake off

Shake off

Shake off

Shake off dull flesh and early rise, To pay thy morning sacrifice. Shake off

To pay thy morning

To pay

These texts and their settings by American composers emphasize the importance of a daily routine that includes sung praise. They confirm the intertwining of sacred song and everyday activity that was a prominent feature of colonial New England's culture.

Others noted the tendency of sacred song to instill good manners in children, so that the lessons learned in worship or at the singing school might spill over into their everyday life, improving their general behavior and character. In this way, psalmody served not only a religious function, but a social one too. Farnsworth spoke of these important auxiliary benefits: "Music is calculated to refine the manners to encrease the sensibility, and sweeten the temper: the first by exciting youth to attend public worship; which is calculated to polish and refine the manners, independent of its religious effects."⁸⁵ Skinner also described psalmody in this light: "It is a very great ornament to society; it may assist both the manners and the morals."⁸⁶ In every case, psalmody seemed to contribute to the upbringing of polite, pious, and respectful children, and this was obviously desirable within families and communities at large—not just on Sunday, but every day.

Most observers in late-eighteenth century New England agreed with Watts's assertion that instruction in singing was a fundamental component of the education of the youth. The words of preachers and musicians alike supported Watts's beliefs in the various mental and moral benefits of psalmody for children and young adults. By focusing the minds of youth on spiritual and intellectual exercises in a structured social environment, singings schools kept children and teens "off the streets," in modern

⁸⁵ Farnsworth, "An Oration on Music," 6.

⁸⁶ Skinner, "A Discourse on Music," 13.

parlance, so that they might avoid “vices” and “temptations” that threatened their moral development. Naturally, parents wanted their children involved in singing schools for these important social, spiritual, and educational benefits: “The people thought their children should all be taught to sing, just as much as they should be taught arithmetic.”⁸⁷ As such, many collections of psalms and hymns intended specifically for the instruction of youth were published during this period.⁸⁸

Young or old, persons of all stations in the New England town were thought to benefit from instruction in the art of singing. In the late eighteenth century, the publication of large numbers of tunebooks—most with many pages of instructional materials—and the burgeoning singing-school movement underscore the social and moral importance of learning how to sing to the best of one’s God-given abilities. This attitude spread well beyond the small groups of composers and compilers who stood to benefit from a society focused on singing instruction; preachers and teachers often discussed singing and pointed to it as a means of attaining a well-ordered mind and a Godly life. The extended focus on learning and forming the mind, both of children and adults, speaks to the overarching Reformed religious belief in the individual’s capability and responsibility to seek understanding in all spiritual pursuits. Psalmody was a way for all persons to practice this joint pursuit of holiness and understanding.

⁸⁷ Dana, *History of Woodstock, Vermont*, 221.

⁸⁸ For example, Daniel Read’s illustrated manual for children, *An Introduction to Psalmody; or, The Child's Instructor in Vocal Music* (New Haven: T. and S. Green, 1790). Accessed via EAI.

CHAPTER 5: SACRED SONG AND THE COMMUNITY

In the post-Great Awakening religious environment of late eighteenth-century America, observers from many walks of life saw singing as a way of integrating one's whole self—soul, body, and mind—and orienting it toward God. Singing was a powerful expression of human emotion that presumably transported the soul to realms unreachable through other means, allowing the singer a glimpse of the divine. Sacred song activated the lips, breath, and body in the motions of praise. It challenged the mind to learn new skills and encouraged deep contemplation of sacred words. At its best, psalmody affected a true “awakening” of the person, rousing him or her to a life of health, holiness, and harmony. The Great Awakening had brought this personal and individual experience of religion into sharper focus and caused a reinterpretation of the corporate dimension of spirituality, as this model of self-improvement through song might be extended to apply to the larger community as well. The idea of a human body with many interdependent parts was a central metaphor for understanding society and ultimately, on a more cosmic level, the Body of Christ, that is, the Church. Just as it benefited the individual person, psalmody seemed to facilitate the well-being of whole communities, too.

The Bonds of Friendship

The formation of a communitarian ethos was one of these larger-scale effects of sacred music for New England society, particularly through the singing schools and other

public venues for the practice of psalm singing. Although sacred music was not solely responsible for the cohesiveness of a community—religious beliefs, economic necessity, and living conditions also surely played a role—singing was thought to strengthen those bonds in a unique way. While sacred song could be experienced in solitude as a form of private devotion in the home, psalmody was essentially a communal activity. The very makeup of the genre, with its three- and four-part settings, indicated social settings for its enjoyment. It was a pleasant form of social interaction that also promoted togetherness and unity on a higher level. Even in the larger and more established towns like Boston, subsistence economies were highly localized and interdependent. Within these social and economic networks, the importance of fulfilling one's role and pulling one's weight could not be overlooked. When all worked according to their own skills, harmonious social order resulted. For citizens who literally depended on each other for survival, psalmody with its interdependent vocal lines and overarching harmonic cohesion served as a fitting embodiment of the ideals of community and togetherness.

As we have seen, leaders of both the religious and musical communities pushed for universal participation in psalmody, a crucial act of communal religious expression. Modern theories about musical participation and group performance focus on the nature of the relationship that communal music-making fosters between performers. At its best, shared performance creates a bond between participants that is difficult or even impossible to express in ordinary speech. In *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Thomas Turino argues that the shared experience of music making can result in a blurring of the boundaries between individuals and the creation of a new, common identity: “good music making ... is a realization of ideal—*Possible*—human

relationships where the identification with others is so direct and so intense that we feel, for those best moments, as if our selves had merged.”¹ When applied to a musical style like psalmody that is so deeply religious in its content and contexts, Turino’s thesis might be adjusted to include God as part of the equation as well. American Christians could thus merge their wills with God’s will through sacred song. Singing was at the same time a bold expression of self and a radical submission of self to both the singing group and to God. In this way, a triangular relationship existed between the individual singer, the participating group—ideally, the whole congregation/community—and God. In its ideal formulation, the participation of all in the act of singing approximated the “citty upon a hill,” in which the whole community was aligned with God’s will for God’s American disciples.

