



"I'VE LEARN'D TO SING A GLAD NEW SONG":
SINGING SACRED HARP WITH THE OTTAWA SHAPE NOTE CHORUS

by
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Abstract

This thesis explores how Sacred Harp—a choral tradition of the Southern United States with deep rural and religious roots—is expressed within the urban, Northern, and secular context of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. Through an examination of the social and musical practices of the Ottawa group, this thesis will demonstrate the extent to which these regional and religious contextual differences are bridged by the overarching communal and personal meanings that singers draw from practicing Sacred Harp. In examining how the Ottawa group's interaction with the tradition creates a communal expression of sacred song, this thesis will explore how the Northern revival of Sacred Harp relates both to the breakdown of the traditional community within, and the secularization of, postmodern society. Doing so will illuminate the contextual flexibility of Sacred Harp and the use of folk revivalism as a means of restoring engagement with community and with the sacred.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Encountering Sacred Harp through Revival

Sacred Harp is a communal expression of sacred song; it is both a musical and a social tradition (McKenzie 1988, 262). Singers of Sacred Harp gather together in a seating formation known as “the hollow square” and—unaccompanied by any instrumentation—they sing from a Christian tunebook called *The Sacred Harp*.¹ The songs contained in this book are arranged in four-part harmony and are transcribed in a system of notation called “shape note”. A “Sacred Harp sing”—that is, a session of singing—can last anywhere from a couple of hours to a multiday event known as a Sacred Harp convention (Miller 2007, 16).

More than simply a type of hymn or a particular form of musical notation, Sacred Harp encompasses a wide range of community-making practices which, when knit together, govern both how the songs are intended to be sung as well as how the singers of Sacred Harp relate to one another in their sharing of this tradition and in their communal expression of the music. The tradition takes its name from *The Sacred Harp*, a collection of hymns originally published in Hamilton, Georgia in 1844 by B.F. White and E.J. King (Cobb 1989, 67). What makes *The Sacred Harp* unique is both the style of notation it employs and the set of customs it transcribes for the manner in which the songs are to be sung. Together with the tradition that bears its name, *The Sacred Harp* owes much of both its form and content to two significantly intertwined and interdependent musical traditions that emerged in and around New England beginning in the early 18th century. These two traditions were shape note notation and the singing schools in which shape

¹ The title of this thesis quotes from the lyrics to “A Glad New Song” (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 530).

note was both taught and practiced, the former granting its influence to the notation utilized by *The Sacred Harp* and the latter granting its influence to the manner in which the songs of *The Sacred Harp* are sung. As will be demonstrated in this introductory chapter, while both the musical and social traditions of Sacred Harp can be traced back to the shape note traditions of New England, it was in the rural South that shape note ultimately forged its deepest and most fruitful roots (Jackson 1933a, 22). Consequently, shape note traditions have becoming largely synonymous, if somewhat misleadingly so, with *The Sacred Harp*, and accordingly, shape note and Sacred Harp alike are primarily associated with the context in which these traditions most prominently flourished (Miller 2008, 8).

Sacred Harp is neither something to experience in isolation from others nor from a position of passive consumption (Marini 2003, 94). As Sacred Harp historian Buell Cobb asserts, "Sacred Harp music is ultimately group singing" (1989, 3). The musical elements of the tradition cannot easily be divorced from the intricate social implications and meanings of singing Sacred Harp. As Cobb goes on to suggest, Sacred Harp is "deeply rooted in a social pattern, a set of comfortable, efficient rituals that have gradually sifted down over the decades into a way of life that seems as natural to its followers as it seems extraordinary to those who stumble upon it from without" (1989, 10). As a tradition based not only upon musical forms and practices but one which is at the same time deeply rooted in and intricately dependant upon the social realities within which it is practiced, the possibility of transporting Sacred Harp from one context to another poses several potential difficulties. Accordingly, Sacred Harp has often times been considered a tradition so embedded within its most prominent environment—the rural churches of the

Southern United States—that, despite the tradition tracing its roots to the Northern United States, to effectively translate and express Sacred Harp outside of the religious South has been viewed by some as ultimately impossible.

Though Sacred Harp may readily appear to be a tradition so entrenched within the social constructs of the religious South that transporting it elsewhere would pose considerable difficulties, in tracing the roots of Sacred Harp through its ancestors in the wider tradition of shape note music, the tradition is found to have a significantly nomadic history; a history heavily marked by both migration and revival, and one in which the tradition at large has continually adapted to and been newly interpreted within each new context. Though commonly conceived of, and popularly portrayed as, an “ancient” religious tradition of the Southern “folk” of the United States (Jackson 1933b, 4), with its origins in the nondenominational singing schools of New England (Farquharson 1983, 14), Sacred Harp has throughout its history negotiated the boundaries of regional and religious identity (Campbell 1997, 169). This negotiation has intensified in the years since the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, during which time the popularization of Sacred Harp as a folk tradition of the rural South encouraged numerous urban Northerners to begin adopting the tradition as their own (Bealle 1997, xii), an adoption that is especially complicated by the fact that it has tended to transport Sacred Harp from its deeply religious context in the rural South to the largely secular framework and approach of singers who practice Sacred Harp in the North. The difficulty and potential impossibility of transporting Sacred Harp from a sacred to a secular context has sparked significant debate since the Northern revival of Sacred Harp took hold in the 1970s.

By 1984 this revival had migrated across the Canadian border with the foundation of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus by folklorist and musician Sheldon Posen. It is the purpose of this thesis to explore how Sacred Harp functions and is uniquely expressed within an urban, Northern, and secular context by examining both the musical and the social practices of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, a group that I was fortunate enough to both speak and to sing along with over the spring and summer of 2008. In this introductory chapter, I intend to acquaint the reader with the basic rudiments and history of Sacred Harp as well as to provide a preliminary description of my own encounters with Sacred Harp—beginning with the first time I heard Sacred Harp music and continuing on to my eventual participation with the tradition, singing with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. The aim of this chapter is thus to establish the appropriate framework necessary before proceeding in subsequent chapters to address the central question of this thesis, which is: how is Sacred Harp expressed within an urban, Northern, and most critically, a *secular* context?

Preliminary Overview of the Musical and Social Traditions of Sacred Harp

To introduce the musical elements of Sacred Harp, it is imperative to begin first with the songs of *The Sacred Harp* and a description of both the manner in which they are transcribed and the notation system that they employ. *The Sacred Harp* has been revised and re-issued four times since its initial publication, with the latest edition being released in 1991 (Bealle 1997, 223). The 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp* contains 554 songs. In addition to the song's title, the heading for each individual selection includes the year of composition, the composer, the lyricist, the key, and a brief excerpt from scripture

befitting the particular song. For example, beneath its title, "Wayfaring Stranger" features a quotation from Jeremiah 14:10, reading: "Thus have they loved to wander" (qtd. in *The Sacred Harp* 1991, 457). While the heading of each song indicates the key in which the selection has been transcribed, it is worth pointing out that the songs are traditionally sung in a "relative pitch" provided by a song leader rather than an instrument (Garst 1991, 13). Apart from a few rare exceptions that omit the alto line, the songs of *The Sacred Harp* are written in four-part harmony, with the melody in the tenor line. To accommodate all of the vocal parts, the verses of the songs are transcribed on four separate staves, one placed above the other and each corresponding with one vocal part so that, in descending order, the top staff is that of the trebles, the second is the altos, the third is the tenors, and the bottom staff is the bass line (Garst 1991, 13). While transcribed as a four-part harmony, since *The Sacred Harp* is typically sung by men and women in unison, the result is often the even more full and intricately complex sound of a six or seven part harmony. As John Garst notes in the introductory piece of the 1991 *Sacred Harp* entitled "Rudiments of Music", "The doubling of the tenor and treble (and sometimes the alto) in the vocal ranges of men and women creates an effect of six-(or seven-)part [sic] harmony" (13).

As previously stated, the notation system utilized by *The Sacred Harp* is one known as shape note. This notation is a solfege system that attaches a solmization syllable to each note of a scale. What makes shape note notation unique from other solfege systems is that in an effort to improve a singer's ability to sight-read the music, a different shape is also assigned to the head of each note (Jackson 1933b, 395). The particular shape note system employed by *The Sacred Harp* is a four-shape system whereby a scale

consists of the following sequence; *fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la-mi-fa*. Accordingly, each of the four syllables—the *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *mi*—are indicated on the staff by a corresponding shape that is attached to the head of each note. The *fa* is signified by a triangle, the *sol* by an oval, the *la* by a square, and the *mi* by a diamond (see Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 The C Major Scale in the Four-Shape Notation of *The Sacred Harp*

In addition to these transcription and notation components of the songs, the musical customs of Sacred Harp involve various practices pertaining to the manner in which the songs are sung—practices that are outlined within the introductory notes of *The Sacred Harp*. Each of these musical customs occurs within “the hollow square”. This term refers to the seating arrangement in which singers customarily gather for a session of singing. Divided into four sections, corresponding to each of the harmony parts of the music, singers are seated facing one another in a square formation with a vacant centre. In addition to establishing a particular configuration necessary for singing Sacred Harp, various customs govern the singing that occurs within the hollow square. These customs pertain primarily to the following areas: song selection, song leading, pitching, vocal projection and the practice known as “singing the notes” whereby each verse of a song is first sung in the language of the solfege system—the *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *mi*—before proceeding on to the words of the particular song at hand.

These traditions of the hollow square, while primarily musical in nature, are not exclusively musical with regards to function. They also serve to create and foster community within the hollow square. Consequently, there is a significant degree of overlap between these musical customs of the hollow square and the more explicitly social customs of Sacred Harp. These more expressly social customs of Sacred Harp involve such practices as the inclusion of prayers and testimonies at the opening and closing of a singing session. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will be focusing on the two most prominent social customs of Sacred Harp: “the memorial lesson” and “dinner-on-the-grounds”.

The memorial lesson is a Sacred Harp tradition that pays tribute to recently deceased singers of a particular singing group or community through a unique combination of spoken word and song (Bealle 1997, 174). With the memorial lesson, Sacred Harp’s enactment of a collective musical expression thus extends to a shared expression of mourning. This collective expression of grief finds its antithesis in the communal expression of joy that is the celebratory communal feast known as dinner-on-the-grounds. Dinner-on-the-grounds is a potluck meal—often quite an elaborate one—that is traditionally held during an all-day singing session, typically taking place at noon to provide a mid-day recess for singers to rest their voices and to share both a meal and some conversation with one another (Miller 2008, 63). What unites all customs of Sacred Harp is their intrinsically collective nature. It is the combination of all of these customs—both the primarily musical and the expressly social—that constitutes the intricately woven pattern that has come to be known as Sacred Harp.

My First Encounters with Sacred Harp

In the winter of 2004, I received as a Christmas gift from my parents a copy of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*—a collection of eighty-four field recordings made throughout the United States during the 1920s and released by Folkways records in 1952. For the remainder of that bitterly cold winter I spent in Ottawa, I slowly made my way through this impressive collection of quintessential American folk music, meeting a whole slew of compelling characters along the way, from John Henry to Henry Lee. And somewhere in between Clarence Ashley singing about a coo-coo bird that “never hollers coo-coo ‘till the fourth day July” and Blind Lemon Jefferson asking a favour that his grave be kept clean, were two songs, which for me, stood out amongst all of the strange and wonderful sounds that I was hearing for the first time.

Those two songs were “Rocky Road” and “Present Joys”, both performed by a group of singers identified as the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers. Perhaps it was the intricate and wide-ranging harmonies, the fiery language of the lyrics, the passionate delivery of those lyrics, or maybe it was the captivating cacophony of sound that each of these elements created when combined, but whatever the source of the initial appeal, these two songs instantly captured my imagination. Just what exactly were these songs about? Where had they come from? Who was singing them? The mystery was only deepened by the fact that each song seemed to begin in a foreign language that I could not identify. The words that I *could* decipher amidst the delicately interwoven lines of the latter verses of each song seemed deeply religious. Raised in booming intensity, the choir of enigmatic voices singing “Rocky Road” rang forth: “Almost done travelling the mighty rocky road/To go where Jesus is” (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 294). And in “Present Joys”

they sang: "For present joys, for blessings past/And for the hope of heaven at last" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 318). It seemed that this was, as the name of the singing group would suggest, indeed a *sacred* form of music. The name of the group, along with the particular accent of the singers' voices, also led me to determine that this was a musical tradition of the Southern United States. At the same time, the quality of the recordings themselves, each made in 1928, left me with an impression of this music as dating back to at least the early 1900s and likely to have its roots as far back as 18th century America. This suspicion was confirmed by the brief write-up for "Rocky Road" contained in the *Anthology's* handbook which informed me not only that this style of singing took its songs largely from a tunebook called *The Sacred Harp* but also that this was a "method of choral singing used very early in this country" and that most of the tunes had been "written during and before the revolutionary period" (Smith 1952, 8).

