A significant part of America’s musical heritage originating in the nineteenth century is the popular shape-note tunebooks that were an outgrowth of the “singing schools.” These collections, which, in their musical notation, used different shapes of note-heads for each syllable of a solfège system, are anthologies of the styles and genres of American music of the time, both sacred and secular. Nineteenth-century American shape-note tunebooks serve as sources for an important body of music—shape-note hymn tunes—which has been, and continues to be, assimilated into the late twentieth-century editions of the hymnals of mainstream Protestant denominations.

The availability and popularity of the shape-note tunes in current hymnals has inspired organ composers to use them as cantus firmi for organ chorale preludes and variation settings. As a result, a wealth of organ chorale settings using shape-note hymn melodies has been published in the twenty-first century spanning 1980–2005. Many of these organ works were composed for use as voluntaries in the worship services of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Christian church. Moreover, some of the compositions are important contributions to the organ concert literature.

Origins

The shape-note phenomenon traces its origins to the psalm singing of New England. Congregational singing in the churches of the early eighteenth century had, in the opinion of the clergy and musicians of the day, fallen into a deplorable state. One person, eloquently describing the state of congregational singing in 1724, said, “The Singing appears to be rather a confused Noise, made up of Reading, Speaking, and Grumbling, than a decent and orderly part of God’s worship.” In order to improve the state of congregational singing, a form of musical education, the “singing school,” was developed. Its purpose was to teach congregations the elements of music so that the people could sing “by note, instead of rote.”

One of the earliest books developed for use in singing schools was John Tufts’s An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes, which appeared in the 1720s. Tufts’s book utilized the four-note system of solfège (fa, sol, la, mi) that had been imported to America from England. Tufts used abbreviations of the syllables on the musical staff rather than traditional music notation. Tufts’s system, as it appeared in his book, is shown in Figure 1.

In 1801, William Little and William Small compiled what is considered the first shape-note collection, The Easy Instructor. Rather than using conventional notation, the two men devised a system in which the four syllables—fa, sol, la, mi—were each notated with a different note-head shape. The collection became so popular that, according to Marion Hutchett, thirty-four editions or printings of The Easy Instructor were published between 1802 and 1832. The shapes, as developed and notated in Little and Small’s collection, are shown in Figure 2. Using these four shapes, a major scale noted in shape-notes consists of the sequence demonstrated in Figure 3.

For the many Americans who had little or no formal musical background or education, this new approach to notation made tonal reading much simpler. The singers needed to know only the shapes of the notes; they did not have to deal with a music reading system in which locating the tonic note depended upon the ability to distinguish key signatures. The shape-note system did have one major disadvantage—no means was devised to indicate accidentals by using shapes. As many of the tunes used in the collections were diatonic in nature, this disadvantage evidently was not a major concern to either the compilers or the singers.

Collections

The invention of the shape-note led to a proliferation of published music collections using the new notation system. During the first half of the eighteenth century, numerous compilers published editions of the shape-note tunebooks. George Pullen Jackson, one of the twentieth-century pioneers in the research of the shape-note tradition, lists thirty-eight collections published in the four-shape system between 1718 and 1835. Twenty-one of the books Jackson designated as works by compilers who lived in the South. Richard J. Stanislaw’s more recent research provides evidence of even a larger number of four-shape collections. Stanislaw lists some ninety-five tunebooks published in the four-shape system in the United States between 1798 and 1859.

A significant contribution of the shape-note collections was their function as a repository of American tunes from the oral tradition. Though these types of tunes had appeared in hymnals or collections, such as the United States Sacred Harmony (1799) and The Christian Repository of Sacred Music (1800), the first shape-note hymnal to incorporate a large number of oral tradition tunes was John Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second (1813). Irving Lowens observes that forty-four of the tunes in this collection were “folk hymns.” The Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second played an important role in the dissemination of these tunes. According to information provided by Lowens, Mania Davis, the compiler of the influential Kentucky Harmony and the Supplement to Kentucky Harmony, used fifteen tunes from Wyeth’s Part Second collection. William Walker, in his Southern Harmony & Sacred Music: Part First (1839), borrowed twenty of these tunes.