Tunebook authors and compilers seemed to recognize the important communal aspect of singing; many emphasized this function in introducing and promoting their publications. The social benefits of singing probably appealed to many New Englanders, who lived in small, close-knit communities where cooperation and oneness of purpose were highly valued. In the preface to *The New-England Harmonist* (1800), for example, compiler Stephen Jenks described singing as an activity that facilitated friendships, which, in turn, helped to build up the whole community: “Music is a pleasing science, and when properly improved is equally beneficial to Society and individuals; as it has a tendency to reconcile discordant hearts and to unite them in the social bonds of

¹ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 19.

friendship.”² Friendships, he argued, were the basic building blocks of healthy communities, and singing was a primary way of making possible those crucial bonds between community members.

The well-known frontispiece for William Billings's *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), probably engraved by Paul Revere, is an artistic representation of the friendship bonds that Jenks describes (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Frontispiece to William Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770), probably engraved by Paul Revere



² Stephen Jenks, *Laus Deo. The New-England Harmonist* (Danbury, CT: Douglas & Nichols, 1800), 2. From the preface, dated 24 Sept. 1799.

Here, Revere depicts seven men interacting with one another around a table in a small room, presumably preparing to sing the music in front of them. Billings's canon, "Wake Ev'ry Breath" surrounds the men; by literally encircling them, the music draws the performers in as one body. As an opening illustration for the collection, it does more than merely inform about the performance practice of sacred song; it suggests that the social function of psalmody was at least as important as its use in worship, if not more so.

Singing's role as social adhesive seemed particularly important for the new and expanding towns and cities in the late eighteenth century. In contrast to Billings's Boston, Supply Belcher worked in the less densely populated but growing areas of Maine, but he, too, recognized the ability of sacred music to create a sense of community in America's post-Independence climate:

As the encouragement of Arts and Sciences is beneficial to all countries, and especially where the settlement is new, the Author presumes that the propagation of Sacred Musick will answer a valuable purpose—that it will not only be a means of forming the people into Societies, but will be ornamental to civilization.³

According to Belcher, sacred song greatly improved the cohesiveness of a society, both in its religious and civic arenas. Psalmody expressed many core beliefs that were commonly held among the various Christian sects prevalent in New England, and it was viewed as an essential part of the worship service for most of them. At the same time, as an art form that usually required a group of singers working in concert, psalmody provided a simple source of entertainment and an excuse for people to get together frequently. The singing voice was common to all members of society, and it was easily

³ Supply Belcher, *The Harmony of Maine* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1794), from the preface, dated Nov. 1794.

and cheaply trained within the singing school. Requiring no special equipment or extraordinary outlay of time or money, singing seemed the perfect glue for the deeply religious New England societies that had limited resources but were constantly absorbing new members.

An Ecumenical Practice

Many observers affirmed a belief in the universal singing voice, as they noted how sacred song seemed to unite disparate segments of society. Dr. H. Farnsworth mentioned a number of different groups that were frequently brought into one accord through singing. Among them were men and women, the youth and the aged, people of different Christian denominations, and people from different socioeconomic classes. He concluded that “almost every member of society” could benefit from the practice of psalmody and feel the bond of community through it:

Who can slight so liberal, so polite an art? By which gentlemen and ladies, of every sect and rank, may associate together, in a most entertaining and useful manner. Thus music is pleasing, and greatly strengthens society, as it cultivates friendship; and especially as it marks no different sectarian; for almost all denominations of men are ready to sing together, and view it as a very essential part of public worship—Psalmody is calculated to entertain almost every member of society, who has arrived to years of understanding; both the cheerful and the sedate, the old and the young.⁴

Singing was deemed appropriate and requisite for Christians of every type, as it seemed to move beyond some of the divisions that separated the various denominations of Christianity present in colonial New England. In its somewhat pluralistic environment,

⁴ Dr. H. Farnsworth, “An Oration on Music” (Cooperstown, NY: Elihu Phinney, 1795

), 7-8. Delivered at the courthouse in Cooperstown in Otsego, NY, April, 1794, at the conclusion of a singing school taught by Nathan Billings (no apparent relation to William Billings). Accessed via *EAI*.

singing proved to be an ecumenical activity, as most singing schools welcomed various denominations and most churches drew from the same repertory of sacred song. The texts of early American psalmody expressed religious beliefs that were more or less commonly held by the various Christian groups present in the area. Nearly all denominations embraced psalmody as an important practice of the faith, and most psalmody texts contained messages that were general enough, theologically speaking, to apply to nearly all Christians.

Examples of this inclusive, ecumenical agenda abound in tunebooks and the materials used to promote singing schools around New England. Andrew Fowler, the rector of St. Peter's church in Cortland, New York, opened his church's singing school to non-members: "We make no difference in the plan of our school, between our own children, and the children of other religious denominations."⁵ In the preface to *Worcester Collection* (1786), Isaiah Thomas noted the almost universal use of sacred song, observing "with pleasure the attention paid to Church Musick, by most classes of people in the New-England States."⁶ Some tunebooks were explicitly non-denominational, like Samson Oocom's *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations*. An advertisement for Andrew Adgate's singing school in Philadelphia also set forth an ecumenical agenda, "that persons of every denomination, desirous of acquiring the knowledge of Vocal Music" might be able to do so.⁷ It was perhaps this shared experience of sacred song that the

⁵ Andrew Fowler, *Hymns on Various Subjects* (New York: John Harrisson, 1793), iv.

⁶ *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1786), preface.

