



Sacred Harp Singing: A Prototype Thesaurus

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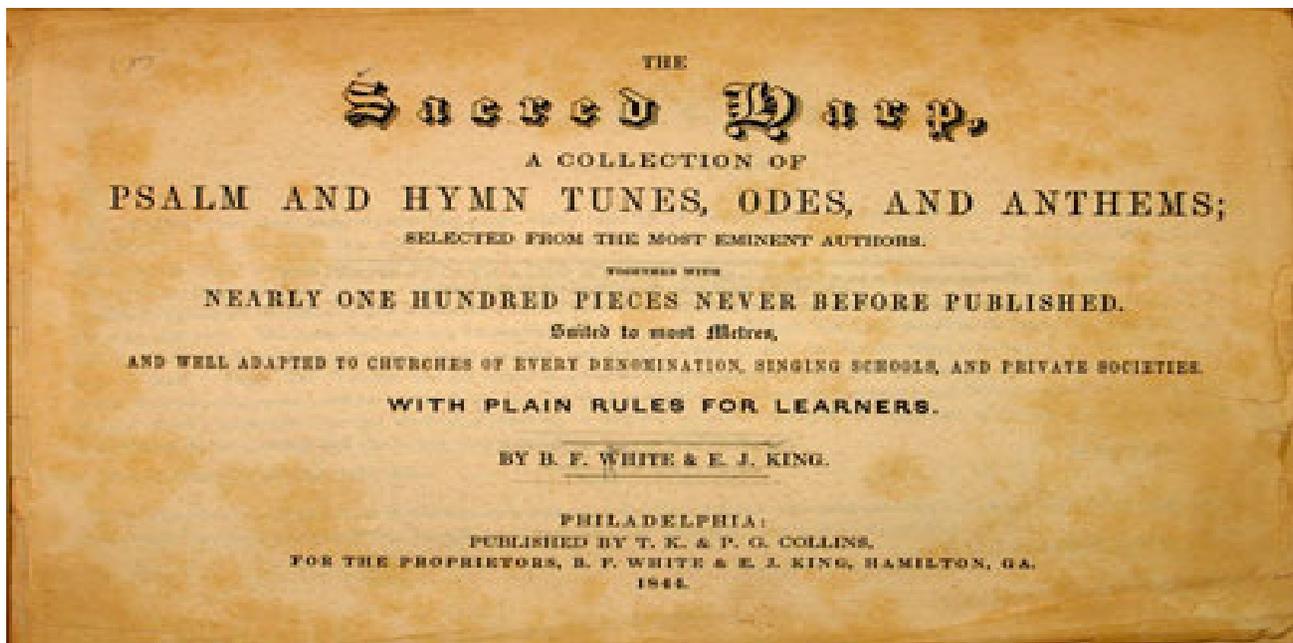


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Introduction

This thesaurus has been created to facilitate the location of resources about Sacred Harp singing, a non-denominational form of choral singing that encourages community participation. It was once America's dominant sacred music form, then eclipsed after the Civil War, but is now enjoying a resurgence of interest. 'Sacred Harp' also refers to your human voice, or the musical instrument you were given at birth. While Sacred Harp has also been interpreted to reference the harp of David, the psalmist, it has nothing to do with the musical instrument known as the harp.

The Sacred Harp refers to the actual oblong hymnbook that contains more than 500 songs and has been continuously updated since its' first 1844 printing. With the publication and overwhelmingly popular acceptance of *The Sacred Harp* in 1844, people began to refer to this music as 'Sacred Harp' music. Before that, it was known as 'shape-note' or 'fasola' music.

In the Sacred Harp singing tradition, worship is public, but one's faith is private. There is no religious discourse or sermon delivered by clergy. Instead, the songs themselves are lessons for the singers. Both religion and politics are left at the door.