Each of these facts—that this was a religious form of music, that it was from the Southern United States, and that it was a tradition nearly as old as America itself—ultimately lead to a somewhat jarring experience upon attending my first Sacred Harp sing, not by traveling back in time to a colonial-era church in rural Alabama, but rather simply by taking a series of city buses on a Sunday afternoon in the spring of 2008 to the home of Jim Nuyens and Adrienne Stevenson in downtown Ottawa. Both Jim and Adrienne have been singing Sacred Harp for nearly ten years with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. Speaking with Adrienne later that spring about her experiences singing Sacred Harp eventually lead to a conversation about the difference between listening to Sacred Harp music and singing it as part of a group. To illustrate her views on the matter, Adrienne passed along a quote from prominent Sacred Harp singer and teacher, Hugh

McGraw—a quote that she had picked up from the founder of the Ottawa group, Sheldon Posen. McGraw is famous in Sacred Harp circles for, amongst other things, having said: “I wouldn’t cross the street to listen to Sacred Harp singing, but I’d travel five hundred miles to sing it myself” (qtd. in Miller 2008, 45).

Such a stress on active participation rather than passive consumption is a long-standing tenet of Sacred Harp. Having first come to the tradition by way of an appreciation of an audio recording, it would seem I had a significant journey to take before I could begin to answer those questions that had first come to mind upon hearing “Rocky Road” and “Present Joys”. This was a journey that would begin that same Sunday afternoon of my first Sacred Harp sing, when it was made immediately clear upon my arrival that I was not to simply observe the group, but rather, would be seriously encouraged, if not outright *required*, to open up a copy of *The Sacred Harp* and sing along.

The Nomadic History of Singing Schools, Shape Note, and Sacred Harp

To account for the discrepancies between my initial impressions of Sacred Harp as an antiquated religious tradition of the rural South and my first experience participating in Sacred Harp as a living tradition and largely secular practice of the urban North, it is crucial to first take a closer look at the history of Sacred Harp. Where my first impressions of Sacred Harp fell short was in recognizing the multiplicity of contexts within which the tradition has been, and continues to be, expressed. Moreover, what I was yet to recognize was the degree of influence that these varied contexts have made not only on the development of Sacred Harp throughout its history but also on its current

teaching methods that would not necessarily be available to or accessible by the masses. They also advocated for imported compositions rather than embracing native hymns (Cobb 1989, 62). In a further slight against the general trajectory of the singing schools, the better music movement downplayed any stress on the vocal abilities of the general congregation of the churches, preferring instead to introduce the organ into church services (Cobb 1989, 62). The potentially offensive implications and often overtly pretentious sentiments of the better music movement were perhaps best voiced by Miss August Brown, who in 1848 wrote in Cincinnati's *Musician and Intelligencer* of her many grievances against the singing schools and their participants:

Hundreds of country idlers, too lazy or too stupid for farmers or mechanics, 'go to singing school for a spell,' get diplomas from others scarcely better qualified than themselves, and then with their brethren, the far famed "Yankee Peddlars," itinerate to all parts of the land, to corrupt the taste and pervert the judgement of the unfortunate people who, for want of better, have to put up with them. (qtd. in Jackson 1933a, 19-20)

The impact of the better music movement was twofold. First, as the comments of Miss Brown suggest, the movement fostered a significantly ostentatious attitude towards the singing schools amongst those Northerners who came to view the schools and their solfege systems—referred to by many as “dunce notes”—as being inferior to more “proper” systems of musical learning and notation (Scholten 1980, 33). Second, the better music movement ultimately resulted in the disappearance of the singing schools and the practice of the solfege systems, first from the Northern cities and eventually from the North at large (Jackson 1933b, 396). It is worth stating however, that the singing schools were not without their defenders in the North and their disappearance did not go entirely without regret. For instance, the editor of *The Boston Courier* wrote in 1848:

The good old days of New England music, have passed away, and the singing-masters who compose and teach it, are known only in history as an extinct race. The good old tunes, Billings' Majesty, Read's Sherburne, Edison's Lenox, could once fill a meeting house quicker than the most eloquent preacher in the country, but all their glory is vanished like Ichabod while instead pompous 'professors' now pummel the ears of their pupils with precepts that profane the sanctuary. (qtd. in Stevenson 1966, 85-86)

It is at this time, with the singing schools retreating to rural areas and ultimately to the South, that the shapes themselves begin to take a greater hold. As Buell Cobb notes of this point in shape note history, "the geographical spread of new song books using the four-shape notation points the progress of the singing-school movement southward" (Cobb 1989, 66). The most popular tunebook to emerge from this period was *The Sacred Harp*. Published in Georgia in 1844 by B.F. White and E.J. King, *The Sacred Harp* has reigned from that day to this as the most popular and revered tunebook of the shape note tradition. B.F. White was himself a singing school instructor as well as a composer and wrote several selections within *The Sacred Harp*. The collection of songs in *The Sacred Harp* represents not only what had become the most popular shape note songs over the fifty-year period leading up to the tunebook's publication but also a significant number of local songs and compositions that were popular in the area in Georgia where White lived and worked. Not necessarily being "composed" in the strictest sense of the word, several of these songs borrowed quite heavily from tunes and lyrics that had gained prominence through oral tradition (Cobb 1989, 72). The more Southern-based selections of *The Sacred Harp* were not only influenced by the oral traditions of the area but also by the environment itself—the landscape and its sounds. Several of the Southern composers were strong advocates of music being a reflection of nature (Cobb 1989, 61). A particularly prominent story amongst Sacred Harp historians and within Sacred Harp

circles in general, is that recounting the composition of "The Weeping Pilgrim", which was written by J.P. Reese in 1859 to be published ten years later in the second edition of *The Sacred Harp*. It is uncertain to what extent this account is entirely accurate but oral history tells us that Reese, sitting in a farm field composing "The Weeping Pilgrim" and finding himself desirous of a particular note to fill out the piece, found inspiration in the sound produced by the "mournful lowing" of a nearby cow (Cobb 1989, 74). As indicated by the influence of local oral traditions and the Southern landscape on the songs of *The Sacred Harp*, the retreat of shape note singing to the Southern United States would have a significant impact on the tradition as a whole, as it came to develop and be transformed within this new and especially fruitful context.

Having retreated from the North to find new fertile ground to take root and grow in the South, shape note singing would remain largely unnoticed outside of the Southern states until it was ultimately "rediscovered" by musicologist George Pullen Jackson in the 1930s. Jackson made recordings of Sacred Harp music in the South and published work on its expression there. In 1933, Jackson published a fundamental work of Sacred Harp literature, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*. This work traced the retreat of shape note music from the North to the South and examined in some detail the expression of Sacred Harp as practiced in the South at that time. Contemporary Sacred Harp scholar Kiri Miller suggests that the legacy of Jackson's work lies both in the association of shape note with the rural South as well as the portrayal of the tradition as "indigenous American folksong" (Miller 2008, 12). Accordingly, much of Jackson's written work, along with his recordings, laid a strong foundation for the eventual re-emergence of shape note music in the North (Bealle 97, 190).

Sacred Harp and the North American Folk Music Revival

The return of shape note to the North owes much to the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, during which the popularization of Sacred Harp as a time-honoured folk tradition of the rural South encouraged numerous Northerners not only to listen to audio recordings of the music but also to pick up *The Sacred Harp* and try it out for themselves (Bealle 1997, xii). Thus, somewhat ironically, as part of the folk music revival, it was largely the same archaic, outdated, rural associations of shape note music that, having initially caused the tradition to disappear from the North, ultimately provided a significant impetus for its revival there. In "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory", Tamara Livingston defines music revivals as: "social movements which strive to "restore" a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society" (1999, 66). Livingston goes on to note that a music revival does not emerge solely by a renewed interest in a musical system perceived to be in decline or consigned to a bygone era, but rather is "shaped by the social, political and economic circumstances which motivate revivalists to take action in the first place" (1999, 68). Neil Rosenberg highlights three primary influences that gave rise to the North American folk music revival. These three influences are as follows: first, the active interest in folk music by collectors, lecturers and authors—such as George Pullen Jackson—who collected and circulated folk music throughout the early 20th century; second, the emergence of the political left who, amidst the Great Depression, "embraced folk music as the expression of the American masses" (Rosenberg "Introduction", 1993, 7); and third, the "growth of scholarly interest in studying American culture" (Rosenberg "Introduction", 1993, 7). These three influences converged in the 1930s to promote the

popularity of folksong amongst “small, young, bohemian enclaves”—most prominently in New York City. It was not until the 1950s that this movement entered the mainstream in what Rosenberg calls “the great boom”.

The great boom of the North American folk music revival entered into decline by 1965 when “the merging of folk with rock shrank the popular folk music market (Rosenberg “Introduction”, 1993, 9). However, the impacts of the revival stretched well beyond these few years. As Rosenberg writes, “many people remained involved with folk music, carrying on the kinds of activities initiated during the boom years through festivals, clubs, magazines, and record companies” (“Introduction” 1993, 9). One such remnant of the folk song revival is the continued practice of Sacred Harp in the North.

Sacred Harp was first popularized as American folk music in the North by way of its inclusion in both folk festivals and folk music recordings, such as Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music* (Miller 2008, 17). However, as Buell Cobb suggests, “Sacred Harp has never been a ‘performance’ kind of music” (Cobb 1989, 3). And thus, given the participatory nature of the tradition, while the folksong revival had dissipated by the mid to late 1960s, it was not until the 1970s that the Northern revival of Sacred Harp truly took hold. This revival did not develop in isolation from the Southern Sacred Harp communities, but rather in many ways was encouraged and fostered by singers from the South. Most notable amongst such efforts were those of Hugh McGraw, who by the mid 1970s began travelling around the Northern states conducting Sacred Harp workshops and encouraging Northern singers not only to learn how to sing from *The Sacred Harp*, but also to practice such customs as the hollow square and singing the notes

As Posen's comments suggest, it was primarily the gap that existed between the ethnic, cultural, and geographic roots of revivalists and those of the musical traditions they were seeking to revive that gave way to debates over the authenticity of the revival. Bruce Jackson writes:

Like many revivals, it appealed primarily to individuals who celebrated traditions not their own. Blues were popular in the folksong revival, but the audiences were mostly whites; rural songs and performers were popular, but the audiences were mostly urban; labor songs were popular, but the audiences were mostly middle-class students. (1993, 73)

Largely due to its association with the folk revival, by the time shape note re-emerged in the North it had come to be viewed not as a music that had originated in the North but rather primarily as a folk tradition of the rural South—a perception that can be traced back to George Pullen Jackson's work (Miller 2008, 12). While the tunebook, *The Sacred Harp*, could easily be transported, for many it would seem that the tradition itself could not be—a view which Buell Cobb gave voice to with the publication of *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* in 1978, saying:

The Sacred Harp songs may be transplanted, but the tradition itself can not be. It is not at last the body of printed songs in the book that constitutes the Sacred Harp, but rather the whole ritualized tradition that envelops the music, transforming it into a living enactment of the past. And this cannot be simulated. Nor can the tradition stand apart from an appreciation of the religious nature of the songs and the inspiration for the praise found therein. (1989, 154)

As Cobb's comments suggest, a significant cultural divide between Southern and Northern singers became readily apparent upon the revival of Sacred Harp in the North (Marini 2003, 90). On the one end of this divide were rural Christian Southerners who had been raised with Sacred Harp as an integral part of their familial, social and religious lives. On the other extreme of this divide were urban Northerners, typically discovering

the tradition through venues of mass media and most commonly singing Sacred Harp within an expressly secular context. For some this divide indicated an impossibility for Northern singers to truly access and participate in the tradition. As Kiri Miller makes clear, "North and South are crucial regional categories in Sacred Harp discourse" (Miller 2004, 499), and despite the fact that Sacred Harp traces its roots to the singing schools and shape note traditions of the North, there remains a sense that contemporary Northern singers fall short of fully expressing the tradition as it came to develop in the South. This is a position that has been held not only by select academics and Southern singers but also by several Northern singers themselves. For example, in an article published on the official website of the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, Northern singer Stephen Levine commented on his experiences attending the 1994 Antioch sing in Ider, Alabama as follows:

We can't create singings that feel precisely like this in the North. We can reproduce every nuance and tone of intonation. We can sing of bane and blessing with pain and pleasure. We can even learn to make fried apple pie and twelve varieties of deviled egg to bring to dinner on the grounds. But I do not believe that we can lose our emotional self-consciousness. I don't think we can sing together as folks do who, in addition to singing Sacred Harp, worship together and share a religious worldview. (Levine 1994)

As Levine's comments suggest, the debate over the ability of Northern singers to effectively express Sacred Harp is a discourse that continues to hold considerable sway over Northern singers' approach to singing Sacred Harp.