⁷ Andrew Adgate, "Plan of Mr. Adgate's Institution for Diffusing More Generally the Knowledge of Vocal Music" (Philadelphia: B. Towne, 1785). Accessed via *EAI*.

president of the new nation, George Washington, had in mind when he spoke with pride about the fraternal cooperation among Christian sects: “It affords edifying prospects, indeed, to see Christians of different denominations dwell together in more charity, and conduct themselves, in respect to each other, with a more Christian-like spirit than ever they have done in any former age, or in any other nation.”⁸

Tunes themselves often set broad, ecumenical texts that named God as a universal ruler and emphasized the shared responsibility of praise. Both Justin Morgan and Oliver Brownson found the following lines from Watts’s version of Psalm 95 worthy of musical setting (Examples 5.1 and 5.2):

Come sound his praise abroad
And hymns of glory sing;
Jehovah is the sovereign God,
The universal king.

Example 5.1: Justin Morgan, “Sounding-Joy,” in Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (1790)



⁸ George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. Jared Sparks (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), Part V, 404. Washington addressed the Bishops, clergy, and laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church on 19 August, 1789.

Example 5.2: Oliver Brownson, “Sutton,” *Select Harmony* (1783)



As this text exemplifies, all Christians could agree on the sovereignty of God. God’s kingship was an especially important concept for the young nation, as it resisted the authority of earthly monarchs. On both a religious and political level, New Englanders could rally around tunes like this one.

Preachers reminded their congregants that this social aspect of singing—uniting people across various divisions—was part of God’s design for humankind. People were made as social beings, so participating in group worship and in community-building activities was natural, good, and requisite. Singing, as Lemuel Hedge explained, fulfilled this natural desire for togetherness and appropriately directed it toward God: “God has made men, as well as angels, sociable creatures, and he expects and requires that they unite together in offering up their praises to Him: And as it is good for them to *dwell*, so to *sing together in unity*.”⁹ Ichabod Skinner similarly described the sense of unity that enhanced the experience of worship, drawing body and soul into alignment:

Our worship is designed to be social—between the social and animal feelings, there is an inseparable connection—as the animal are excited, the social are drawn into exercise, and thus a multitude of hearts can beat in

⁹ Lemuel Hedge, “The Duty and Manner of Singing in Christian Churches, Considered and Illustrated” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1772), 18. Preached at a singing lecture in Warwick, MA, where Hedge was pastor, on January 29, 1772. “Published at the request of the singers.” Accessed via EAI.

unison, and a whole assembly imbibe nearly the same sentiments and feelings.¹⁰

Skinner and other observers of late eighteenth-century psalmody recognized the power of sacred song to provide a meaningful common experience to groups of people, thus building a sense of community on many levels. In choirs and small private gatherings, sacred tunebooks were the centerpieces of social interaction, providing a source of pleasurable and challenging activity and shared religious beliefs. At its best, psalmody brought all into a state of being one soul, one body, and one mind together. Churches and singing schools facilitated this sense of community in a formal way and on a larger level. As a fundamental part of daily life in New England and an activity common to nearly all people who lived there, singing promoted cohesion among the different segments of the population and embodied the ecumenical agenda of the Great Awakening.

A Democratic Practice

Furthermore, the singing voice, as the central focus of so many native tunes, opens a window onto broader aspects of American culture in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods. Some of the apparent virtues of the singing voice—its naturalness, its versatility, its universality, its ability to be honed through hard work—mirrored some of the perceived values present during this early nation-building stage of American history. With the growth of new settlements and a relatively mobile population, the portability of the voice and the low cost associated with establishing singing groups in new locations made it an especially appealing art form and social activity. Ultimately, the

¹⁰ Ichabod L. Skinner, “A Discourse on Music” (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796), 17. Delivered February, 1796, at a singing lecture in North Bolton, CT. Accessed via *EAI*.

voice is an instrument representative of democracy. The choral body depended on many individuals doing their parts and working as one. As in a democracy, every individual has a voice, and, as Billings reminded his readers, “It is not material whether the voices be greater, or less.”¹¹ Regardless of skill level, each person was expected to put his or her voice to use and to participate in the common work of praising God.

Evidence for the democratic nature of psalm singing can be found in the way singing schools and tunebooks catered to all segments of society, particularly the young, unlearned, and outcast. People of all ages and capacities attended singing schools and purchased tunebooks. Many observers viewed the singing school as a type of continuing education program for adults as well as children. The practice of psalmody not only challenged the mind, it was also a means of imparting Christian morality and participating in the worship life of the community. These benefits were thought to be so crucial to the functioning of New England society that virtually everyone was encouraged to learn the art of singing. Thus, the rhetoric surrounding psalmody was extraordinarily broad and inclusive, welcoming people of all ages and all levels of artistic ability and mental capacity. Many authors took special care to write with language that was accessible to the unlearned. Even if one was illiterate and could not read an instructional manual on singing, the methods themselves had to be easy enough to be learned by nearly anyone. Typical of late eighteenth-century tunebooks, the *Worcester Collection* (1786), for example, boasted of an introductory “rudiments” section that could be understood and easily learned by a broad range of people: “As young children, as well as those of riper years, are now instructed in Psalmody, the following Introduction is written in as plain

¹¹ William Billings, *The Singing Master's Assistant. Or Key to Practical Music* (Boston: Draper and Folsom, 1778), 15.

and familiar a manner as the nature of the subject would admit, in order the better to accommodate it to all capacities.”¹²

By targeting those with little or no understanding of music and singing, these tunebooks underscored the participatory culture of psalmody and the value placed on learning. The instruction itself was seen as a valuable activity. Preaching on the advantages of sacred song for all people, Zabdiel Adams asserted that “instruction in psalmody is as necessary as in any other art or science” and concluded that easy-to-understand approaches to the subject were immensely valuable. He had great confidence that almost anyone could come to a basic understanding of how to interpret music and produce a reasonably pleasing sound with their voice. Resting on the efforts of tunebook compilers to make their explanations of psalmody accessible, he declared that “the rules of [harmony] may be learned by persons of common capacities without any great expence of time or attention; and when learnt, may be reduced to practice by far the greater part of mankind.”¹³

According to Adams, the benefits of singing for all segments of society—young and old, educated and ignorant—were so great that accommodations had to be made for the least of them. These efforts included the publication of tunebooks and instructional manuals and the establishment of singing schools:

Hence the indispensable necessity of an acquaintance with the rules of musick, ... hence also the necessity of singing-masters to teach and instruct the young, the ignorant and the unlearned. Time and money expended for this purpose are profitably laid out. Instruction brings back

¹² *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1786), front matter.