Singings are a participatory experience; they are not a performance. There are no rehearsals and no separate seats for an audience. Every singing is a unique and self-sufficient event with a different group of participants. Also, there is no conductor. Instead, each singer is welcomed and encouraged to take a turn leading the group in singing.

I first heard Sacred Harp singing while volunteering for my college's annual Folklore Society Folk Festival as a college student in Chicago. I've been fascinated ever since. I'm drawn to it still because of its lyrical richness, its haunting, polyphonic sound (sometimes plaintive, often joyous), and its deep sense of community.

About this Thesaurus

This is a miniature prototype thesaurus intended for the use of music enthusiasts and folklorists seeking a controlled vocabulary to locate resources about Sacred Harp singing. The thesaurus details the terminology used to index resources on this subject, as well as articulate some relationships between these terms. Please note that this prototype thesaurus cannot take the place of a dictionary, index, or other comprehensive reference. Instead, this thesaurus hopes to aid retrieval by linking resources depicting the same topic with the same term.

In researching Sacred Harp singing, I came across countless individuals that have contributed in ways both large and small to this rich tradition: preachers, ministers, evangelists, social reformers, composers, singing instructors, vocalists, compilers, authors, publishers, and even poets. These hundreds of proper names would make quite a sizable Name Authority File. However, these individuals have not been included in this thesaurus prototype since a Name Authority File was outside the scope of this project.

Also, I have chosen to leave out all of the religious traditions, institutions, and movements that have shaped and influenced the Sacred Harp singing tradition. This is because defining each group's religious identity and then researching, confirming, and delineating their histories, mergers, rivalries, and factions, could be a dissertation unto itself.

HIERARCHICAL DISPLAY

AGENTS

<Participants>

<By vocal part>

Altos

Basses

Sopranos

Trebles

Tenors

Front-bench tenors

<By experience level>

New singers

Traditional singers

<Roles>

Chairs

Leaders

Pitchers

Secretaries

EVENTS

<Lessons>

Classes

Singing schools

<Singings>

<Single day>

All-day singings

<Multi-day>

Conventions

Camp meetings

Revivals

MUSICAL ATTRIBUTES

<Concepts>

A capella

Harmony

Polyvocality

Melody

Rhythm

Solmization

Solfège

Tempo

Beating time

Down-up time

Walking time

Volume

<Musical notation>

Roundhead notes

Shape notes

Circle shapes

Diamond shapes

Ornaments

Square shapes

Triangle shapes

Musical scales

<By number of notes>

Four note scales

Seven note scales

<By key>

Major scales

Minor scales

MUSICAL DOCUMENTATION

Songs

<By type>

Anthems

Folk hymns

Folk songs

Fuging tunes

Hymn tunes

Odes

Plain tunes

Psalm tunes

Revival songs

Rounds

Sugar sticks

Tunebooks

<By type>

Hymn tunebooks

Psalm tunebooks

Shape note tunebooks

TRADITIONS

<Archival>

- Minutes-taking

<Communal and social>

- Ceremonies

 - Closing prayers

 - Memorial lessons

 - Opening prayers

- Dinner on the grounds

<Seating arrangements>

- Hollow square

<Social rules>

- Dress codes

ABBREVIATIONS

SN	Scope Note (working definition)
UF	Used For (entry term's synonym)
USE	(pointer to preferred vocabulary term)
BT	Broader Term (entry term's parent)
RT	Related Term (entry term's sibling)
NT	Narrower Term (entry term's child)

ALPHABETICAL DISPLAY

A capella

SN	Sacred harp singing is inherently without musical instrument accompaniment.
UF	Unaccompanied singing Acoustic
RT	Polyvocality Volume

All-day singings

RT	Conventions Revivals Camp meetings
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Altos

RT	Basses Sopranos Tenors
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Anthems

SN	Prose songs, usually from the Bible, sung responsively. Longer examples may have changes of meter or key. However, some anthems are as brief as a psalm tune.
BT	Songs
RT	Hymn tunes Odes Psalm tunes