The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus

The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus first emerged amidst the tension between the blossoming revival of Sacred Harp in the North and the accompanying debate concerning

the ability of Northerners to properly adopt and express the tradition. One source of debate was the fact that Northern singers were being introduced to the tradition largely via revivalist means while Southern singers had traditionally encountered Sacred Harp through community, religious, and familial connections (Marini 2003, 94). While, as Buell Cobb argued in the late 1970s, the Southern expression of Sacred Harp has from the beginning been a tradition existing "almost wholly in a folk context" (Cobb 1989, 30), the revival of Sacred Harp in the North has, from its beginnings, been greatly dependant upon transmission through mass media such as audio recordings and folk festival showcases, both of which popularized Sacred Harp as American folk music (Bealle 1997, 190). While the importance of rural communities and oral tradition to the development and preservation of Sacred Harp within the Southern context may be viewed as "more traditional" than the means by which the tradition found revival in the North, it is worth pointing out that while Sacred Harp has been a tradition made possible by "the oral preservation of singing techniques, rhythms, and melodies" (Cobb 1989, 30), it is also one which has always to some degree been reliant on means of mass media transmission. As Kiri Miller notes, "the division of the traditional and less traditional on the basis of oral transmission can be deceptive. There is a tunebook after all" (Miller 2008, 79).

A. A Brief History and General Outline of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus

In much the same way that I and many Northerners like me initially discovered Sacred Harp simply by hearing a recording, so too did the founder of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, Sheldon Posen, first discover Sacred Harp by happening upon a Library of

Congress recording of the music.² While completing his degree in Folklore at Memorial University during the late 1970s, Sheldon Posen stumbled upon this recording in the Folklore and Language Archives and was immediately struck by the unique and powerful sound of the music. It was this strong reaction to having heard Sacred Harp that ultimately fuelled his desire to participate in this tradition by teaching both himself and others to sing Sacred Harp. When I spoke with Sheldon Posen in the spring of 2008, he described his first time hearing Sacred Harp as follows:

That music went through me, it sent shivers up my spine and just elated me and I had to do it [...] And the only way to do it was to do it with other people. And the only way you could do it with other people, in Canada, in Ottawa or in Toronto, was to teach other people how to do it so you could. So it was purely selfish. (2008)

Thus while Sheldon was first introduced to Sacred Harp via a recording, it was the indispensably participatory nature of the tradition that ultimately led him to form the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus.

The first meeting of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus was held on January 10th, 1984. Since then, the Ottawa group, which now consists of two separate chapters, has gathered together on a weekly to monthly basis to sing from *The Sacred Harp* within a Northern, urban, and secular context. At the time of my singing with them, each chapter of the group consisted of roughly twelve active members. The founding chapter of the group gathers on a monthly basis, typically on a Tuesday evening. The singing session of the Tuesday chapter is held within the comforts of a member's living room and tends to last about an hour and a half before the singers reconvene for food and conversation in the

² The album was Alan Lomax's 1942 recording of the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers commissioned by the Library of Congress.

host's kitchen. The second chapter of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus emerged in the mid 1990s as a result of a series of Sacred Harp workshops held by Sheldon Posen at the Ottawa Folklore Centre. This chapter also meets on a monthly basis in the living room of a fellow singer. Meeting together typically on a Sunday afternoon for a two hour singing session, the Sunday chapter often concludes their time together with dinner at a nearby restaurant. Both chapters sing in the traditional hollow square formation and follow several other conventional Sacred Harp practices. However, all of this is done within an expressly secular framework and customs involving opening and closing prayers or personal testimonies are omitted from the group's expression of Sacred Harp. In addition to their separate monthly singings, both chapters of the Ottawa group come together on a quarterly basis for singing sessions that are held on the solstices and equinoxes of each year. These larger group sings are commonly held within a community hall and typically feature a potluck dinner to follow the singing. The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus remains an open group, welcoming newcomers without requiring any sort of audition or extensive musical abilities but rather only the willingness to learn and the capacity to carry a tune. It was thus my privilege to join the Ottawa group in the spring and summer of 2008 and to put forth my best effort in singing along.

B. My Fieldwork Experiences with The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus

I first discovered the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus while browsing through a list of singing groups found on the Sacred Harp website (Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association 2007). It was to my pleasant surprise to find that there was a group in my hometown of Ottawa who gathered together to sing Sacred Harp on a regular basis.

Proceeding to the Ottawa group's website, I was also pleased to discover that the group welcomed newcomers (Stevenson and Baril 2007). My first contact with the group was with Adrienne Stevenson, who runs the website. She very kindly welcomed the idea of me attending their singing sessions while making it known to me that I would be expected not only to observe the group but also to participate in the singing. Shortly after attending my first singing session, which was held at Adrienne's home on May 4, 2008, I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with and interview the founder of the group, Sheldon Posen. Over the spring and summer of 2008, I was able not only to attend both the Sunday and Tuesday singing sessions of the Ottawa group but also to interview a total of twelve members of the group. Ten of these interviews were conducted in person while two were completed via email. At the consent of those present, both the singing sessions and the personal interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. For the purposes of this thesis, when quoting from an interview with an informant who requested anonymity, an alias has been given in place of that informant's true name.

Reconsidering the Categories of Sacred Harp Discourse: From Region and Religion to Community and Song

In seeking to answer the primary question of how Sacred Harp is expressed within an urban, Northern, secular context such as that of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, this thesis will demonstrate the extent to which the cultural divide between Southern and Northern contexts is bridged by the musical and social meanings that singers draw from practicing Sacred Harp regardless of their regional or religious identity. In illustrating the extent to which the musical and social meanings of Sacred Harp function to bridge this

of the hollow square, while being an adaptation uniquely formed by the group's own character and context, nevertheless remains true to the primary function of the hollow square—namely, the production of a communal expression of song.

Chapter three will move beyond the boundaries of the hollow square in order to discover the ways in which the community that is formed and rooted within those boundaries extends beyond and branches outside of the hollow square. More specifically, in this chapter I will be deciphering how communal ties are forged and how they function both on a micro level—amongst the members of a particular singing community such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus—as well as on a macro level—that is, both between individual Sacred Harp singers across North America and between a particular group and the Sacred Harp network at large. In doing so, I will discuss particular Sacred Harp traditions that serve to extend community beyond the confines of the hollow square by forging and strengthening communal ties. Of particular relevance here will be the memorial lesson and dinner-on-the-grounds. Overall, I will demonstrate that the community formed and rooted within the hollow square extends beyond its confines in such a way that ultimately not only strengthens individual singing communities such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, but also the Sacred Harp network at large.

Finally, in chapter four I will be shifting my focus away from the community-making practices of Sacred Harp in order to look at the music itself and in particular how the songs of the Sacred Harp are expressed within the secular framework of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. In this chapter I will examine the liminal space that exists between the expressly secular context of the Ottawa group and the passionately religious content of the songs that they sing. In doing so I will argue that, in their occupation of this liminal

space, the Ottawa singers participate in what I have termed a “masquerade of the sacred”; a masquerade in which the singers, adorning the songs of *The Sacred Harp* as one might wear a mask or a costume, are enabled to express and participate in the sacred without having to subscribe to the particular theology of the text. For some this mask of the sacred is merely a facade and a playful guise of the religious, while for others, participating in a masquerade of the sacred affords the opportunity to cultivate some level of genuine personal meaning and significance. This fluctuation between imitation and sincere expression, as afforded by the liminality of masquerade, is performed within a larger social framework in which the singer occupies a delicately balanced position not only between the secular and the sacred but also between abiding in and departing from the conventional milieu of postmodern society.

Conclusion: Postmodern Sacred Harp

Throughout this thesis, the examination of the musical and social traditions of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus—in view of discovering how Sacred Harp is expressed within an urban, Northern, and secular context—will lend itself to unearthing the broader implications of practicing Sacred Harp within a postmodern social framework. In exploring how urban, largely non-religious, Northerners meaningfully engage with and express Sacred Harp, it will prove worthwhile, in the chapters to follow, to concurrently address the question that is the most logical counterpart to the primary enquiry of this thesis: what benefit and meaning do non-religious singers derive from practicing Sacred Harp within an urban, Northern context?

The transportation of Sacred Harp into a largely postmodern context raises several significant issues concerning the role that the tradition is liable to play within such a framework, issues that will be delved into as an integral part of my examination of how Sacred Harp has come to be uniquely expressed within an urban, Northern, and secular context. Through its creation of a “welcoming community of consent” (Miller 2008, 203), the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus’ practice of Sacred Harp offers its members a space in which to experience community and spirituality without belonging to a church or demanding “explicit doctrinal consensus” (Bealle 1989, 241). However far removed from the Southern context of Sacred Harp, the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus’ expression of the tradition may be, in the chapters to follow I will demonstrate the many ways in which the group’s interaction with the tradition bridges the discrepancies evoked by regional and religious categories. This bridge between rural and urban, South and North, sacred and secular is accomplished through the Ottawa group’s engagement with the overarching musical and social meanings inherently involved in Sacred Harp’s creation of a communal expression of sacred song.

Chapter Two

"We'll Shout and Sing with One Accord": Creating Community inside the Hollow Square

*"All glory to the Son of God,
Who died upon the tree;
We'll shout and sing with one accord,
Thru all eternity"*

-Excerpt from "Sing On" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 381)

Attending my first Sacred Harp sing was far from how I first imagined it would be when I was initially introduced to Sacred Harp music by way of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. Listening to the *Anthology*'s scratchy recordings of "Present Joys" and "Rocky Road," I imagined that if there presently remained an opportunity to hear such songs in person, it would likely involve a lengthy trek down winding back roads to a small wooden church somewhere along the countryside of the Southern United States. However, upon discovering Sacred Harp to be alive and well throughout North America, I soon found myself taking a series of buses from my home in the Ottawa countryside into downtown Ottawa, bypassing several churches along the way, in order to arrive at my first Sacred Harp sing which was being held in the home of Jim Nuyens and Adrienne Stevenson.

Armed only with a very rudimentary understanding of Sacred Harp music and well aware from my prior email correspondence with Adrienne Stevenson that I would be fully expected to participate in the singing rather than simply observe, the series of buses that I took in order to arrive at the sing gave me plenty of time to get nervous. These nerves concerning my lack of experience were only amplified by the fact that I would be

singing with a group of people that I had never met before. However, arriving at the Jim and Adrienne's home and being warmly welcomed to take my place amongst the other singers seated in the hollow square, as the sing progressed I became increasingly comfortable and my nerves receded. This was certainly not due to any level of personal musical achievement obtained over the two hours of singing. In fact, my first experience singing Sacred Harp only highlighted the difficulty of singing this music and my lack of proficiency at doing so. While I often found myself quite lost somewhere in between an intricate series of *fa*, *sol*, and *la*, I eventually found that the thoroughly collective nature of singing Sacred Harp not only pulled me into participating with the group but that through this participation I began to feel that I was a part of the group. Entering the sing as a nervous stranger, I would leave not only with an amplified enthusiasm for the music itself, but also with the satisfaction of having participated in a highly collaborative musical endeavour—a satisfaction that, for me, had already begun to foster a sense of belonging to a community. This sense of belonging increased every time I sang with The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and eventually I came to recognize that the structure and practices of the hollow square, in requiring each individual singer to act together and to collaborate in the expression of Sacred Harp music, were continually functioning to foster and create community. Thus, while that lengthy bus ride to my first Sacred Harp sing gave me time not only to get nervous about singing with a group of strangers but also to reflect on the differences between my initial impression of Sacred Harp music and what was about to be my first experience singing Sacred Harp, by the completion of the sing not only had I begun to feel a sense of belonging to the group, I had also garnered a sense of what draws people to participate in this tradition regardless of the context; a sense of

what it is that unites Sacred Harp singers across regional and religious boundaries. It was not the music alone nor was it the community in isolation, but rather it was the complete interdependence between the two; an interdependence forged within a space where music and community meet: the hollow square. In this chapter I will be examining how the structure and practices of the hollow square create community through a process of collective consensus which produces a musical experience that is both shared and collaborative. In particular, I will be examining how the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' unique adaptation of the hollow square, while differing in many ways from more conventional approaches, nevertheless remains true to the primary function of the hollow square, which is the creation of a communal artistic expression.