¹³ Zabdiel Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages of Church-Musick” (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 11, 24. Preached in Lancaster, MA on Thursday, April 4, 1771. Adams was pastor of a church in Lunenburg, MA. Accessed via *EAI*.

the aged to the rule, from which they gradually, and in a course of years widely depart.¹⁴

The fact that tunebooks were written and singing schools were promoted in such a way—accessible to children and unlearned people and welcoming to all Christian—reflects a belief in the universality of sacred song. Musicians and religious leaders alike believed that everyone should participate in the act of service and praise to God that psalmody embodied. Therefore, they emphasized the value of simplicity and directness in both the music itself and instructional methods. Elias Mann, prefacing the *Worshipper's Assistant* (1799), explained why an uncomplicated learning approach to the art of psalmody was necessary: “The plainest method is best in the service of God, who requires sincerity and simplicity in his worship; therefore if we desire to belong to his spiritual assembly we should condescend to the weak, capacities of Children and foreigners.”¹⁵

Mann's recommendation offers a taste the rhetoric of democracy that colored many aspects of colonial life, especially during the Revolutionary War and its aftermath. The idea of condescension to the masses—in this case, “weak” singers, children, and those of “common capacities”—was and remains one of the chief criticisms of democracy in general. Mann even included foreigners—presumably, immigrants or other newcomers to a community—in his circle of those who should attempt to learn sacred song. In the eyes of eighteenth-century New Englanders, it seems that psalmody was to be a true participatory work of the common people and not a performance by an elite group of specially-trained singers.

¹⁴ Adams, “The Nature, Pleasure and Advantages,” 25-26.

¹⁵ Solomon Howe, *Worshipper's Assistant* (Northampton, MA: Andrew Wright, 1799). From the preface by Elias Mann, dated 14 February, 1799.

The Body of Christ

With this broad and ecumenical invitation, singing helped the community to more fully represent Body of Christ, another biblical Pauline concept that was paramount in the religious rhetoric of post-Great Awakening America. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (the same epistle in which he talks about singing "with the spirit" and "with the understanding also"), he presents a famous analogy between the human body and the "body" of Christ, that is, the whole community of believers:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

Through the metaphor of the body, Paul draws attention to both the unity and diversity of the body of believers. Like the human body, the many "members" necessarily have different functions, and they are diverse in their makeup—Jew or Gentile, bond or free. Yet, this essential diversity results in a unified and efficient whole, with each individual incorporated into the common purpose of praising the one true God. Preachers recognized this passage as a call to ecumenism. Samuel Langdon, preaching to an association of ministers in New Hampshire, cited Paul's words as support for a broad and universal understanding of "church": "St. Paul most certainly useth the word *church* in the most catholic sense, as comprehending all particular churches, thro' the world; for they are all one in Christ Jesus the head."¹⁶ Brought to its fullest fruition, the Body of Christ was to be a cooperative community of all those who professed the Christian faith.

¹⁶ Samuel Langdon, "A Discourse on the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth; Designed to Reconcile Christians of All Parties and Denominations in Charity and Fellowship, as One Body in Christ" (Exeter, NH: Henry Ranlet, 1792), 9, "delivered before an association of ministers convened at Portsmouth, [NH], October 12, 1791, and in substance repeated at a lecture in Hampton Falls, January 26, 1792." Langdon was a minister in the town of Hampton Falls, NH. Accessed via *EAI*.

Understood as a welcoming, unified entity with many diversely functioning parts, the Body of Christ shared obvious similarities with the late eighteenth-century New England singing choir. The different voice parts each worked only in conjunction with the others, and together they joined to create harmony. No one voice could harmonize with itself. Furthermore, the practice of psalmody in singing schools and at social functions encouraged broad participation by all segments of society and by persons of all skill levels. With sacred texts and the consistent emphasis on spiritual and moral development in the discourse of psalmody, Christ might be considered the “head” of the singing group as well.

Because of these similarities, Paul’s concept of the Body of Christ made its way into tunebooks and hymn texts, serving as a fitting reminder of the larger, unitive purpose of psalmody. One of Watts’s hymns, entitled “Communion with Christ and with the Saints,” for example, reiterates Christ’s leadership of the “sev’ral parts” making up the whole. In using the image of bread, he also points to the Eucharistic nature of Christ’s body:

We are but sev’ral parts
Of the same broken bread;
One body hath its several limbs,
But Jesus is the head.¹⁷

George Whitefield, one of the main catalysts of the Great Awakening, also recognized the importance of the Body of Christ concept in drawing Christians together. His evangelical preaching style was similarly ecumenical in its aim, emphasizing the beliefs

¹⁷ Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 18th ed. (New York: H. Gaine, 1761), 261.

that all Christians held in common and minimizing the differences between denominations. One of Whitefield's original hymn texts echoes Watts's:

Build us in one Body up,
Call'd in one high Calling's Hope;
One the Spirit whom we claim,
One the pure baptismal flame.¹⁸

Whitefield asserts the oneness of all Christians, using the familiar images of the body and the baptism flame to support this claim. Psalm 133 also describes this type of unity among diversely functioning parts. When set in the style of four-part psalmody, it implies a similar harmonious order within the singing group:

How pleasant 'tis to see
Kindred and friends agree.
Each in their proper station move,
And each fulfill their part
With sympathizing heart,
In all the care of life and love.

According to these texts, in the choir as in life, each voice must in its "proper station move"; when all perform their assigned roles, the harmony is sweet. Daniel Read's fittingly titled setting of Psalm 133, "Amity," shown in Example 5.3, offers an excellent musical depiction of both independently-moving lines (in the middle fusing section) and harmonious union:

¹⁸ George Whitefield, *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship* (Philadelphia: David Hall, 1768), 132. Excerpted from Part III, hymn XXIV.