Basses

RT	Altos Sopranos Tenors
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Beating time

BT	Tempo
RT	Down-up time Walking time

Buckwheat notes

USE	Shape notes
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Camp meetings

- RT All-day singings
- Conventions
- Revivals

Ceremonies

- RT Closing prayers
- Memorial lessons
- Opening prayers

Chairs

- SN Sacred Harp singing participants chosen to preside over a singing convention and observe businesslike rules of order.
- RT Secretaries

Circle shapes

- SN Circle shapes denote 'sol'.
- RT Shape notes
- Square shapes
- Diamond shapes

Classes

- RT Singing schools

Closing prayers

- SN A non-denominational address in word to God at the ending of a singing.
- BT Ceremonies
- RT Memorial lessons
- Opening prayers

Conventions

- SN Annual singing gatherings lasting two days and attracting participants of all types and ages. Historically, this started in Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas, and usually occurred after the crops were planted but before their harvest.
- RT All-day singings
- Camp meetings
- Revivals

Diamond shapes

- SN Diamond shapes denote 'mi'.
- RT Circle shapes
- Shape notes
- Square shapes

Dinner on the grounds

- SN Noontime, home-cooked potluck meal break to allow for eating and socializing during all-day singings.
- RT All-day singings
Ceremonies

Down-up time

- SN The basic element, a "down-up" stroke of the arm marks a whole measure, demonstrating the tempo with great economy. Flourishes of the hand, nods of the head, and movements of the body may add grace or emphasis or simply give natural expression to the leader's own enjoyment.
- BT Tempo
- RT Beating time
Walking time

Dress codes

- SN At traditional conventions, there is an understood social rule that blue jeans or other sloppy or grungy clothing should not be worn.
- RT Conventions

Fa

- USE Triangle shapes

Fasola

- USE Shape notes

Folk hymns

- BT Songs
- RT Folk songs
Hymn tunes

Folk songs

- BT Songs
- RT Folk hymns
Hymn tunes

Four note scales

- BT Musical scales
- RT Seven note scales

Front-bench tenors

- SN It is the role of the first row of the tenors section to assist the leader, to help keep the class together, and to provide visible beat keeping for the altos and others with bad sight lines.
- BT Tenors
- RT Altos
Basses
Sopranos
Trebles

Fuging tunes

- SN Fuging tunes are songs that have a section where the parts enter one or two at a time, usually in melodic imitation. The words are not uttered by all the parts at the same time.
- BT Songs
- RT Anthems
Odes

Harmony

- SN Sacred Harp singing's harmony is dispersed, characterized by polyphonal-singing parts, in which each vocal part (treble, alto, tenor, and bass) contributes a sort of tune, occupying its own separate staff, with the parts freely crossing one another and the tenor, or third line, carrying the chief melody.
- RT Polyvocality
Melody

Hollow square

- SN Singers sit with one voice part (treble, alto, tenor, bass) on each side, all facing the center and toward one another, and singing out loudly. The song's leader stands in the center of the empty ('hollow') square. When choosing where to sit and sing at a convention, only sit on the front bench (first row) if you are willing to perform your share of the tasks. It is also customary to trade off with other experienced singers so that no one becomes too tired and everyone gets a turn who wants one.
- RT All-day singings
Conventions
Camp meetings
Revivals

Hymn tunebooks

- BT Tunebooks
- RT Psalm tunebooks
Shape note tunebooks

Hymn tunes

- SN Hymn tunes are designed for multi-stanza poetry. The tune is repeated for subsequent stanzas. Many of these tunes are simple, and composed of block chords so that everyone sings the same words at the same time.
- BT Songs
- RT Plain tunes
Psalm tunes

Keyers

- USE Pitchers

La

- USE Square shapes

Leaders

- SN Sacred Harp is purely democratic choral singing. There is no permanent conductor. Instead, singers can queue to take a turn leading the singers. Every singer may have a turn choosing a song and leading the group.
- RT Pitchers