Defining Group and Creating Community through Collective Action

Concepts of what constitutes and defines a group, as well as those concerning how a group's sense of community is created, have played a central, if often problematic, role throughout the development of folklore studies (Noyes 2003, 7). For Alan Dundes, conceptions of what creates and defines a group are integral to the very notion of "folk" itself. Dundes defines "folk" as being "*any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor" (1965, 2). According to Dundes, for this collection of people to be considered "folk", they must have a set of traditions that they call their own and furthermore, he argues, it is these traditions that, belonging to the group, "help the group have a sense of group identity" (1965, 3). Extending Dundes' association between folk and group is Dan Ben-Amos' definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (1972, 13). Ben-Amos not only highlights the centrality of group to folklore but

also the importance of communication. For Ben-Amos, folklore is dependant upon communicative events, arguing that in order for what he terms "the folkloric act" to occur, "both the performers and the audience have to be in the same situation and be part of the same reference group"(1972, 12). Building from both Dundes' concept of the role that traditions play in building and defining a group, as well as Ben-Amos' ideas concerning the importance of communication amongst a group for the creation of folklore, Dorothy Noyes argues that a group does not comprise of a natural object in and of itself but consists rather of a cultural creation. For Noyes, community is a creation dependant upon communal action, or, as she argues, "acting in common makes community" (2003, 29).

Applying these concepts concerning group and the creation of community to the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus provides an interesting example of the role that tradition and artistic communication play in both defining a group and creating community. For the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, Dundes' "common factor" can readily be identified as Sacred Harp music. Sacred Harp music is the one element that each member of the group holds in common with each other and it is this linking factor that brought together the members of the group to begin with. In line with Dundes' argument for what constitutes "folk", the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus not only has a linking factor but also a set of traditions that it calls its own. This set of traditions is composed of both those which the group has adopted from the greater body of Sacred Harp traditions—and through the process of cultural adoption has made these traditions distinctively their own—as well as those traditions that are entirely unique to the group. It is through the performance of these traditions—or, more specifically, through the enactment of the artistic communication

involved in practicing these traditions—that a sense of community is created and expressed for the members of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. Furthermore, through the performance of these traditions, the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus effectively engages in an interesting example of Ben-Amos' "folkloric act"—one in which, given the collective nature of singing Sacred Harp, audience and performer become one and the same. As Buell Cobb suggests, "Sacred Harp music is ultimately group singing [...] it is the act of participating that constitutes the true appeal of this music" (1989, 3).

The Hollow Square and the Process of Collective Consensus

While it is the music itself that initially draws singers such as those of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus together to meet within the hollow square, the collective action that singers participate in within the hollow square creates a sense of community that, alongside the music, becomes an integral part of the Sacred Harp experience. The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' unique expression of the hollow square produces a communal expression of song that is both shared by the group as a whole and dependant upon the collaborative contribution of individuals. The structure and practices of the hollow square induce a process of collective consensus whereby the influence of the individual and that of the group is negotiated by both granting the individual the ability to personally express him or herself artistically as well as ensuring that this individual expression be cohesive with and beneficial to the group as a whole. The process of collective consensus produced by the structure and practices of the hollow square thus creates a space in which the individual is defined by his or her contribution to the group and the group is defined by the sum of its parts.

At the same time that this process of collective consensus fosters the creation of a communal artistic expression, it also serves to transform the hollow square within each new context. The hollow square becomes a creation both dependant upon and continually re-shaped by each singer seated within the square and their relationship to the group as a whole. As a result, even though the tradition of the hollow square is most typically associated with its Southern, rural, Christian expression, the hollow square itself is not bound by such regional and religious labels. Rather than being an identifiably Southern, rural, or Christian space unto itself, the hollow square is a liminal space that is continually re-formed and re-identified within each new context. This flexibility of the hollow square to be re-shaped within each context while maintaining its function of fostering communal creativity has played a crucial role in the ability of Sacred Harp to, as Wallace McKenzie argues, endure with a level of success and vitality unmatched by any other tradition of "white folk hymnody" (1989, 153). Similarly, John Bealle suggests that it is the various traditional forms and practices of Sacred Harp, all working together, that allow "the full experience of Sacred Harp" to be transported to new contexts (1997, 243).

The Structure of the Hollow Square: Foundations of a Shared and Collaborative Artistic Expression

In Sacred Harp, the hollow square is a space where individuals meet to become a community through collective engagement with music. The structure of the hollow square at its most basic can be divided into two main regions: the harmony sections and the centre of the square (see Figure 2.1).

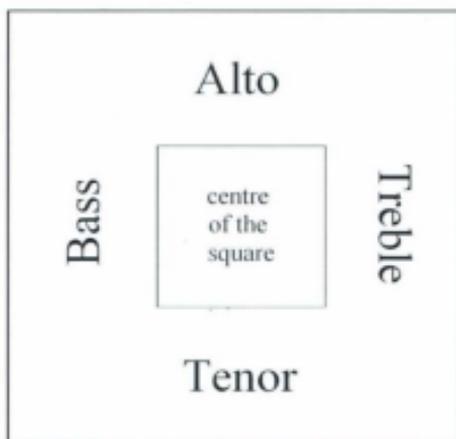


Figure 2.1 The Basic Structure of the Hollow Square

A. The Harmony Sections

The harmony sections of the hollow square consist simply of a seating arrangement divided into four sections, each facing the centre of a vacant square and corresponding to one of the four harmony parts involved in singing Sacred Harp: alto, treble, tenor, and bass. In its conventional expression, each section is composed of rows of singers, seated on benches or chairs. This seating arrangement in and of itself reflects something of the participatory nature of Sacred Harp; the formation leaves no space for an audience (Miller 2004, 484). As Buell Cobb argues, "Sacred Harp has never been a "performance" kind of music. The singers are not arranged in a line or a semicircle facing the audience. Instead the circle or square is closed and the singers face each other" (1989,

3). Facing one another in this manner, audience and performer become one in the same and in effect performance itself is transformed into a shared collaboration. Furthermore, within this framework all are welcomed more or less as equals. There is no assigned seating based on either proficiency or rank. In fact, it is often the naive newcomer who is welcomed to the most privileged position within the harmony sections, the front row. As Cobb goes on to write,

Front-row privileges are accorded to visiting singers, and shy beginners are urged to come up and join the group. "Up front's where all the racket is," one singer offers as a friendly inducement, and even reluctant novices are drawn from the back by that kind of incontestable logic. (1989, 3)

Thus, while there are privileged spaces within the formation of the hollow square—namely, those spaces closest to the centre of the square where the sound is at its fullest (Miller 2008, 74)—the occupation of those spaces is not necessarily governed by any particular hierarchy or ranking of singers. In fact, within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, given their generally smaller numbers, typically everyone is granted front row privileges as there is only one row per section. The structure of the hollow square welcomes every singer to participate in the singing as an equal and in doing so fosters a creative relationship between group and individual; a relationship that is essential for the creation of community within the hollow square.

B. The Centre of the Square

While each singer, including "shy beginners", are welcomed as equals to participate in a Sacred Harp sing, the most sought after space of the hollow square—the centre of the square—is in general a space of privilege and authority (Miller 2008, 75).

As the hollow square is being formed, the centre of the square is left empty, thus granting the square its hollowness. This space is not typically left entirely empty however. In the religious expression of the hollow square, this space is intended first and foremost as a space for God. God in this sense is intended as the only real “audience” at a Sacred Harp event and the singing itself is perceived more as a form of worship than any kind of performance (Cobb 1989, 17). God is, however, not the only authority figure seen to occupy the centre of the square. Throughout the course of a singing, the centre of the square is also occupied by the various song leaders who, one at a time, take their place at the centre of the square to lead the group in whichever song they have selected for the group to sing. It is fitting that it is the centre of the square which is set apart as a somewhat privileged space for figures of authority to occupy as it is this space in which the best sound can be received. While song leading is freely available to any singer who chooses to do so, a certain level of proficiency is necessary to properly fulfill the role, often making the position—and the privileged space that the position occupies—open only to more seasoned singers. As Kiri Miller argues, “since new singers often lack the confidence to lead, there is a built-in mechanism of exclusion at work. Sacred Harp can afford to be all-inclusive in theory because only the initiated will regularly reach the center of the square and leave their mark on the tradition” (Miller 2008, 73). There are however many ways in which this “mechanism of exclusion” can be overcome, particularly as the hollow square becomes continually re-defined within each new context. This is possible not only through increased accessibility to the centre of the square but also through the ways in which the authority afforded the individual within the centre of the square, and the degree to which the song leader is able to exercise that

authority, is largely determined by the group surrounding him or her. Individual expression within the centre of the square, as within the hollow square as a whole, remains subject to the process of collective consensus.

Constituting the basic structure of the hollow square, the relationship between the centre of the square and the harmony sections provides a suitable metaphor for the balance of creative influence that is established between individual and group at a Sacred Harp sing. The centre of the square, as a space of authority occupied by one person at a time projecting his or her influence outward to the surrounding group, can be seen to symbolize the role of the individual in contributing to and influencing the group as a whole. The harmony sections on the other hand, being composed of individuals gathered together as equals to form a collective that surrounds the individual at the centre, can be seen to symbolize the ways in which the group as a whole functions together to influence the individual. Thus, acting together, these influences of the individual and the group, as negotiated through a process of collective consensus, produce a musical experience that is both collaborative—due to the importance of individual contribution—and shared—due to the communal nature of singing Sacred Harp.

The Practices of the Hollow Square: Individual Expression and Group Cohesion

While the basic structure of the hollow square is effectively re-created by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the spaces of the hollow square—both the harmony sections and the centre of the square—have been significantly transformed through the group's interaction with and adaptation of the practices of the hollow square. Even so, the basic

means of individual contribution have remained largely the same. Whether singing in a church in the rural south or in Jim Nuyens' and Adrienne Stevenson's living room, individual expression through contribution to the group is facilitated in three primary ways: voice, song selection and song leading. For the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, each of these practices of individual expression occur within the space of the harmony sections and while they are unique translations of conventional approaches to hollow square practices, they each remain subject to the process of collective consensus and thus to the basic function of the hollow square—the creation of a communal artistic expression.

A. Voice

Perhaps the most obvious way in which a singer participates at a Sacred Harp sing is through his or her voice. Within the hollow square, each individual voice becomes a part of the collective expression of each song. Singing in the hollow square, one must recognize a balance between, on the one hand, the potential for standing out as an individual through the exercising of a particularly strong, unique, or even unfortunate voice, and on the other hand the importance of blending in with the group as a whole. Overall, a balance between these two possibilities becomes most desirable as it allows for the free expression of the individual while maintaining the primacy of the group as a whole. The ability of a singer to influence the sing vocally is often limited to the more seasoned singers due to the technical aspects of singing Sacred Harp. As Kiri Miller argues: "New singers with strong voices and excellent reading skills could influence Sacred Harp regional styles very rapidly if they were not held back by the shapes" (Miller 2004, 488). In my own experience, individual contribution and influence through voice

was held back by both a lack of skill reading music and limited experience singing the shapes. As a result, especially for my first few sings, I kept my voice quite low. Thus, while Sacred Harp is a tradition that, at least ideally, welcomes all singers to participate equally, the technical aspects of the tradition often keep newcomers somewhat at bay in terms of the potential for full and equally influential participation.

For more seasoned singers, having reached a certain level of comfort and proficiency singing Sacred Harp, the increased potential to influence the singing session vocally is made all the more apparent in a group of smaller numbers such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. David Baril, an Ottawa Shape Note singer known for contributing a particularly strong voice to the group, states:

Now, we have a few voices in the group and because it's a small group the individual voices tend to colour the sound more when you have people singing without—like, I tend to do this myself so I know it happens—without managing their sound in a way to blend. So if everybody's singing at their full power and there's some voices that have a lot more power than others then they can dominate the sound right? So we have a couple of those that tend to stick out a bit and create what I would call an unbalanced or rough texture. (2008)

While strong vocal contribution on the part of an individual singer is often appreciated by those present at a sing, an individual who excessively overwhelms or dominates the group with their vocal abilities tends to be frowned upon.