Example 5.3: Daniel Read, “Amity,” in Chauncey Langdon, *Beauties of Psalmody* (1786)

34 A M I T Y. 133^d, D. W. P. M.

How pleasant 'tis to see, Kindred and friends agree, Each in their proper station move; And each, &c.

And each fulfil their part, With sympathizing heart, In all their cares of life and love.

These words about interconnectedness and larger corporate entities linked the human body, the singing choir, and the Body of Christ into one metaphor. Each entity was comprised of many parts with different skills, and all three “bodies” were at their best when each individual performed his or her own function, no more and no less.

Conclusions

Psalmody, as a communal activity that demonstrated the action of the Body of Christ, represented larger trends in the religious and political life of America in the late eighteenth century. A desire for oneness might be cited as a theme common to this cultural and political environment. In the musical world dominated by psalmody, musicians and religious leaders alike emphasized the oneness of person—in soul, body, and mind—that could be achieved through singing and that could benefit the whole

person in numerous ways explored here. In the wake of the Great Awakening, religious leaders called for a new ecumenical spirit among Christians of all denominations. During the American Revolution and its aftermath, colonies that had previously functioned as separate entities, often with religious barriers between them, were compelled to unite to rebel against a common enemy and live under one law. In *The Revolution of the Saints* (1965), Michael Walzer assesses the relationship between religion and radical politics in late eighteenth-century America:

The same sense of civic virtue, of discipline and duty, lies behind the two names. Saint and citizen together suggest a new integration of private men ... in the political order, an integration based upon a novel view of politics as a kind of conscientious and continuous labor.¹⁹

The individual was seen as an integral part of the body politic and, in religious terms, the Body of Christ. The typical Revolutionary-period New Englander, a composite saint-citizen, Walzer argues, made little distinction between spiritual and political matters. This corps of “psalm-singing soldiers” demonstrated the radical integration of public and private in early America through all sorts of religious and political activities, including singing.

Finally, the health of a community’s religious life, that is, its general morality, was thought to be directly related to its civic health. Revivalist preacher Jonathan Lee spoke often of this connection; in a 1766 sermon he cited the “blessed tendency of vital piety to happify the civil state.”²⁰ This evaluation of New England societies held equally true for the individuals that lived within them; the harmony between private piety and

¹⁹ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 2, 87.

²⁰ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 80.

public life was expressed through activities like singing that naturally bridged this two. The observations about sacred song's ability to benefit the soul, body, and mind in numerous ways, and to bring those parts into proper alignment with one another demonstrates on a small scale its potential effects for New England societies at large. The holistic well-being that psalm singing encouraged for the individual might also apply to the whole community of singers, bringing public and private, political and religious aims into harmony.

Appendix A: Biographical sketches of late eighteenth-century preachers and orators

Zabdiel Adams (1739, Braintree, MA – 1801, Quincy, MA) graduated from Harvard University in 1759 and attended seminary. In 1764, he was ordained as a Congregational minister at Lunenburg, in northern Massachusetts, where he stayed until at least 1796. Adams published sermons on various topics, including sacred music and Christian unity. He was a first cousin to John Adams, the second president of the United States, and a more distant cousin to patriot Samuel Adams. John Adams wrote a letter to Zabdiel in 1776 while the former was drafting the Declaration of Independence. Their correspondence addresses the pros and cons of independence and the moral aspects of forming a new nation.¹

John Anderson (c. 1748 – 1830) was born in England to Scottish parents. He studied theology at the Associate Divinity Hall in Scotland. After moving to the United States in 1783, Anderson settled in the Philadelphia area and was ordained a Presbyterian minister there in 1788. He became a member of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania in 1791 and pastored congregations at Mill-Creek and Herman's Creek, Pennsylvania. He was installed as pastor at Kings Creek United Presbyterian Church, near Pittsburgh in 1792, was named professor of theology there in 1794, and retired in 1810. Anderson apparently had a weak voice and poor speaking skills. He was, however, very studious and an excellent writer. Descriptions of Anderson capture his socially awkward and introverted nature: one account describes him as "remarkably small, not over five feet in height, with a large head, and thick, tangled hair. His eyes were black and penetrating, and his whole manner that of a man not belonging to the ordinary grade of humanity, but marking him off as one of unusual powers."²

John Black (ca. 1750, North Carolina – 1802) graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1771. He was licensed as a Presbyterian minister 1773 and installed as pastor of the Upper Presbyterian congregation at Marsh-Creek (now Gettysburg), Pennsylvania, in 1775. Known as an excellent preacher, Black was very popular with his congregants. His popularity waned when he took up the cause of temperance in the later years of his ministry. He left the Marsh-Creek congregation in 1794. From 1800 until his

¹ Walter A. Davis, comp., *Early Records of the Town of Lunenburg, Massachusetts, Including That Part Which Is Now Fitchburg, 1719-1764* (Fitchburg, MA: City Council of Fitchburg, 1896), 218; William Allen, *An American Biographical and Historical Dictionary: Containing an Account of the Lives, Characters, and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in North America From Its First Settlement, and a Summary of the History of the Several Colonies and of the United States*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Hyde, 1832).