Walker’s Southern Harmony

A significant source of the shape-note tunes found in today’s hymnals is Walker’s The Southern Harmony & Sacred Music: Part Second (1835). The Southern Harmony was published as a repository of American tunes from the oral tradition. Though these types of tunes had appeared in hymnals or collections, such as the United States Sacred Harmony (1799) and The Christian Repository of Sacred Music (1800), the first shape-note hymnal to incorporate a large number of oral tradition tunes was John Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second (1813). Irving Lowens observes that forty-four of the tunes in this collection were “folk hymns.” The Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second played an important role in the dissemination of these tunes. According to information provided by Lowens, Mania Davis, the compiler of the influential Kentucky Harmony and the Supplement to Kentucky Harmony, used fifteen tunes from Wyeth’s Part Second collection. William Walker, in his Southern Harmony & Sacred Music: Part First (1839), borrowed twenty of these tunes.
Musical Companion (hereafter referred to as Southern Harmony). One of the most popular and successful of the nineteenth-century shape-note tunebooks, Southern Harmony served as an important "anthology" of the musical styles and tastes of rural America. Harry Eskew notes, it is probably the first shape-note collection to be compiled in the "Deep South." The legibility, variety, and number of this popular collection continues even today as the "Big Sing" day held annually in Brenton, Kentucky.

Walker was born on May 6, 1809, in southern North Carolina, near a small village known as Cross Keys. Around the time he was eight years old, his family moved to a small community called Cedar Springs, near Spartanburg, South Carolina. At age 15, Walker married Amy, the wife of Benjamin Franklin White, who would become the compiler of The Sacred Harp. Not only is 1836 the year Walker married Amy, it is the same year he published his first and most well-known shape-note collection, Southern Harmony.14 In addition to Southern Harmony, Walker compiled three other collections during his lifetime, including the Southern and Western Pocket Harmonist, The Christian Harmonist, and Fruits and Flowers.15 Although Walker is considered the compiler of Southern Harmony and the other shape-note collections during his lifetime, the work was initially a joint project of Walker and his brother-in-law, B. F. White.

In 1835, Southern Harmony underwent several revisions, with the 1840 edition containing the bulk of the text as it currently exists. During the years of its publication, the collection was obviously popular, as Walker later claimed that 600,000 copies of it had been sold.16 Hymnologist Charles Callahan describes several reasons why Southern Harmony is a significant shape-note collection: 1) its use as a textbook to learn to read music, 2) its role in continuing early American psalmody, and 3) its musical companion for numerous word-only hymnals.17 Eskew also notes that Southern Harmony "was published as a repository of melodies from oral tradition" and that "Walker and other rural-oriented singing school teachers/composers drew from the rich oral tradition of the Anglo-American folk tradition to provide material for many hymn texts."18 Walker, in the preface to the first edition of Southern Harmony in 1835, states that he had "composed the parts to a great many good airs (which could not be found in any publication)" and assigned my name as author.19 It may be surmised that many of the " airs" popular melodies or folk tunes of the day that were passed on by oral tradition. Hymnologist Austin C. Lovelace recounts that, "When Walker was going around doing singing schools, he also asked for some good tunes. He would then write them down and claim them as his own."20

Sources of texts and tunes are indicated for some of the hymns, though often no source is documented for other songs. Glen Wilson relates that approximately one-fourth of the hymns texts were written by Isaac Watts.21 Of the 341 tune names in the index, Wilson maintains that about 250 of them can be attributed to 110 composers, with the remaining tunes being "unknown persons."22 Walker added 73 tunes to his collection. It is interesting to note that, according to Eskew, approximately one-fourth of the tunes Walker added in 1835 were in "the style of the folk hymn."23

Southern Harmony incorporated some important "firsts" regarding several hymn tunes. Walker marked the first time the text "Amazing Grace," and the tune "New Britain" were joined together in a shape-note collection. The edition of 1840 contained the first appearance of the tune "Shenandoah." With the text "What wondrous love is this," and the 1854 edition has one of the early appearances of the tune "Dover or Peace."24

The inclusion of the American tunes in this shape-note collection has helped to preserve them for future generations. Unlike its popular counterpart, The Sacred Harp, which has undergone a number of revisions over the years of its existence, even as recently as 1991. Southern Harmony has had no additions or corrections to its music since the final version of 1844. As if Southern Harmony were a repository of numerous musical styles and tastes of nineteenth-century America, particularly of southern and rural America. Eskew remarks that, "No wonder Southern Harmony was so popular... by oral tradition, and they were united with tunes which had circulated among the people for years in oral tradition, and the use of these tunes in hymnals."25 During the years of its publication, Walker expressed a number of revisions over the years of its publication, with the final one being the 1854 edition. Of the 1854 edition has one of the early appearances of the tune "Dover or Peace."15 During the years of its publication, Walker expressed a number of revisions over the years of its publication, with the final one being the 1854 edition.16