Because a Sacred Harp sing is shaped by the collaboration of each individual present, the vocal contribution of an individual who stands out amongst the group can at times present a challenge to the others singers in attendance. Illustrating this point are the following comments from Ottawa Shape Note singer Barbara Tose:

My experience changes depending on who's there and what part they're singing and how loud they are. The last time, I think it was the last time we got together, I was singing alto and I thought it just sounded really nice the way it was and I

could hear myself and I could hear the other parts and then Marg arrived. And Marg has a very powerful voice and yeah, she's singing the music the way it should, the way it's supposed to be sung, but it's like, "where did I go? I can't hear myself anymore!" And everybody else gets louder, it's natural. And suddenly we're all shouting at each other, that's how it felt. And so I started switching to other parts so that I could hear myself [...] but it's one of those things, it's a community thing. (2008)

As Tose's remarks suggest, there is a delicate balance that is continually negotiated between the freedom allotted individual voices and the particular sound desired by the group as a whole. The contradictions sometimes involved in striking such a balance between personal liberty and group cohesion are echoed in the following comment from David Baril:

I mean *nobody* within the Sacred Harp community is gonna get criticized because they sing off-tune or because their voice can't put the right, you know—although, I say that, excessive vibrato in powerful sopranos is frowned upon. And that's just because it is in the tradition and also in folk in general. I mean, I had to modify a little bit in my vocal production as well, because I had the vibrato of a classical singer and I had to make sure that I toned that back. And so I don't produce my voice as classically as I might otherwise. Now, sometimes I get carried away; blow the rafters off just for fun! (2008)

At work in David's comments are two competing ideals that govern the Sacred Harp tradition. The first ideal being the equal, free participation of all present and the second ideal being conformity to a particular sound desired by the group as a whole. The balance between these two ideals is played out within the hollow square as a push and pull between allowing a certain amount of individual expression while assuring that that expression is conducive to the group as a whole.

Thus, in terms of voice, individual vocal contribution can either be favoured if that voice is appreciated by the group or can be curtailed by the group if deemed out of line with the group's overall trajectory or collective desire. An effort to curtail vocal

independence is evident in David's aforementioned comments concerning what was deemed "excessive vibrato" as well as in the following comments by Irene Taylor concerning strong alto voices,

Both Adrienne and I have reasonably powerful voices, either one of us will drown out three altos. Of all the tenors that show up on Sunday, either one of us can drown them all out if there aren't more than two tenors. If there aren't three tenors there we'll be drowning them out too, either one of us! So, when we're both singing treble its like, well, you know, you can't hear anything else! (2008)

Thus, an individual voice may need to be curtailed to avoid drowning out the group as a whole, such as in Irene's case, or to avoid straying too much from the traditional Sacred Harp sound, such as in David's case. Due to the democratic ideals of Sacred Harp whereby every individual is welcomed to participate freely and equally, the policing of undesirable vocal contributions is not typically accomplished through any direct authoritative gesture on part of the group over the individual but rather tends to be accomplished through more subtle means of communication such as through looks given from one singer to another from across the square. Indicative of both how such policing is accomplished as well as the relative lack of such efforts within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, are Barbara Tose's comments concerning the degree to which singers such as Colin Hencin are given the freedom to experiment vocally at the group's singings in contrast to how such flourishes might be received at a Sacred Harp convention. She says, "Colin's always playing with the music, he's always throwing a little something in and singing a little bit differently you know. And he'd be given very filthy looks if he did that at a convention" (2008).

While individual vocal contributions can be viewed negatively by the group as a whole to the extent that they may be subject to subtle policing, at the same time an

individual voice can contribute in such a way that while the voice stands out, it is thoroughly appreciated by the other singers present and by the group as a whole. For instance, Sheldon Posen remarks,

There are certain people that I used to listen for their voices while we were singing certain songs. Pippa Hall had a particular phrase that I always looked forward to her singing that cause her voice stuck out at that particular time—had a certain quality to it. We had other singers that, and still when I sing that music, I come to that point I say, "God, I wish Sue was here cause I really would love to hear her sing *that* piece of music." I identify that piece of music and her voice, they just go together. And that's one of the things that happens when you sing with a group of people over and over again in a small place. You do become a community and you do get a way of doing things that are yours. They have to do with the people who are there and your experiences. (2008)

As suggested by Sheldon's comments, each individual voice has the potential of not only contributing to the group but of standing out amongst the other singers in a way that is deemed acceptable by the group as a whole. Furthermore, it is possible for the individual to stand out amongst the group in such a way that fosters a sense of community by personalizing particular songs through the association of that song with an individual's voice. While certain types of individual vocal expression may be discouraged, there is room for voices that stand out. The goal here is not that all the voices blend together perfectly, every individual voice becoming lost in the crowd, but rather that all the voices work together effectively, producing a communal artistic expression. In this sense, the individual singer, operating within the framework of the hollow square, becomes defined not by his or her unique vocal traits or characteristics, but rather by how his or her voice contributes to the group as a whole.

B. Song Selection

Defining the individual in terms of how he or she contributes in a manner deemed acceptable by the group as a whole holds true not only for vocal contribution, but also for the process of song selection. In the conventional Southern context, song selection and song leading go hand in hand. Whoever desires to select a song takes the position in the centre of the hollow square to lead that song. This traditional approach to song selection and song leading can be seen to somewhat disenfranchise certain singers from participating in and influencing the sing (Miller 2008, 73). For instance, Barbara Tose describes her first experience at a Sacred Harp convention—where they adhere to the traditional approach to song selection and song leading—saying, “It was fun. But you only get to pick a song if you lead and I wasn’t at a stage where I could lead so I just kept hoping!” (2008). Within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, however, song selection is granted to all singers present regardless of their ability or desire to lead. Song leading is typically performed by only one singer for the entirety of the singing session. This difference in practice makes song selection more accessible, particularly for singers new to the tradition who might otherwise be unable to contribute to the singing through their choice of song. For the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the song selection process is run democratically beginning with one member of the group and rotating around the square several times over until roughly two hours have passed and the sing is complete. Thus, over the course of a sing, each individual will be given the opportunity to select at least three songs. In keeping with conventional Sacred Harp practices, rather than requesting the song by title, the singer whose turn it is will simply call out the page number on which the song is found. While practices of song selection, particularly as adapted by the Ottawa

Shape Note Chorus, provide a fair and equal means for each individual to contribute to the singing session, an individual's personal expression through song selection remains subject to the influences of the group as a whole.

At my first sing, while I was in some respect thrilled by the possibility to select songs that I had been enjoying recordings of and was now able to hear in person, the process also proved somewhat of a daunting task. Once I had named those few songs that I was already familiar with, I became somewhat uncomfortable at the prospect of selecting something more or less at random, not knowing whether or not it would be a song familiar to or generally liked by the group as a whole. As a result, at least for my very first sing, after selecting those couple songs I was eager to hear, I resorted to passing on a couple of my turns. Even once it became clear to me that the group was generally open to trying out whatever song might be selected by an individual and while I became more comfortable the more I sang with the group to select whichever song I might like, I continued to be driven by a sense of wanting to select a song that the group as a whole enjoyed. Here again are the two influences of the individual and the group at work—as throughout the song selection process I found myself striking a balance between my own personal tastes and what I thought would be appreciated by the group as a whole.

There are songs that, in general, are favoured by the group and together these songs can be seen to comprise something of a group repertoire. This repertoire has evolved over the years of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' existence and is largely rooted in those songs that were originally taught to the singers by Sheldon Posen. In addition to Sheldon's particular influence on the group's repertoire, every individual singer who has sung with the group for a significant amount of time has inevitably influenced this ever-

evolving repertoire through their role in song selection. In particular, most singers eventually find that they have at least one or two favourite Sacred Harp songs. These songs not only gain prominence within the group by being repeatedly selected by the individual but as a result those songs themselves come to be associated with that individual and as such become, in a sense, personified. Thus the group's repertoire is composed of songs that individual singers have favoured and as a result those songs that the group as a whole has appreciated over time. The group's repertoire itself can thus be seen as another example of the creative relationship between individual and group as fostered by the process of collective consensus.

This interplay between group and individual is also evident in the fact that while newcomers such as myself are encouraged to select whichever songs they like, there is at least one song from *The Sacred Harp* that the group will not sing. The song, "The American Star" was once requested by a singer who was interested in hearing its harmonic elements. While the group gave the song a try it was ultimately decided that "The American Star" would not be sung again due to what the group as a whole viewed as negative lyrics that promoted American colonialism. Of particular contestation were the words of the songs' chorus:

To us the high boon, by the gods has been granted,
To spread the glad tidings of liberty far,
Let millions invade us, we'll meet them undaunted,
And conquer or die by the American Star. (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 346)

The process of song selection thus functions within the framework of collective consensus in that while the individual singer is encouraged to express him or herself and contribute as an equal to the group by selecting whichever song he or she desires, those

individual contributions are influenced by the group as a whole not only in terms of the group's repertoire, but there are also some limits—or at least one—in terms of songs that the group has collectively decided not to sing. Thus, while song selection as practiced by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus differs somewhat from conventional practices, being subject to the process of collective consensus, it nevertheless remains a collaborative endeavour to be shared by the group as a whole rather than exclusively a means of personal expression.

C. Song Leading

The final way that an individual may contribute to and directly influence a Sacred Harp singing session is through song leading. Despite the potentially authoritative elements of song leading, like vocal contribution and song selection, song leadership is primarily a collaborative endeavour. This holds true for song leading within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus as well within more conventional contexts. The conventional approach to song leading whereby only the song leader has the opportunity to select a song affords each song leader a greater level of influence than is available to those unable or unwilling to lead. Kiri Miller describes obtaining this role of song leader and assuming the corresponding position within the centre of the hollow square as, "a primary goal of Sacred Harp singing" (2008, 75). Miller describes the position as follows:

Leading from the center of the square is often described as the quintessential Sacred Harp experience. It constitutes a major opportunity to demonstrate one's competence in the tradition as well as one's willingness to make mistakes in public. At the centre of the square leaders may choose song, pitch, verses, and tempo at will, making a stylistic contribution to traditional practice. (2008, 73)

While as Miller argues the song leader is undoubtedly granted the opportunity to provide a "stylistic contribution to traditional practice," there are limits to the degree of influence that an individual may exert through leading. Because of the creative and collaborative relationship between the individual and the group that lies at the foundation of the hollow square, there remains an influence on the part of the group that can not only sway the song leader but can in fact over-ride whatever stylistic decisions the leader has made. The delicate balance between the influence of the song leader and the group as a whole is evident in Ottawa Shape Note singer Robert Thompson's description of his experience leading a song at the Quebec Sacred Harp Convention. This convention is an annual Sacred Harp singing event held in Lennoxville, Quebec that adheres to the conventional practices concerning song selection and song leading. Robert says,

It's fun, the satisfaction to be able to lead a group into singing. I mean the group pretty much takes care of things but you can control, you determine what the rhythm's gonna be, if it's gonna be fast or slow. It's fun, it's fun to do that [...] You start moving your arm, you start the song. So you have to be ready in your head, and actually, if you've got it too slow, the group will kind of pick it up for you, right away, right at the beginning. So you have to be on your toes, you have to know the song pretty well. So yes, it's pretty terrifying, but once you've started it just goes on. (2008)

Similarly, Adrienne Stevenson remarks of her experience leading at the Quebec convention:

But it's fun leading to a big group too. I have done it at, down at Lennoxville. And you sign your name on a sheet that you're willing to lead and it goes around, you may get a couple of picks so you should make it something that you know really well and that you're comfortable doing and that you're not going to, you know, make too many mistakes. But the people will just keep singing anyway and it can be a little frustrating because sometimes if there's enough experienced people in the group, they'll pick up their own pace, it doesn't matter what you're doing, they pick up the pace! [laughs] (2008)

Thus, within the conventional expression of song leading, which grants the song leader the opportunity for a heightened level of influence over the group and in turn potentially disenfranchises other singers from influencing the singing session through song choice, a compromise is nevertheless made between the influence of the individual as song leader and the group as a whole. Ultimately the song leader is subject to the collective drive of the group as a whole and thus even those who do not participate in song selection or leading nevertheless participate in the overall trajectory of how the songs are sung.