² Joseph Henderson Bausman, *History of Beaver County, Pennsylvania, and Its Centennial Celebration*, vol. 2 (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 915-917.

death, Black worked for Unity and Greensburg Presbyterian churches in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.³

Samuel Blair (1741, Fagg's Manor, PA – 1818) was a Presbyterian minister and the second Chaplain of the United States House of Representatives. Blair was the son of a Presbyterian minister (also named Samuel Blair), who was a friend of the famous revival preacher George Whitefield and one of the prominent proponents of New Light Presbyterianism. Samuel Blair, the younger, graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1760 and was licensed to preach in 1764. He was pastor of the Old South Church in Boston from 1766 until 1769, when he retired due to poor health. He was known as an eloquent and studious preacher. In 1767, at only twenty-six years of age, Blair was offered the presidency of the College of New Jersey, but he declined. After 1769, Blair devoted himself to his studies and earned the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Pennsylvania in 1790. He was appointed Chaplain in Congress later that year, a position he held for two years.⁴

Jonas Clark (1730, Newton, MA – 1805) graduated from Harvard in 1752 and was ordained pastor of the Congregational church in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1755, where he remained until his death. Clark was known for his exceptionally long-winded sermons, sometimes lasting up to two hours. He was an avid patriot. Clark's home in Lexington is reportedly the location where Samuel Adams and John Hancock met with Paul Revere on the eve of the Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775, which marked the beginning of the Revolutionary War. Revere helped Hancock and Adams escape in the early morning hours, before the arrival of the British. Clark wrote a book, *The Fate of Blood-Thirsty Oppressors, and God's Tender Care of His Distressed People* (Boston: Powars and Willis, 1776), which includes an important first-hand account of the events of the Battle of Lexington and the so-called "shot heard 'round the world."⁵

In his youth, **Samuel Emerson** (1765 – 1851) served as a fifer in the Revolutionary War. He graduated from Harvard in 1785 and studied to be a physician. He practiced medicine

³ *The Centennial Memorial of the Presbytery of Carlisle*, vol. 2 (Harrisburg, PA: Meyers, 1889), 66-69.

⁴ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1858-59), 268-70.

⁵ Theodore Gilman, *The Rev. Jonas Clark, Pastor at Lexington, Leader in Revolutionary Thought* (New York: Order of the Founders and Patriots of America, 1911); Oliver Ayer Roberts, *History of the Military Company of the Massachusetts, Now Called the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, 1637-1888*, vol. 2 (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1901), 155.

in Kennebunk, Maine, from 1790 until his death. Emerson was an excellent musician and speaker; he gave orations on music, politics, and medicine.⁶

Little is known about the life of **Dr. H. Farnsworth**, except that he was a physician who came to practice in Cooperstown, New York, around 1792.⁷

Andrew Fowler (1760, Guilford, CT – 1850) graduated from Yale in 1783. He was ordained an Episcopal deacon in 1789 and a priest in 1790. Fowler was well-traveled, spending time in Long Island, Philadelphia, and New Jersey, and reportedly doing mission work in various locations in the United States. In 1794, Fowler became rector of St. Peter's Church in Cortland and St. Philip's chapel in Philip's town, near New York City. In 1807, Fowler moved to St. Bartholomew church in Charleston, South Carolina, where he remained until his death.⁸

Lemuel Hedge (1734 – 1777) graduated from Harvard in 1759 and was installed as pastor of the Congregational church in Warwick, Massachusetts, in 1760. As the war approached, Hedge preached against independence. In March of 1775, the town of Warwick voted to “disarm and confine” Hedge, and made him pledge to “not influence or prejudice the minds of the people against the common cause which the country is engaged in.” It is unclear whether Hedge's death in 1777 was a result of the harassment he received at the hands of local patriots.⁹

Aaron Kinne (1744, Norwich, CT – 1824) graduated from Yale in 1765 and took charge of an Indian school at what is now Cherry Valley, New York. Kinne established relations and did missionary work with Oneida and other Indian groups in Maine and New York. From 1769 until 1798, he was pastor of the Congregational church in Groton, Connecticut, and was a strong exponent of New Light theology. After his stint in Groton, Kinne pastored congregations in Litchfield County, Connecticut, and Berkshire County, Massachusetts. In 1824, he moved to Tallmadge, Ohio, where he died.¹⁰

⁶ Joseph Williamson, *A Bibliography of the State of Maine from the Earliest Period to 1891*, vol. 1 (Portland, ME: The Thurston Print, 1896), 405-406; Edward Emerson Bourne, *The History of Wells and Kennebunk from the Earliest Settlement to the Year 1820* (Portland, ME: B. Thurston & Co., 1875), 751.

⁷ Ralph Birdsall, *The Story of Cooperstown* (Cooperstown, NY: Arthur H. Crist, 1917), 90.

⁸ Robert Bolton, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the County of Westchester: from Its Foundation, A.D. 1693 to A.D. 1853* (New York: Stanford & Swords, 1855), 598; Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 5, 428.

⁹ Rev. Theophilus Packard, Jr. *A History of the Churches and Ministers, and of Franklin Association in Franklin County, Mass.* (Boston: S. K. Whipple and Company, 1854), 398-99; Charles Morse, *Warwick, Massachusetts: A Biography of a Town, 1763-1963* (Cambridge, MA: Dresser, Chapman & Grimes, 1963).

¹⁰ Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History*, vol. 3 (New York: Holt, 1885), 130-32.

Samuel Langdon (1723, Boston – 1797, Hampton Falls, NH) graduated from Harvard in 1740 and was ordained pastor of the North Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1747. He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Aberdeen in 1762. In 1774, he was dismissed from his post in Portsmouth in order to fill the presidency of Harvard College. He left the presidency in 1781 to pastor a congregation in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, where he remained until his death.¹¹

Timothy Langdon (1758 – 1801) graduated from Yale in 1781 and was ordained pastor of the First Church (Congregational) in Danbury, Connecticut, in 1786. He remained there until his death.¹²

John Mellen (1722, Sterling, MA – 1807) graduated from Harvard in 1741. Mellen was pastor of the Second Church of Christ (Congregational) in Lancaster, Massachusetts, from 1744 to 1778. From 1784 to 1805, he ministered at two more Congregational churches in Massachusetts: the Church of Christ in Hanover and East Church in Barnstable.¹³

Samuel-John Mills (1743 – 1833) graduated from Yale in 1764 and was pastor of a Congregational church in Torrington, Connecticut, from 1769 until his death. His son, also named Samuel John, played a leading role in the formation of the American Colonization Society in the early nineteenth century and travelled to the west coast of Africa to purchase land.¹⁴

Oliver Noble (1734, Hebron, CT – 1792) graduated from Yale in 1757 and was ordained pastor of the First Church (Congregational) in Coventry, Connecticut, in 1759. Noble was dismissed in 1761, apparently because of “singularity in dress.” He was installed at the Fifth Church in Newbury in 1762, but was again dismissed in 1784 due to issues with his personal hygiene and mannerisms. Observers called his attire “slovenly” and described his peculiar habit of making house calls in “a long dressing-gown.” Noble was installed at a church in New Castle, New Hampshire in 1784, where he served until his death. He had served as a chaplain in the army for eleven months in 1776.¹⁵

¹¹ Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D. 1755-1794, with a Selection from His Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 523.