Major scales

- SN In the Sacred Harp singing, the keynote of any major scale appears as a 'fa', with the scale ascending 'fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la-mi-fa'.
- BT Musical scales
- RT Minor scales

Melody

- SN In Sacred Harp singing, the melody is a rhythmic series of musical tones carried by tenors (not upper, higher voices) arranged to give a pleasing effect. Singers sometimes double parts; tenors sing highest parts (melody) but an octave lower. Sopranos might sing tenor line an octave higher.
- RT Harmony
Polyvocality

Memorial lessons

- SN At a Sacred Harp singing convention, there will be a short homily honoring singers, family, and friends who have died during the past year and those who are sick and homebound.
- BT Ceremonies
- RT Closing prayers
Opening prayers

Mi

- USE Diamond shapes

Minor scales

- SN In Sacred Harp singing, all minor scales begin on 'la', proceeding 'la-mi-fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la'.
- BT Musical scales
- RT Major scales

Minutes-taking

- SN Sacred Harp convention secretaries note down the name and song choice (by page number) of every leader at a convention; these minutes are compiled and archived into an annual minute-book and directory for the year's singings.
- RT Chairs
Secretaries

Musical scales

- NT Four note scales
Seven note scales
Major scales
Minor scales

New singers

- SN "New singer" denotes a singer who was not born into a Southern singing family, internalizing Sacred Harp practice in early childhood, but came to the tradition later on.
- RT Traditional singers

Odes

- SN Odes are songs containing three or more stanzas of poetry, with different music for every stanza, often with musical contrasts. The poem may be on a sacred or other elevated subject.
- BT Songs
- RT Anthems
Hymn tunes
Rounds

Opening prayers

- SN An address in word to God at the beginning of a singing.
- BT Ceremonies
- RT Closing prayers
Memorial lessons

Ornaments

- BT Shape notes
- RT Circle Shapes
Diamond Shapes
Square shapes
Triangle shapes

Pitchers

- SN One designated person chosen to set the beginning notes of a tune for each segment of a Sacred Harp singing convention.
- RT Leaders

Plain tunes

- BT Songs
- RT Folk hymns
Folk songs
Hymn tunes
Psalm tunes
Revival songs
Rounds

Psalm tunebooks

- BT Tunebooks
- RT Hymn tunebooks
Shape note tunebooks

Psalm tunes

- BT Songs
- RT Folk hymns

Folk songs
Hymn tunes
Plain tunes
Revival songs

Revival songs

SN Songs with stanzas followed by a constant refrain. Sometimes there are brief refrains after every couplet or every line.
BT Songs
RT Rounds

Revivals

RT Conventions
Camp meetings

Rhythm

RT Tempo

Roundhead notes

RT Shape notes

Rounds

SN Tunes "with extension" that usually have some repetition of text in one or more parts.
BT Songs
RT Anthems
Odes

Secretaries

SN Sacred Harp singing participant chosen to record the name and song choice (by page number) of every leader at a singing convention.
RT Chairs

Seven note scales

BT Musical scales
RT Four note scales

Shape note tunebooks

BT Tunebooks
RT Hymn tunebooks
Psalm tunebooks

Shape notes

SN Four note heads in the shapes of open and solid squares, diamonds, triangles, and circles which determine pitch and rhythm and are used to teach sight-reading of music to people without musical training. Specifically, the triangle shape denotes 'fa'; the circle shape denotes 'sol'; the square shape denotes 'la'; and the diamond shape denotes 'mi'.
NT Circle shapes
Diamond shapes

Ornaments
Square shapes
Triangle shapes
RT Roundhead notes

Singing schools

SN Singing schools are an 18th-century institution that remains, in modified form, the primary mode of Sacred Harp instruction today. The typical Sunday class commences with a straightforward song selection.
RT Classes