The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of song leading not only separates the practice from that of song selection but it also removes the song leader from the centre of the square. While this expression of song leading is a departure from the conventional approach, the role of song leading nevertheless remains primarily a collaboration between the song leader and the group through which a communal musical experience is produced. For the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, rather than each new song being lead by whoever has selected that song, the duty of song leading typically falls on one person for the duration of each singing session. For the Tuesday group this duty typically falls on Colin Hencin and for the Sunday group it is given to Adrienne Stevenson. Reflective of the democratic ideals of Sacred Harp however, these leaders are seen not as holding positions of particular prestige or status. Rather, given their particular skills in leading and tuning, these song leaders have been required by the group as a whole to serve and contribute to the group in this manner. In fact, both Colin and Adrienne, while appreciating the opportunity to contribute to the group in this way, express both a sense of reluctance in fulfilling this role of leadership as well as an eagerness for anyone who would like to take over their position to feel free to do so. Neither song leader describes the role of leading

as something particularly pursued or desired, but rather as simply something they stumbled into. As Colin puts it, "I think it sort of fell to me to lead" (2008). Similarly, Adrienne describes her role as song leader as follows:

It's funny, you just sort of fall into the leading, I guess I took it on because nobody else was doing it. [...] I mean, I've said I'm not doing it all! [laughs] I have to travel for work too so you know, if I'm away, you guys have to figure it out; you can't put all your eggs in one basket. (2008)

Both Adrienne and Colin, while enjoying their role as song leader, thus look to the position not as granting a particularly influential role but rather as fulfilling a duty to the group. The priority for each singer is simply to sing, not to reach a particular status within the group. For example, Colin describes one of his first attempts to fill the role of song leader for the group as follows: "I remember we were still at Marg's place because I remember she was frustrated. Marg was quite frustrated with me when I was first trying to lead because she really just wanted to sing" (2008). Thus, song leading is viewed primarily as a position that facilitates everyone's ability to sing rather than as a position of status or even of authority.

Even though the song leader is granted a certain level of influence over the group as a whole—primarily by setting the key and the tempo of each song—the role consists of a great deal of collaboration with the other singers present. In fact, in many ways this leadership position seems to be more that of a mediator than a true leader *per se*. For instance, the key and tempo that are set by the song leader may be influenced in one of two ways by the other singers present. First, it is not all that uncommon for one or more of the singers present to request that either the key be changed—raised or lowered—or that the tempo be sped up or slowed down. And in every case I witnessed, the leader was

keen to oblige the request or at the least to find a compromise between his or her preferred tempo and that being suggested by another singer. The second way which key or tempo becomes a collaborative effort rather than a dictation on the part of the song leader is that through the course of singing a song, the key or tempo that was initially set is not always the key or tempo finally reached by the conclusion of the song. As Colin describes his experiences in setting the tempo,

The tempo setting is kind of amusing. I've sort of been thinking about it while you've been here recording things and thinking about the tempos. And the group really knows the tempos they want to sing the songs at, so the tempos that you give are not always the tempos that they sing. And that's fine. In many cases they're right and as soon as we start singing I'm like "oh yeah, that was a much better tempo than the one I started thinking about." (2008)

Thus, through the course of singing a particular song, there is often a drive on the part of the group as a whole to reach a particular tempo. This collective drive can also be seen to influence the key assigned by the song leader at the beginning of the song. The song leader within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus can thus be seen to function primarily as a mediator. The lack of un-checked authority granted the song leader is reflected in the fact that for the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the song leader does not occupy the centre of the square but opts rather to remain seated alongside everyone else, integrated into the group as a mediator rather than set apart as an authority figure. As with voice and song selection, the creative relationship between group and individual is cultivated within the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' practice of song leading as being a role of collaborative mediation rather than authoritative dictatorship.

Transforming the Centre of the Hollow Square: Contextual Flexibility and Increased Accessibility

Since the song leader within the context of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus remains seated throughout the course of a sing rather than occupying the centre of the square, each of the practices of the hollow square through which individual contribution is made possible are all enacted within the region of the harmony sections.

Correspondingly, the centre of the square has become a space uniquely expressed and creatively utilized by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus.

The song leader is not the only figure absent from the centre of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' hollow square. In the traditional, Southern context, the hollow square is a sacred space and, as previously mentioned, the centre of the square in particular is a space intended for God. However, the centre of the square is not in and of itself a sacred space but rather is made so by the collective consensus of those present. Thus, just as within the conventional context of Sacred Harp the religious beliefs of the singers present place God at the centre of the square, making it a sacred space, the overall lack of religious beliefs on the part of the singers of a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, removes God from the centre of the square, making it a secular space.

For Sheldon Posen, singing Sacred Harp was never a religious practice but was rather simply a means of exploring a type of music that had captured his attention. Furthermore, those people whom Sheldon initially drew together so that he could sing Sacred Harp were by and large of the same mind as Sheldon in that they viewed their participation with the Sacred Harp tradition as an experiment with a type of folk music rather than any sort of spiritual or religious exercise. As I will discuss in detail later, some

of the singers have found spiritual significance in singing Sacred Harp and some Christian singers have been drawn to join the group at least in part because of their own religious beliefs, but both of these categories of singers remain in the minority and are themselves well aware that they are participating in a secular expression of Sacred Harp. As a result, whatever religious significance a singer may bring to bear during a sing belongs to him or her privately rather than being a part of the communal expression of Sacred Harp that is taking place amongst the group as a whole. The overall secular orientation of the group is expressly declared on the group's webpage which states, "We are a secular group: no prayers, no testimonies. We meet to sing Sacred Harp songs and enjoy each other's company" (Stevenson and Baril 2007). The secular orientation of the group is rooted in the collective consensus amongst the group and is made manifest in such concrete ways as the expressed declaration of being secular and through the exclusion of such practices as prayers and testimonies. This identification of the group as being secular is thus another indication of how the relationships between group and individual functions in the context of the hollow square. While for some individuals of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus singing Sacred Harp has spiritual significance, since they are in the minority and since the majority of the singers sing Sacred Harp as a secular practice, the group as a whole becomes defined as, and communally expressed as, secular.

The flexibility of the hollow square to be either a sacred or secular space through the process of collective consensus has resulted in an increased accessibility of the Sacred Harp tradition. Because it is the nature of the hollow square to be continually re-formed and re-shaped within each new context, people of various backgrounds and beliefs—ranging from Christians to Atheists—are all welcomed to take a seat inside the hollow

square. Irene Taylor describes this element of Sacred Harp as being part of the initial appeal of singing with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. Describing the difficulties she faced attempting to sing with other choral groups, she says, "not being a Christian is extremely limiting in that sort of area because there is certainly some opportunities where, "No, you have to be a good Christian leader to be singing in this particular group." Well, that's not me. Have a good time. Tell me about it later! [laughs]" (2008). Thus, while the secularization of the hollow square may be viewed as a significant departure from the square's traditional expression, the loss of overt religious significance does not seem to diminish the potential for creating a shared, collaborative expression of song as it is the secularization itself that has allowed so many singers of varying backgrounds and beliefs to participate in the tradition and in doing so to become a part of an ever-emerging, continually re-created community. While the secularization of the hollow square within certain contexts has thus resulted in a departure from the religious significance of singing Sacred Harp, it has at the same time reaffirmed the tradition's ability to create an inclusive community defined by the sum of its parts—or, as Kiri Miller describes it: "a welcoming community of consent" (Miller 2008, 203).

The emptying out of the centre of the hollow square, both of the song leader and of God, while deferring from the tradition's conventional expression can nevertheless be seen to play into the primary function of the hollow square—namely, the creation of a communal expression of song. For the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the centre of the square becomes not a space of authority, but rather one freely accessible to all. Perhaps this can be illustrated best by relating the three circumstances in which, during my time singing with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the hollow square became an occupied

space. The first such instance occurred at one of the Tuesday night sings. To the general amusement of the group, David Baril, after selecting his favourite Sacred Harp song, "Sacred Throne" (Appendix 1), took it upon himself to express and embrace his appreciation of that song by not only placing himself in the centre of the hollow square in order to receive the best sound, but also by laying down in the centre of the square to become, in effect, bathed in the sound of "Sacred Throne". In such an instance, the centre of the hollow square ceases to be a space reserved for a figure of authority—be it God or a song leader—and instead becomes freely accessible to anyone wishing to take advantage of the space with the greatest available sound. This transformation holds true not only in such an instance of an individual entering the centre of the hollow square but also of group interactions that take place within the centre of the square. The first such instance I experienced involves a particular tradition unique to the Sunday group. Over years of singing together it has become customary for the Sunday group to close each singing session with the song "Hallelujah" (Appendix 2) and for each of the singers to rise and stand together in the centre of the square to sing this song. Singing "Hallelujah" at the conclusion of every Sunday session within the centre of the square allows for a highly communicative experience. Most of the singers have become so familiar with this particular song that, closing their books to sing from memory and facing one another in closer proximity, they are further able to interact and communicate with one another via such non-verbal communication as facial expressions, eye contact and physical gestures. Here then with the removal of any expressed sense of sacredness or of authority from the centre of the hollow square, not only is everyone able to enter the centre of the square but, occupying that space becomes an opportunity for enhanced collective participation and

communication. This level of enhancement is further evident in the third instance in which I witnessed the centre of the hollow square being filled. This instance also occurred at the conclusion of a singing—this time at the group's annual summer solstice sing. Here both the Sunday and Tuesday groups, along with some singers who no longer participate in the monthly sings, gathered together at a community centre in the Ottawa countryside for an afternoon of singing and a potluck dinner to follow. The seasonal group sings are appreciated not only for the food, but for the opportunity to sing with a greater number of singers and to accomplish a fuller sound within the walls of the community centre. At the final few verses of the final song of this particular summer sing—which was, fittingly the song called "Parting Friends" (Appendix 3)—not only did each singer rise, but, as initiated by one individual in particular, everyone proceeded to cross over into the centre of the square to shake hands with one another. The joint action of singing while shaking each other's hands provides a perfect illustration of the link between Sacred Harp music and the creation of community. Furthermore, with singers entering into the centre of the square to meet and interact with the group at large, here is also an especially appropriate representation of how the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' transformation of the centre of the hollow square is one which not only makes Sacred Harp increasingly accessible to various individuals but does so in such a way that increases the potential for collective interaction and communication. Thus, while this expression of the centre of the hollow square differs somewhat from conventional approaches, the primary function of establishing a communal artistic expression that is entirely shared and collaborative has been maintained.

Conclusion: Creating Traditional Communities in Postmodern Society

Speaking with Sheldon Posen about his various experiences singing Sacred Harp, he related to me a story that highlights the degree to which the integration of artistic and social meaning is essential to the Sacred Harp experience:

There's a woman who came up from the States who is possibly the best Sacred Harp singer I know [...] And she sang with us and she kept trying to catch my eye as we sang and I had no idea what she was doing. And she said when I was driving her home, "You wouldn't catch my eye." And I said, "What was that all about?" She said, "Well, it's what you do in Sacred Harp. You're flirting with the other singers. You're making connections. You're sharing the joy, the—whatever it is. And it's not necessarily sexual, it's companionable, it's reaching out and touching the other singer as you sing and you're together in this joy and in this stuff." And I'd sort of seen it and I had felt it but it was not anything that I thought had actually been articulated [laughs]. (2008)

For Sacred Harp singers, music becomes not only an artistic expression but a means of creating and expressing community. Music within the context of Sacred Harp is a collective process of interaction, something to be shared through collaboration rather than received through performance. This communal expression of music is forged within the hollow square; the structure and practices of the hollow square functioning to establish a creative relationship between each individual and the group as a whole. Defining the individual in terms of his or her contribution to the group fosters a sense of community. This sense of community, regardless of regional or religious contexts, plays an integral role in the experience and appeal of practicing Sacred Harp. Stephen Marini suggests that part of the appeal for Northern singers to engage in the tradition is that in Sacred Harp they discover "an extraordinarily intense cultural community" (2003, 91). For Marini, individuals practicing Sacred Harp within a secular context are largely drawn to do so because the tradition fulfills a social element once performed by religious institutions

(2003, 91). Similarly, Laura Clawson argues that in postmodern society the individual lives "unconnected to traditional communities, such as church and families" and that in light of this disconnect, Sacred Harp offers a means for the postmodern individual to connect with other such individuals through the formation of community (2004, 315). Sacred Harp, as adopted and practiced by such groups as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, can thus be seen to satisfy a social need once fulfilled by religious institutions and traditional communities. Collective enactments of communicative traditions create community and the hollow square ensures that artistic expressions of Sacred Harp remain entirely communal regardless of context. Boundaries of South vs. North, rural vs. urban and sacred vs. secular may be seen to pose a serious threat to the ability of Sacred Harp to be effectively transported across such regional and religious dichotomies (Cobb 1989, 154). However, being thoroughly dependant upon the collective consensus reached between each individual who takes his or her seat within the hollow square, it is the very nature of the hollow square to be continually re-formed and re-created within each new context. Thus, given that at its most basic the hollow square functions to produce a communal artistic expression shaped through the collective collaboration of those present, transporting Sacred Harp across differing contexts not only ensures that the tradition will in fact be significantly altered within each new context, but conversely it also guarantees that what lies at the very core of the tradition will remain thoroughly intact. Sacred Harp is creating music through community and creating community through music; it is singing together "with one accord" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 381).