¹² Dexter, *Graduates of Yale College*, vol. 4, 194-95.

¹³ Samuel H. Riddel, ed., *American Quarterly Register*, vol. 13 (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1843), 438.

¹⁴ William Walker Rockwell, ed., *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, vol. 6 (New York and London: Knickerbocker Press, 1914), 672; Sarah Johnson and Eileen Moffett “Lord, Send Us: A Kaleidoscope of Evangelists,” *Christian History & Biography* 90 (2006): 35.

¹⁵ *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Mass.* (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1865), 71-72.

Samson Occom (1723 – 1792), a Mohegan Indian of Connecticut, converted to Christianity in 1741. He was educated at the Indian school established by Dr. Eleazer Wheelock, a Congregationalist preacher of the Great Awakening. Occom was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1759 at Long Island, where he preached to other Indian groups. In 1761, he was engaged in a mission to the Oneida tribe in New York. Occom was known as an excellent preacher; he accompanied George Whitefield on a preaching tour throughout New England in 1764. In 1766, he embarked on another preaching tour to England to raise funds for Wheelock's Indian Charity School in Lebanon, Connecticut, becoming the first Indian preacher to visit England. In his later years, Occom struggled with his admitted alcoholism and was involved in land settlements for the Mohegan tribe in Connecticut.¹⁶

Ichabod Skinner (1767, Marlborough, CT – 1852) graduated from Yale in 1793. One year later, he was ordained and installed in the Congregational church of North Coventry, Connecticut, where he stayed until 1798. Afterward, Skinner studied law; he joined the bar in 1804 and began to practice in Colchester, Connecticut. He was a deacon in the First Church of Colchester from 1805 until 1808, when he moved to Hartford. He practiced law in Hartford until 1816 and was involved in a number of other projects there, including real estate sales and public works. Skinner moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked on the national roads project and continued to sell land. In 1823, he resumed some ministerial duties, this time with the Presbyterian Church.¹⁷

Charles Stearns (1753, Lunenburg, MA – 1826) graduated from Harvard in 1773 and earned a Doctor of Divinity from the same institution in 1810. He was also honored as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Stearns was pastor of a Congregational church in Lincoln, Massachusetts, from 1781 until his death. During his forty-five year tenure there, Stearns attempted to mediate the conflict between Trinitarian and Unitarian Congregationalists, freely dealing with both sides until his death. A dedicated scholar, Stearns also served as preceptor of the Liberal School in Lincoln. He was offered the presidency of Harvard, but declined in order to stay with his parish.¹⁸

Joseph Strong (1729, Coventry, CT – 1803) graduated from Yale in 1749 and was pastor of a Congregational church at Salmon Brook (now Granby) in West Simsbury, Connecticut, from 1752-1770. He served as chaplain to the Connecticut troops on Long

¹⁶ David A. Rausch and Blair Schlepp, *Native American Voices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 125-126; Joanna Brooks, ed., *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford, 2006), xxi-xxv.

¹⁷ Dexter, *Graduates of Yale College*, vol. 5, 87-89.

¹⁸ William Richard Cutter, ed., *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of Boston and Eastern Massachusetts*, vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1908), 140.

Island in 1776. In 1781, he was installed as pastor of a Congregational church in Williamsburgh, Massachusetts, where he remained until his death.¹⁹

William Symmes (1729 – 1807) was pastor of North Parish (Congregational) Church in Andover, Massachusetts, from 1758 until his death.²⁰

John Todd (1719-1793) was installed at the Presbytery of Hanover, Virginia, in 1752. He was asked by the presbytery to give his opinions on psalmody. His remarks were widely disseminated in early America's Presbyterian strongholds, especially Philadelphia.²¹

Shippie Townsend (1722, Charlestown, MA – 1798) was a blockmaker, like his father. In 1746, he moved to Boston, and in 1763, he joined the Old South Church of Boston (Congregational). Shortly thereafter, Townsend became interested in the teachings of Robert Sandeman, a Scottish immigrant who preached against the necessity of spiritual conversion. Sandeman and his followers saw faith as an operation of the mind and believed that faith alone, as opposed to good works, ensured salvation. Townsend converted to Universalism around 1782, occasionally preaching in Boston and Gloucester. From 1785 to 1793, he published several pamphlets promoting Universalist theology.²²

Ezra Weld (1736, Pomfret, CT – 1816) graduated from Yale in 1759 and was ordained in 1762 as pastor of the First Congregational Church in Braintree, Massachusetts. Weld enforced stricter rules for church membership, requiring an account of a spiritual conversion experience.²³

¹⁹ Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 2, 229.

²⁰ N. W. Hazen, "A Memorial Discourse on William Symmes, Esq.," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 4.5 (1862): 194.

²¹ Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), 181.

²² Hamilton Andrews Hill, *History of the Old South Church (Third Church), Boston, 1669-1884*, vol. 1 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), 98; Richard Eddy, *Universalism in America: A History*, vol. 1 (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1886), 265-66.

²³ Dexter, *Graduates of Yale College*, vol. 2, 631-33.