New England "reforms" As the shape-note tradition moved into the southern and western states, a mid-to-late nineteenth-century movement emerged in New England to eliminate American tunes, as found in shape-note tunebooks, from church hymnals and music collections. New England reformers, among whom were Lowell Mason and Thomas Hastings, considered music and hymn of European background and influence to be superior to America's "folk-style" music. Hymn tunes and music composed in the European style were referred to as "correct" harmonies.21 It is ironic that the New England area, once the heart of America's "Copperplate" schools and shape-note systems, is the same geographic area that led to the substantial development of shape-note singing and the use of these tunes in hymnals.21

In his White Spirituals of the Southern Uplands, devotes a chapter (chapter VII) to the subject of the shape-note tradition. Through the 1889 edition of the Methodist Hymnal contained a number of the tunes: the 1895 edition included only four of what Jackson calls "fasola popular tunes"—"A Cutler, Nettleton, Meek, and Greenhills.22 Jackson's research notes out that the Service of Thanksgiving (1837), a hymnal used by the Baptists in more urban areas, embodied only nine tunes from the "fasola tradition." Another hymnal used in the early twentieth century, Modern Hymnal (1924), incorporated only seventeen of what Jackson refers to as hymns of "specific southern fasola making.22 Jackson asserts that the Philadel-phia publishers, suppliers of hymnals to southern Presbyterian churches, included all indigenous songs of the southern and western revival.25 An examination of Presbyterian hymnals of the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century certainly underscores this observation. The Presbyterian hymnals of 1874, 1895 (revised in 1897), and 1905 all contain some hymn tunes—just as today's hymnals do—common to Southern Harmony and other similar tunebooks. These tunes, however, are primarily ones with identified composers—such as Azmon, Coronation, and Duke Street. Based on this author's examination of the index of tune names in each of these three editions of hymnals, Nettleton seems to be the only anon-ymous shape-note tune included in Pres-byterian hymnals until the appearance of the 1905 edition of the hymnal.26

As late as the twentieth century as 1940, American shape-note tunes held little respect among some scholars who were interested in serious hymnody. Henry Walker Foote, in Three Centuries of American Hymnody, spends little time focusing on the history or importance of the tunes. His writing contains remarks such as, "While in general their effect on American hymnody has been permanent or valuable... the folk hymn was routed to revivals and social gatherings like out-of-doors camping trips, and in any case they fall outside the main current of American hymnody, can surmise from Foote's statements, Raymond Glover's support that the efforts of musicians like Nettleton and others whose "effects may still be seen in today's mainstream hymnals" is certainly not supported.27 Fortunately, these efforts initiated by the "scientific" musicians of the mid-nineteenth century experienced a notable reversal in the late twentieth century.

Table 1. Shape-note Tunes in Hymnals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hymnal</th>
<th>Number of Shape-note Tunes</th>
<th>Percentage of Tunes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptist, 1854</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist, 1895</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist, 1955</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist, 1978</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian, 1955</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian, 1978</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist, 1982</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist, 1989</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twentieth-century acceptance Five Protestant denominational hymnals—Southern Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian, USA, and United Methodist—were selected to be surveyed as to their inclusion of shape-note tunes. These were chosen because of the importance of each denomination in the current of American Hymnody. The survey included an inspection of ten hymnals to discern the number of tunes that appear to be of shape-note origin. African-American spirituals, frequently designated as African folk tunes or melodies in older hymnals, were not within the parameters of the research. The numerical results of the American tune survey, shown in Table 1, verify the thesis that there is a definite increase in the number of shape-note tunes in the current editions of the denominational hymnals compared to the previous editions. In the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian hymnals, the growth in the number of tunes is significant. Though the increase in the number of shape-note tunes in the most recent hymnals is noted by each denomination, the percentage does not indicate an increase because the hymnals contain a larger number of total hymn tunes. The
1906 edition contains only 417 hymn tunes, whereas the 1989 edition includes 504 tunes. Some of the denominational hymnals use various sources for their tunes, some of the shape-note tunes included in hymnals have indications of possible composers. An example is the tune NELTLE, identified in two hymnals as being composed by John Wyeth.47 The tune did appear in the 1911 edition of Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second, but it originated from the "coining" of the editorial board of Baptist Hymnal.48 Given that the tunes were so freely copied in an oral tradition before they were noted in hymnals, it is difficult for musicologists and historians to determine the original composers.

Among the various shape-note collections of the nineteenth century, William Walker's Southern Harmony serves as an important source of American shape-note tunes, especially in the more recent editions of the selected hymnals. In each denomination, the number of hymn tunes attributed to either William Walker or Walker's Southern Harmony shows a significant increase. The frequency of their attribution as a source may be observed in Table 2.