Chapter Three

Wayfaring Strangers and Parting Friends: Extending and Affirming Community beyond the Hollow Square

*"I am a poor, wayfaring stranger,
While journ'ying thru this world of woe
Yet, there's no sickness, toil nor danger,
In that bright land to which I go."*

-Excerpt from "Wayfaring Stranger" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 457)

*"Farewell, my friends, I'm bound for Canaan,
I'm traveling through the wilderness;
Your company has been delightful,
You, who doth leave my mind distressed."*

-Excerpt from "Parting Friends" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 267)

One of the most prominent themes within the songs of *The Sacred Harp* is that of the wayfaring stranger on a pilgrimage home. In addition to those quoted above, songs such as "Pilgrim's Farewell", "Jackson", "Sweet Home", "Parting Hand", "White" and "My Home" all express a similar narrative—that of the "stranger here below" who journeys through life in joyful anticipation of being reunited with fellow travelers either in this life or in the hereafter. "White" contains the following lines:

Ye fleeting charms of earth, farewell,
Your springs of joy are dry
My soul now seeks another home,
A brighter world on high.
I'm a long time trav'ling here below,
I'm a long time trav'ling away from home.
I'm a long time trav'ling here below
To lay this body down. (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 288)

In a sacred context, such hymns speak to the Judeo-Christian conception of life on earth as a pilgrimage through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. A particularly good example of which is the song "My Home" which includes the following lyrics:

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.
Don't you feel like going home,
Don't you feel like going home;
My home, it is in the promised land,
And I feel like going home. (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 51)

While the sacred meanings of such songs are readily apparent, the practices of Sacred Harp lend these same songs a parallel secular meaning; one that casts the singer of Sacred Harp as both a wayfaring stranger and a parting friend—both a pilgrim traveling through the wilderness and a member of a community of fellow travelers. Home, for the singer of Sacred Harp, is the hollow square: the location in which community is both rooted and cultivated through the collaborative artistic expression involved therein. However, this home is temporary at best—a home continually reformed and disbanded; what Kiri Millers calls a "portable homeland, a place that gathers family together" (2008, 47). It is the temporality of this homeland that allows for the secular meaning of the many Sacred Harp songs that deal with the theme of a pilgrimage home. Fittingly enough, the Promised Land—alternatively referred to as either Canaan or heaven—is portrayed in these hymns as a place of communal singing. For instance, the second verse of "Wayfaring Stranger" concludes:

When I get home to that good land
I want to shout salvation's story
In concert with the blood-washed band. (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 457)

Much like a reunion of Sacred Harp singers gathering together within the hollow square, homecoming in the sacred sense is portrayed as a joyful reunion of fellow travelers joining together in song. Thus, depending upon the occasion, a song such as "Fellowship" may be selected in a sacred context as a means to memorialize a fellow singer who has made his or her way to their home in heaven; or in a more secular context as a means to conclude a singing session by bidding farewell to one another and expressing hopes of meeting again:

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
When we asunder part, It gives us inward pain
But we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again.
(*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 330)

Between the wilderness and the pilgrim's homeland, lies what "Fellowship" describes as the "tie that binds." In "Parting Hand" the ties that bind are described as "bonds of love" and "a drawing band"¹, in "Sweet Home" they are the "sweet bonds that unite all the children of peace", and in "Pilgrim's Farewell" they are "cords of love".² Whatever the name, in each instance these connections of fellowship are portrayed as not only binding the singers to one another when they are apart but also as ultimately drawing them back together again. For the Christian, these drawing bands symbolize the connections that exist between fellow Christians while for all singers of Sacred Harp—

¹ "My Christian friend, in bonds of love,
Whose hearts in sweetest union join,
Your friendship's like a drawing band,
Yet we must take the parting hand." (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 62)

² "Farewell, Farewell, Farewell,
Dear brethren in the Lord,
To you I'm bound with cords of love;
But we believe His gracious word,
We all ere long shall meet above." (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 185)

regardless of religious affiliation—they symbolize the connections that exist between fellow singers.

It is the secular meaning of these ties that bind which takes the central focus of this chapter; bonds signifying the expressions of community that, rooted within the hollow square, branch outside of the square in such a way that connects singers with one another while they are apart and ultimately calls them to return to their “portable homeland”. These communal ties operate on both a micro and macro level—that is, both within an individual community such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus as well as within the larger social network of the Sacred Harp community. At the micro level, communal ties exist between individual singers who belong to a particular singing community and the strength of these ties are dependant upon the ways in which the community rooted within the hollow square is extended and affirmed beyond the boundaries of the square. At the macro level, these same ties can be seen to operate both between individual singers and other singers across North America, as well as between a particular group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and the Sacred Harp network at large. It is the strength of these communal ties that, having grown out of the community initially created within the hollow square, largely determines the successful continuation of both the individual group and the network as a whole. Communities such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus do not exist in isolation from the Sacred Harp network nor does the network exist apart from individual community cells such as the Ottawa group. Rather, the two collaboratively co-exist and feed into one another. As Dorothy Noyes argues of such a relationship: “The community is in no way independent of the network [...] The community exists as a

project of a network or of some of its members. Networks exist insofar as their ties are continually recreated and revitalized in interaction” (Noyes 2003, 33).

In this chapter I will be examining the ways in which communal ties—both within the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and the Sacred Harp network at large—extend and affirm the sense of community initially created within the hollow square. Together these communal ties form an intricate arrangement of “drawing bands” that connect singers to one another locally and to the network as a whole. In exploring the role that these communal ties play in forging bonds between individual singers and their local singing community, I will be looking first at the traditions of Sacred Harp that function to extend and affirm the sense of community created within the hollow square. In particular, I will be examining the traditions known as “the memorial lesson” and “dinner-on-the-grounds”; the former tradition being one which occurs within the hollow square and extends the community created therein beyond its boundaries and the latter tradition being one which occurs outside of the hollow square and affirms the sense of community created within the square. Finally, in order to examine how these communal ties operate between a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and the Sacred Harp network as a whole, I will be looking at the various interactions that have occurred between the Ottawa singers and the greater Sacred Harp community. In doing so, I hope to show first the extent to which the geographic and religious differences that separate Sacred Harp communities are overcome in favour of forming meaningful social bonds and second, how the forging of these communal ties simultaneously strengthens both the individual community and the network at large. Thus, my main intention is to demonstrate how the sense of community that is formed within the hollow square branches out of the square

and forms communal ties between singers; ties that strengthen both the individual communities such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus as well as the Sacred Harp network as a whole by continually drawing wayfaring strangers together to the hollow square before disbanding once again as parting friends.

The Memorial Lesson: Extending Community and Sharing Grief

As many of the Sacred Harp hymns previously mentioned suggest, there is an intricately meaningful relationship between Sacred Harp and death. This relationship can be seen as a result not only of the intensely mournful tone of many of the songs and the prominent theme of death featured in several of the texts, but also of the intimate relationships forged amongst communities of singers. It is the combination of these two elements—the musical and the social—that makes Sacred Harp an appropriate instrument with which to communally express grief at the loss of a fellow singer. The memorial lesson is a Sacred Harp tradition and rite of passage that honours deceased singers through the use of both spoken word and song. To examine the ways in which the community rooted within the hollow square branches out of the square, it seems only fitting to begin with the memorial lesson; a tradition that, while typically occurring within the confines of the hollow square, is both heavily demarcated from the other singing practices and, unlike the other practices of the hollow square, functions to shift the singer's focus away from the singing itself and towards the Sacred Harp community as it exists outside of the hollow square.

A. The Conventional Form and Practices of the Memorial Lesson

Perhaps nowhere in Sacred Harp is the connection between song and community—the “bonds of love” that connect singers—more poignant than with the memorial lesson. The term “memorial lesson” is rooted in Sacred Harp’s emergence from the singing school movement in which singing sessions were referred to as “lessons” (Bealle 1997, 174). Far from being an academic endeavour, however, the memorial lesson is a uniquely powerful expression of the love and fellowship that exists amongst singers of Sacred Harp and furthermore, is a testament to the often integral role that Sacred Harp plays in a singer’s life. John Bealle describes the tradition as follows:

The memorial lesson is the period devoted to recently deceased members of the signing community and the congregation. In its most succinct form, the memorial lesson consists of reading aloud the names of the deceased and the songs sung in their honor. But it is a solemn occasion, and often a testimonial talk is given that describes vivid memories of dear friends and family members. (1997, 174)

The solemn tone is one of several ways in which the memorial lesson is set apart from the preceding portion of the singing session. Accompanying this shift in tone, there is also commonly a shift in singing practices in which at the onset of the memorial lesson, those songs selected to be performed are sung without “singing the notes”. The purpose behind omitting the singing of the notes is not only due to the fact that, as part of the memorial lesson the “jangle of *fa sol la*’s might seem frivolous” (Cobb 1989, 9), but also because the omission allows for a greater level of focus to be afforded the words of a song that has been specifically chosen to honour the deceased. Furthermore, as Kiri Miller argues, omitting the notes serves to enforce an “immediacy of experience that suggests a song of grief bears no rehearsing” (2008, 62). In addition to these shifts in tone and singing

practice, the prominence granted spoken word as an integral part of the tradition also serves to significantly differentiate the memorial lesson from the rest of the singing session. For the speaker in charge of giving the memorial lesson, a unique interplay between speech and song is available that allows the speaker to pay honour to the deceased through both spoken remembrances as well as through song selection. Thus, while the memorial lesson is heavily demarcated apart from the rest of the singing session, the tradition nevertheless holds true to the overall governing rules of the hollow square in that it balances individual expression with group collaboration. The speaker—typically a close friend or relative of the deceased—is granted the platform to offer a personal eulogy, while it is the group as whole that comes together to produce a song in their honour.

As a tradition set apart from the singing practices of the hollow square while maintaining the community-making trajectory that governs the hollow square, the memorial lesson is a tradition ideally poised to draw the world outside of the hollow square into its parameters and conversely to extend the community forged within the hollow square beyond those same boundaries. As Kiri Miller states, “while the hollow square turns singers’ backs on the outside world, the memorial lesson looks beyond the square’s borders to address death, illness, grief, and remembrance” (2008, 63). The memorial lesson accomplishes this transference primarily through provoking singers to shift their attention away from the singing itself and towards the community of people involved in the singing.

The memorial lesson shifts singers’ focus towards community in various ways. The speech portion of the memorial lesson grants the speaker the opportunity not only to

reflect upon the deceased singer's life and death, but also often to express the role that Sacred Harp played in that person's life. The following is an excerpt from a memorial lesson given by Richard DeLong for his great-uncle. DeLong is a singer from Georgia who was first introduced to Sacred Harp in the 1960s by his grandmother, Dollie Hudgins. As part of his speech, DeLong describes his grandmother, who had died the previous year, and her passion for Sacred Harp:

I don't think there's a day that goes by that I don't think about Sacred Harp. Because it—you can't help it! It gets down in the inner most part of you, and you get to love the people, and you love what we do and you love coming together, and my grandmother when she knew she was getting in bad health, and before a big singing would happen at home, I told somebody yesterday: a month before the singing was going to happen, she would go to worrying if she would be well enough to go the singing. A month! And I hope I—she would say, I hope I can go one more time, just one more time. And we'll be like that [...] Because you love it so much. And with that comes the love of these people we get to know, and friends, family, and sometimes they're even closer than family. So we'll sing 65. [leads "Sweet Prospect"]³ (qtd. in Miller 2008, 135)

While delivered from within the hollow square, such a speech as this shifts the audience's attention far beyond the boundaries of the square as they are drawn to reflect upon the life of a fellow singer and the importance of Sacred Harp to that singer. As this excerpt suggests, the spoken portion of the memorial lesson is often geared not only towards remembering singers who have passed away but also towards stressing the importance and interconnectedness of the Sacred Harp community. Mr. DeLong's comparison of the Sacred Harp community to a family is a common one. The recently deceased members of the community who are honoured in the memorial lesson are typically referred to as brothers and sisters (Bealle 1997, 257).

³ For the lyrics to "Sweet Prospect" see Appendix 4.

The memorial lesson frames both the life and death of an individual within the context of what it means to sing Sacred Harp and to belong to the community of singers. In doing so, this rite of passage serves to highlight the temporality of both the hollow square and the tradition of Sacred Harp as a whole. As Kiri Miller argues of the ways in which the memorial lesson draws the attention of those singers present to the temporal nature of the hollow square: "When memorial speakers invite the class to prepare themselves for the day when their own loved ones are missing from the square, they encourage *preemptive* nostalgia as a prelude to grief" (2008, 63). Similarly, particularly at times when the future of Sacred Harp has seemed in peril as older generations have passed on, the memorial lesson has offered singers the opportunity to comment on the mortality of the tradition itself. For instance, writing in the late 1970s, Buell Cobb remarked of the memorial lesson: "Painfully concerned as the singers are for the continuance of the singing even beyond their own knowledge of it, the list which is read at this time—often ten to twenty names in any given area—is like a bell that tolls the end of the singing itself. "We are passing away," they often sing, and they feel this truly" (1989, 147).