Appendix B: Location, denomination, and education of select preachers²⁴

Preacher	Main Location(s)	Denomination	Schooling
Adams, Zabdiel (1739-1801)	Northern Massachusetts	Congregationalist	Harvard
Anderson, John (c. 1748-1830)	Philadelphia	Presbyterian	Associate Divinity Hall, Scotland
Black, John (1750-1802)	Southern Pennsylvania	Presbyterian	College of New Jersey (Princeton)
Blair, Samuel (1741-1818)	Boston area	Presbyterian	College of New Jersey (Princeton); Penn (D.D.)
Clark, Jonas (1730-1805)	Boston area	Congregationalist	Harvard
Fowler, Andrew (1760-1850)	New York City area; Charleston, SC	Episcopal	Yale
Hedge, Lemuel (1734-1777)	Northern Massachusetts	Congregationalist	Harvard
Kinne, Aaron (1744-1824)	Connecticut	Congregationalist	Yale
Langdon, Samuel (1723-1797)	New Hampshire	Congregationalist	Harvard
Langdon, Timothy (1758-1801)	Connecticut	Congregationalist	Yale
Mellen, John (1722-1807)	Eastern Massachusetts	Congregationalist	Harvard
Mills, Samuel-John (1743-1833)	Connecticut	Congregationalist	Yale
Noble, Oliver (1734-1792)	Southern New Hampshire	Congregationalist	Yale
Occom, Samson (1723-1792)	Connecticut	Presbyterian	Wheelock's Indian School
Skinner, Ichabod Lord (1767-1852)	Connecticut	Congregationalist	Yale
Stearns, Charles (1753-1826)	Boston area	Congregationalist	Harvard
Strong, Joseph (1729-1803)	Connecticut	Congregationalist	Yale
Symmes, William (1729-1807)	Boston area	Congregationalist	?
Todd, John (1719-1793)	Virginia	Presbyterian	?
Townsend, Shippie (1722-1798)	Boston area	Universalist (not ordained)	?
Weld, Ezra (1736-1816)	Boston area	Congregationalist	Yale

²⁴ Sources for this information are the same as those indicated in Appendix A.

Appendix C: Summary of select New England composers and tunebook compilers, their locations, education, and occupations

Composer / Compiler	Main Location(s)	Representative Collection
Bayley, Daniel (1729-1792)	Massachusetts	<i>New Universal Harmony</i> (1773)
Belcher, Supply (1751-1836)	Maine	<i>Harmony of Maine</i> (1794)
Benham, Asahel (1754-1803)	Connecticut	<i>Federal Harmony</i> (1790)
Billings, William (1746-1800)	Boston area	<i>New-England Psalm-Singer</i> (1770)
Brownson, Oliver (1746-1815)	Connecticut	<i>Select Harmony</i> (1783)
Bull, Amos (1744-1815)	Connecticut	<i>The Responsary</i> (1795)
French, Jacob (1754-1817)	Massachusetts	<i>New American Melody</i> (1789)
Holden, Oliver (1765-1844)	Boston area	<i>Union Harmony</i> (1793)
Holyoke, Samuel Adams (1762-1820)	Eastern Massachusetts	<i>Columbian Repository</i> (1802)
Howe, Solomon (1750-1835)	Western Massachusetts	<i>Worshipper's Assistant</i> (1799)
Jenks, Stephen (1772-1856)	Connecticut, Ohio	<i>Musical Harmonist</i> (1800)
Kimball, Jacob (1761-1826)	Eastern Massachusetts	<i>Rural Harmony</i> (1793)
Langdon, Chauncey (1763-1830)	Vermont	<i>Beauties of Psalmody</i> (1786)
Law, Andrew (1749-1821)	Connecticut	<i>Select Harmony</i> (1779)
Lyon, James (1735-1794)	Philadelphia, Maine	<i>Urania</i> (1761)
Mann, Elias (1750-1825)	Massachusetts	<i>Northampton Collection</i> (1797)
Morgan, Justin (1747-1798)	Vermont	<i>Benham's Federal Harmony</i> (1790)
Read, Daniel (1757-1836)	Connecticut	<i>American Singing Book</i> (1785)
Shumway, Nehemiah (1761-1843)	New Jersey, Upstate New York	<i>American Harmony</i> (1793)
Stickney, John (1744-1827)	Massachusetts	<i>Gentleman and Lady's Musical Companion</i> (1774)
Swan, Timothy (1758-1842)	Connecticut	<i>Federal Harmony</i> (1788)
Wood, Abraham (1752-1804)	Massachusetts	<i>Columbian Harmony</i> (with Joseph Stone, 1793)

Appendix C, continued

Composer / Compiler	Schooling	Other Profession(s)
Bayley, Daniel (1729-1792)	Informal	potter, shopkeeper
Belcher, Supply (1751-1836)	Informal	tavern owner, tax assessor, teacher
Benham, Asahel (1754-1803)	Informal	teacher
Billings, William (1746-1800)	Informal	tanner
Brownson, Oliver (1746-1815)	Informal	?
Bull, Amos (1744-1815)	Informal	teacher, shopkeeper
French, Jacob (1754-1817)	Informal	farmer, soldier
Holden, Oliver (1765-1844)	Informal	carpenter, real estate dealer, minister
Holyoke, Samuel Adams (1762-1820)	Harvard	headmaster of prep school
Howe, Solomon (1750-1835)	Dartmouth	teacher, printer, farmer
Jenks, Stephen (1772-1856)	Informal	farmer, instrument maker
Kimball, Jacob (1761-1826)	Harvard	fifer, teacher, lawyer
Langdon, Chauncey (1763-1830)	Yale	judge, politician, congressman
Law, Andrew (1749-1821)	Rhode Island College (Brown)	Congregational minister
Lyon, James (1735-1794)	College of New Jersey (Princeton)	Presbyterian minister
Mann, Elias (1750-1825)	Informal	carpenter
Morgan, Justin (1747-1798)	Informal	horse breeder, farmer
Read, Daniel (1757-1836)	Informal	farmer, comb-maker, general store owner
Shumway, Nehemiah (1761-1843)	Rhode Island College (Brown)	farmer, school headmaster
Stickney, John (1744-1827)	Informal	farmer, lumberman, fisherman
Swan, Timothy (1758-1842)	Informal	fifer, hat-maker, merchant
Wood, Abraham (1752-1804)	Informal	cloth-maker, tax assessor

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