Singing the notes

USE Solfege

Sol

USE Circle shapes

Solfege

SN In performance, these are the 'fa-sol-la' syllables that start things off, followed by the hymn lyrics.
BT Solmization

Solmization

SN Singing specific pitches to indicate specific musical intervals.
NT Solfege

Songs

NT Anthems
Folk hymns
Folk songs
Fuging tunes
Hymn tunes
Odes
Plain tunes
Psalm tunes
Revival songs
Rounds
Sugar sticks

Sopranos

RT Tenors
Altos
Basses
Trebles

Square shapes

SN Square shapes denote 'la'.
BT Shape notes

RT Circle shapes
Diamond shapes
Triangle shapes

Sugar sticks

SN Favorite tunes of a song leader that they always lead (if they have not already been called.)
BT Songs

Tempo

SN Sacred Harp singers keep time to the song being sung with an up-and-down motion of the forearm.
NT Beating time
Down-up time
Walking time

Tenors

NT Front-bench tenors
RT Altos
Basses
Sopranos
Trebles

Traditional singers

SN Traditional singers are usually considered those born into a Southern singing family, internalizing Sacred Harp practice in early childhood.
RT New singers

Trebles

RT Altos
Basses
Sopranos
Tenors

Triangle shapes

SN Triangle shapes denote 'fa'.
BT Shape notes
RT Circle shapes
Diamond shapes
Square shapes
Triangle shapes

Tunebooks

NT Hymn tunebooks
Psalm tunebooks
Shape note tunebooks

Volume

RT A cappella

Walking time

BT Tempo

RT Beating time

 Down-up time

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- Vinson, D. (2006, Autumn). As far from secular, operatic, rag-time, and jig melodies as possible: Religion and the resurgence of interest in The Sacred Harp, 1895-1911. *Journal of American Folklore*, 119 (474), 413-443.

IMAGE REFERENCES

(in order of appearance)

'Sing sign' image on the cover. Photograph from *Awake, My Soul* Official Website Photo Gallery.
Retrieved December 9, 2009 from <http://www.thirdday.com/awake/mainindex.htm>

'The Sacred Harp tunebook' image on the cover. Photograph from *Awake, My Soul* Official Website Photo Gallery. Retrieved December 9, 2009 from
<http://www.thirdday.com/awake/mainindex.htm>

APPENDIX

- 1. Title** Public worship, private faith.
Author(s) Beale, John
Imprint *Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press*
Date 1997
Resource Type Book
Descriptors folk songs; tune compilers; conventions; shape notes
- 2. Title** Anthems of the sacred harp tunesmiths.
Author(s) McKenzie, Wallace
Source *American Music*
Volume 6
Number 3
Pages 247-263
Date 1988, Autumn
Resource Type Journal
Descriptors anthems; fuging tunes; odes; shape note tunebooks
- 3. Title** First sing the notes: Oral and written traditions in sacred harp transmission.
Author(s) Miller, Kiri
Source *American Music*
Volume 22
Number 4
Pages 475-501
Date 2004, Winter
Resource Type Journal
Descriptors all-day singings; ceremonies; dinner on the grounds; hollow square
- 4. Title** Solmization, scale, and key in nineteenth-century four-shape tunebooks: Theory and practice.
Author(s) Taddie, Daniel
Source *American Music*
Volume 14
Number 1
Pages 42-64
Date 1996, Spring
Resource Type Journal
Descriptors four-note scales; major scales; minor scales; shape note tunebooks; solmization

- 5. Title** As far from secular, operatic, rag-time, and jig melodies as possible: Religion and the resurgence of interest in The Sacred Harp, 1895-1911.
- Author(s)** Vinson, Duncan
- Source** *Journal of American Folklore*
- Volume** 119
- Number** 474
- Pages** 413-443
- Date** 2006, Autumn
- Resource Type** Journal
- Descriptors** folk hymns; revivals; shape note tunebooks