Factors in 20th-century acceptance

Based on the information and statistics indicated above, it is clear that there is a significant increase in the number of shape-note tunes included in recent hymnals. Perhaps related to the success of the shape-note tradition in the congregational text and tune combination this has not always been the case in recent hymnals. The growth of shape-note tunes in recent hymnals, and the significant increase in their attribution as a source, may be observed in Table 2.

The increase in the number of shape-note tunes is due to a number of factors including: 1) the increased number of published organ pieces, based on 46 different tunes compiled by this author, a total of 238 organ pieces, based on American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 2) the publication ofShape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 3) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 4) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 5) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 6) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, 7) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89, and 8) the publication of Shape-note scores including works by American folk melodies in TUMH '89.

The factors that Music considers significant are echoed by others who have been involved in the editorial process of recent hymnals. Carlson Young, editor of The Hymnal 1982, for example, notes that "the growth of shape-note tunes is the result of the increasing interest in American folk tunes, especially in the more recent hymnals. These settings, however, were not inspired by the composer's familiarity with tunes found in a denominational hymnal; instead, they seem to be the result of the composer's acquaintance with a shape-note collection, primarily The Sacred Harp."

Because the hymnals of the early-to-mid twentieth century contained very few American shape-note tunes, it was not until their inclusion into mainline hymnals that they began to be more widely known to many organists and to the general public. Hence, when examined in the context of the literature performed on organ recitals and concerts, a significant number of organ pieces, based on American folk melodies in TUMH '89, appeared around the mid-twentieth century. These settings, however, were not inspired by the composer's familiarity with tunes found in a denominational hymnal, instead, they seem to be the result of the composer's acquaintance with a shape-note collection, primarily The Sacred Harp.

The Sacred Harp—early-twentieth-century American composer Gardner Read composed a number of works in the repertoire of church choirs. Read relied on a copy of The Sacred Harp as the source of the tunes used in his compositions. In the scores of both collections, Read notes that the tunes were based on a "whole series of hymn-tunes found in the 1802 edition of The Sacred Harp, a collection of white spirituals and Southern folk tunes. Read followed the tune's source for the composition, and in several cases, they are found in Southern Harmony."
first volume, the number of works catalyst, and the number of tunes included in the Hymnset: Four Chorale Preludes on Old American Tunes section of the volume two lists the following number of organ set-

foundations: 21, Holy Manna – 15, I. Love – 15, and Dove of Peace – 0. The organ compositions based on shape-note tunes, for the most part, are not very significant organ literature are number of tunes once unknown are now modern in many hymnals; as a result, organists and composers have been, and continue to be, drawn to them for sources of cants. This growing body of organ literature represents music of a wide range of difficulty, compositional creativity, and usefulness. The shape-note collections of the nineteenth century, including the popular and significant Southern Harmony, helped preserve the tunes and harmonizations that are part of our American history. The use of this organ literature is significant in the minds of other American composers, and should be considered. The organ literature resulting from this rediscovery will assist in the preservation of these tunes for new audiences and generations to come.

Summary

The heritage of American tunes contained within the shape-note tradition of the nineteenth century, whether or not they are called shape-note, folk, or American folk tunes, represents an important body of music, which in the last thirty years, has been discovered and brought into a rightful place in American hymnody. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the rediscovery of this music prompted main-teen activity and a more significant number of tune tunes for various levels of difficulty, length, and effectiveness. This particular body of organ literature deserves to be both performed and recognized. The continuing role it plays in exposing both church and concert audiences to the music of Southern Hymnody is similar to many of the tunes included in its catalogue. The current availability of shape-note tunes in the hymnals of main-teen Protestant denominations is a contributing factor to the increasing number of organ set-

foundations: Foundation – 23; Holy Manna – 6; and Dove of Peace – 4. This growing body of organ literature represents music of a wide range of difficulty, compositional creativity, and usefulness. The shape-note collections of the nineteenth century, including the popular and significant Southern Harmony, helped preserve the tunes and harmoniations that are part of our American history. The use of this organ literature is significant in the minds of other American composers, and should be considered. The organ literature resulting from this rediscovery will assist in the preservation of these tunes for new audiences and generations to come.

Notes

5. Richard J. Stanislav, A Checklist of Four-Shape Shape-Note Tunebooks (New York: Institute for Studies in American Mu-

sic, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 1970), 45–54.

mognition/hymnset.hmtl

8. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

er,” 127–137.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Harry Eskew, “The Significance of Wil-

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27. Ibid, 309.
28. Ibid, 310.
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