

# 19<sup>th</sup> Century Sacred Music Primer:

**Southern Harmony** - The *Southern Harmony* is a shape note hymn and tune book compiled by William Walker (May 6, 1809 – September 24, 1875) was a Baptist song leader, shape note "singing master," and compiler of three shape note tunebooks.

In 1835, Walker published a tunebook entitled *The Southern Harmony*, using the four-shape shape note system of notation. In 1846 he came out with *The Southern and Western Pocket Harmonist*, intended as an appendix to the Southern Harmony. In 1866, he published another tunebook entitled *Christian Harmony*, in which he changed from four shape to seven shape notation. He incorporated over half of the contents of *The Southern Harmony* in the *Christian Harmony*. For the additional three shapes, Walker devised his own system - an inverted key-stone for "do", a quarter-moon for "re", and an isosceles triangle for "si" (or "ti"). Editions of the *Christian Harmony* are still available printed with Walker's system, as well as in the more common shapes patented by Jesse B. Aiken. The standard four shapes, the Aiken and Walker seven shapes, and other shape note systems may be viewed at [What are the Shapes and Why?](#)

**Shaker Music** – The Shakers originated in Manchester, England in 1747 in the home of Jane and James Wardley. They developed from the religious group called the Quakers which developed in the 17th century. Both groups believed that everybody could find God within him or herself, rather than through clergy or rituals, but the Shakers tended to be more emotional and demonstrative in their worship. Shakers also believed that their lives should be dedicated to pursuing perfection and continuously confessing their sins and attempting to stop sinning.

The name "Shakers," originally pejorative, was derived from the term "Shaking Quakers" and was applied as a mocking description of their rituals of trembling, shouting, dancing, shaking, singing, and glossolalia (speaking in strange and unknown languages). In 1774 Ann Lee pulled together nine of her followers from an English sect known as the Wardleys, founded by Jane and James Wardley, which she joined in 1758. They arrived on August 6, 1774 in New York City, and in 1776 the Shakers settled in Niskayuna, New York, where a unique communal life began to develop and thrive. Lee taught her followers that it is possible to attain perfect holiness. Like her predecessors the Wardleys, she taught that the demonstrations of shaking and trembling were caused by sin being purged from the body by the power

of the Holy Spirit, purifying the worshipper. Distinctively the followers of Mother Ann came to believe that she embodied all the perfections of God in female form.

The Shakers considered music to be an essential component of the religious experience. The Shakers composed thousands of songs, and also created many dances; both were an important part of the Shaker worship services. In Shaker society, a spiritual "gift" could also be a musical revelation, and they considered it to be important to record musical inspirations as they occurred. Scribes, many of whom had no formal musical training, used a form of music notation for this purpose: it used letters of the alphabet, often not positioned on a staff, along with a simple notation of conventional rhythmic values. This method has a curious, and coincidental, similarity to some ancient Greek music notation.

**Sacred Harp** - Sacred Harp singing came into being with the 1844 publication of Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King's "The Sacred Harp". It was this book, now distributed in several different versions, that came to be the shape note tradition with the largest number of participants.

B. F. White (1800-1879) was originally from Union County, South Carolina, but since 1842 had been living in Harris County, Georgia. He prepared "The Sacred Harp" in collaboration with a younger man, E. J. King, (ca. 1821–44), who was from Talbot County, Georgia. Together they compiled, transcribed, and composed tunes, and published a book of over 250 songs.

King died soon after the book was published, and White was left to guide its growth. He was responsible for organizing singing schools and conventions at which "The Sacred Harp" was used as the songbook. During his lifetime, the book became popular and would go through three revisions (1850, 1859, and 1869), all produced by committees consisting of White and several colleagues working under the auspices of the Southern Musical Convention. The first two new editions simply added appendices of new songs to the back of the book. The 1869 revision was more extensive, removing some of the less popular songs and adding new ones in their places. From the original 262 pages, the book was expanded by 1869 to 477. This edition was reprinted and continued in use for several decades.

**American Hymnody** – In America the Puritans used psalters brought with them from Europe until the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), the earliest American hymnal, was published at Cambridge, Mass. William Billings wrote the first original American hymns as distinguished from paraphrases of psalms and psalm tunes; another important composer was Lowell Mason, whose song collections, such as *Spiritual Songs* (1831), compiled jointly with Thomas Hastings, attained wide distribution.

In the latter half of the 19th cent. the gospel hymn was developed. It is marked by lively rhythm, constant alternation of the simplest harmonies, and sentimental text. Arthur Sullivan's "Onward Christian Soldiers" (1871) is a well-known example of the martial hymn of the period. In the 20th cent. radical variations in church music have emerged: folk-song and jazz elements have been integrated with older music and frequently replaced it. Troubadour-style "protest" songs with theological content were common in the 1960s alongside a newly vital, more conservative hymnody.

**Spirituals** - The few early references to spiritual-like songs sung by black slaves date from about 1819. Black and white spirituals share many tunes and texts; blacks and whites mingled at the camp meetings, and musical influences probably traveled both ways. Both traditions use pentatonic tunes and extensive melodic ornamentation, and lining out resembles the pervasive call-and-response (solo-chorus alternation) pattern of African music. Black spirituals also show significant melodic and rhythmic relationships with West African songs. They are also linked with the ring shout, an ecstatic dance of African origin. Black spirituals were sung with an African vocal quality and to African polyrhythmic accompaniment of finger-snapping, clapping, and stamping. Until after the American Civil War they were apparently sung without harmony. Examples include "Deep River" and "Roll, Jordan, Roll." Black spirituals were often used as work songs and sometimes contained coded information as a form of secret communication. In the late 1800s both black and white spirituals were largely displaced in churches by gospel songs, though they remained popular in concert halls.