With the memorial lesson singers affirm their relationships to one another as part of a community: a community that, while forged within the hollow square, exits well beyond its boundaries. The memorial lesson constitutes an intricate intersection where life, death, music, and community each meet in the expression of social unity (Miller 2008, 134). This social unity is evident in the following comments from prominent Sacred Harp revivalist Hugh McGraw:

One of the main things in going to singings is not the singing, it's that wonderful fellowship. We'll get as close to somebody in Chicago as we will to the next door neighbour in Bremen, because of the love they have for our music. I hear in Bremen, Georgia, that a fellow in Texas has died that I sat and sang with. It hurts me when I hear that he's died, because, I remember him, I've sung with him, I've eaten with him. (qtd. in Bealle 1997, 217)

Held after the standard singing session is complete and before the departure from the hollow square for dinner-on-the-grounds, the memorial lesson serves as a transitory moment—one in which singers, while still seated within the hollow square, are compelled to look beyond its borders and to reflect upon the social significance of singing with one another.

B. The Memorial Lesson as Expressed by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus

While the engagement of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus with the memorial lesson has been limited, there remains within the group a significant relationship between singing Sacred Harp with one another and expressing grief as a community. The thematic content of the hymns of *The Sacred Harp* coupled with the strength of the community formed within the hollow square of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus has resulted in an adaptation of the memorial lesson that has been practiced by the group: the performance of Sacred Harp songs at the funeral or memorial of a singer who has passed away. When singer Jo Brunskill's husband, John—who also sang with the Ottawa group—died in 2006, so strong was this connection between communal singing and shared grief that it was readily assumed that Sacred Harp would be sung at his memorial. The memorial was organized by another member of the Ottawa group, Harlon Knowles. Concerning the inclusion of Sacred Harp songs, Jo remarks: "I don't think it was anybody's real idea, we

just knew it had to be" (2008). For the memorial the group sang John's favourite Sacred Harp songs: "Jacob's Vision" and "Sabbath Morning". The occasion provided an opportunity for the Ottawa singers to join together in both a fitting tribute to one of their fellow singers as well as in support of Jo. Since forming the hollow square would have excluded others in attendance at John's memorial, the group opted to sing in a more performance-oriented formation. The performance was a fitting tribute that impacted both the singers themselves as well as the audience. Concerning people's reaction to the use of Sacred Harp at her husband's memorial Jo mentions: "several people, after John's memorial—it's amazing how many people came up to me and said how much they enjoyed it." (2008). The integration of Sacred Harp into a memorial service thus proved to be a fitting union for all in attendance; so much so that many members of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus intend on having something similar done for their own funeral. For instance, when speaking of her favourite Sacred Harp songs, singer Barbara Tose remarks:

But there are certain songs that I want sung at my funeral, you know? That, because they're just so appropriate at a funeral I guess; I don't know. And again, this is envisioning me you know, singing Sacred Harp, you know, the rest of my life and knowing people who sing it—or dying tomorrow sort of thing. But you know, if I continue and I still know people who do it and I'm still singing it, yeah, I want it sung at my funeral, you know. I wouldn't do it if I got married, you wouldn't have that at a wedding! [laughs] (2008)

As Barbara's comments suggest, it is not merely the thematic content of the Sacred Harp hymns that lend the tradition to so fittingly be incorporated into funerary practices, but such an integration also relies heavily upon the community that exists among the singers. While the memorial lesson as expressed in its conventional form compels singers to look beyond the confines of the hollow square, the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus physically

removed such a tribute from out of the confines of the hollow square and in doing so both literally and metaphorically extended the group's communal ties beyond the confines of the hollow square. I would argue that this practice of the Ottawa group has grown not so much as an effort to replicate the conventional tradition of the memorial lesson but rather has developed organically within the group as a result of first the tone and thematic content of the songs and, second, the group's strong sense of community.

While within the group itself the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus has not practiced the memorial lesson in its conventional form, the communal ties that exist between the group and the Sacred Harp network has allowed members of the group to experience and participate in this rite of passage. For instance, John Bruskill was not only a member of the Ottawa group but was also a singer who frequently attended conventions around North America. With his passing, John came to be honoured in memorial lessons both in Canada and the United States. In July of 2006, John was honoured as part of the memorial lesson of the Quebec Singing Convention in Lennoxville. Unable to attend the convention, John's wife Jo Brunskill was grateful that fellow Ottawa singer Harlon Knowles was in attendance to represent the family. For the spoken word portion of the memorial lesson, Harlon read aloud a letter from Jo and John's youngest daughter and for the musical portion he lead "Green Street" in John's memory as it had been one of John's favourite songs. John was also honoured as part of the memorial lesson of the 2006 Coastal Maine Singing, held in August in Waldoboro, Maine. His name was read alongside those of fellow singers from Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Montreal, and North Carolina (Sheppard 2007, 192). The hymn "Vale of Sorrow," which contains the following verse, was sung in honour of the deceased:

While in this vale of sorrow, I travel on in pain
My heart is fixed on Jesus, I hope the prize to gain.
But when I come to bid adieu, to those I dearly love,
My heart is often melted—It is the grief of love. (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 83)

A fitting selection for the memorial lesson, “Veil of Sorrow” utilizes the theme of a pilgrimage homeward to express the sorrow of parting ways with loved ones. It is the “grief of love” here alluded to that the memorial lesson—and similar Sacred Harp funerary practices—seek to express through shared grief and communal mourning.

Dinner-on-the-Grounds: A Fruitful Branch of the Hollow Square

In the conventional timeline of a Sacred Harp sing, the memorial lesson is typically followed by dinner-on-the-grounds. With dinner-on-the-grounds, the shared grief of the memorial lesson is turned to the collective celebration of a communal feast.

A. The Conventional Form and Practices of Dinner-on-the-Grounds

Dinner-on-the-grounds became a part of the shape note tradition as a result of the migration of shape note music to the Southern United States during the mid to late 1800s. Since then, dinner-on-the-grounds has continued to thrive as a mainstay of the conventional expression of Sacred Harp. A potluck meal typically held at noon in between the morning and afternoon singing, dinner-on-the-grounds not only provides a recess for the singers to rest their vocal cords but also an opportunity to share both food and conversation with one another. The dinner is typically preceded by a blessing given by the chaplain and the food is commonly provided chiefly by “members of the host church or community” (Garst 1991, 25). The women of the host church or community

have tended to perform this duty of organizing the dinner-on-the-grounds and providing the food (Eastburn 2008, 31). In her book "A Sacred Feast", Kathryn Eastburn describes her experience at a Sacred Harp singing in Birmingham, Alabama: "The ladies of the food committee have risen to the occasion. More food arrives. No one goes hungry" (2008, 31).

In the following account of her first experience partaking in dinner-on-the-grounds, Eastburn remarks of the tradition's role in affirming her interest in Sacred Harp as a whole. She says,

I was hooked. And to cement my interest, lunchtime rolled around with a feast as grand as any I could recall [...] Rows of dishes—fried chicken, baked beans, deviled eggs, three varieties of green beans, and at least as many versions of potato salad—were lined up on long tables in the crowded church kitchen, flanked by smaller tables filled with sweating cups of iced tea. At the end of the table, women who reminded me of my great-aunts with their pillowed bosoms and downy cheeks, fussed over a banquet of pies and cakes. Effortlessly, the line of at least a couple hundred hungry souls rolled past the long table, filling plates and rattling the close air with small talk. (2008, xviii)

The dinner-on-the-grounds here described by Eastburn is typical of the elaborate feasts often staged for Sacred Harp sings—particularly those held in the South. Kiri Miller describes the Southern expression of dinner-on-the-grounds as follows:

The chairman calls a one-hour break for dinner. Many country churches in the South have long outdoor tables made of reinforced concrete, sometimes sheltered by a roof, where the food is laid out buffet-style. The singers pour out of the singing room and crowd around the tables, admiring the offerings and waiting for the chaplain to say grace before filling their plates [...] Outdoors, singers eat on their feet or sit on the ground in small groups. Indoors, they eat at tables or (rarely) sit back down in the singing space. (2008, 63)

There is some debate as to whether the term “dinner-on-the-grounds” originates from the meal being held on church grounds or whether the expression initially referred to singers taking their dinner, literally, on the ground—laying out quilts and picnic baskets (Eastburn 2008, 9). Whatever the origin of the term, dinner-on-the-grounds has become not only an integral part of the Sacred Harp experience, but also, for many singers is a significant part of the appeal of singing Sacred Harp. As Laura Clawson quotes from Alabama singer Henry Johnson, “the food is more important than sometimes we like to think. There’s something about eating together and eating good food every time you go that is a drawing card” (qtd. in Clawson 2004, 319).

Dinner-on-the-grounds can thus be seen to function as a communal tie that both extends community beyond the hollow square and also to compel singers to continue in their participation with Sacred Harp in general. Thus, similar to the manner in which dinner-on-the-grounds operates within the timeline of a conventional singing day, the tradition as a whole serves both to extend the singing community outside of the hollow square as well as to continually return the community to its “portable homeland”. The ability of dinner-on-the-grounds to function as a communal tie which both extends beyond and draws back to the hollow square is largely dependant upon the ways in which the tradition operates as an extension of the forms and practices of the hollow square. Much like the memorial lesson, dinner-on-the-grounds functions based on a delicate balance between individual expression and collective collaboration. A potluck meal is a particularly fitting extension of the community-making practices of the hollow square. While it is not demanded of everyone who attends a sing to contribute to the afternoon feast, typically dinner-on-the-grounds involves a great deal of both individual

contribution and group collaboration. Individuals and families alike bring their preferred dish to the festivities and as everyone contributes to the overall meal, the tables of food become a fitting representation of those present.

Akin to the singing practices of the hollow square, dinner-on-the-grounds grants the individual both a means of personal expression and an opportunity to contribute to the group as a whole. The opportunity for personal expression is perhaps most evident in the fact that, over time it is often common for individual singers or families as a whole to develop "trademark dishes" (Miller 2008, 64). These culinary contributions serve not only to represent particular singers to the group as a whole but are sometimes even made mention of in advertisements for a singing event as a means of enticing participation (Miller 2008, 64). Much like a singer may develop a trademark song, so too he or she may come to have a trademark dish; both of which provide singers with the opportunity to contribute to the group. Furthermore, much like the meal as a whole, these dishes themselves are often the product of a collaboration that enhances social bonds either amongst particular families or between friends. This is particularly prominent amongst women singers who contribute "enormous hampers of food" to the dinner-on-the-grounds. As Kiri Miller notes: "many female singers have commented on the bonds that develop from getting up at four in the morning to make final food preparations with mothers, daughters, sisters, or friends who are staying the night" (2008, 46).

In addition to the strengthening of social bonds through the collaborative production of the meal, particularly in the years since the Sacred Harp revival, dinner-on-the-grounds has become a means for singers from diverse backgrounds to both embrace one another's differences and come together in an expression and affirmation of

community. In the recent years of Sacred Harp history, which have seen the migration of Northern singers to Southern conventions—and vice versa—dinner-on-the-grounds has become an increasingly diverse culinary expression. Singers visiting the South from the Northern States and from Canada bring their own contributions to the meal: “elaborate pasta salads, sushi, pilaffs, and Midwestern ‘hot dish’” (Miller 2008, 64). These dishes are placed alongside the more typical Southern dishes: “barbecue, fried chicken, biscuits, and red velvet cake” (Miller 2008, 64). As Kiri Miller notes of this increased culinary diversity: “the spread of food is vast and varied, a visible and edible representation of the diversity of the participants” (2008, 63). This culinary diversity works both ways as dinner-on-the-grounds also becomes a gauge by which singers from the South measure cultural differences when attending a sing in the North. For instance, John Bealle quotes singer Richard Whatley from Georgia, who, attending his first Northern sing in 2002 at the Midwest Convention, humorously describes his experience of dinner-on-the-grounds there as follows:

All the meals were excellent, although I could not identify most of what was served. Sacred Harp purists will be glad to know that someone remembered to bring the traditional “purple dessert with Cool Whip on top.” First-timers from the South, like myself, noticed the conspicuous absence of the more traditional fare like collards with hog “parts,” and a decided slant towards pasta dishes. I never did figure out how they kept the cadence of the music at such a fast pace on such a low calorie diet. Never-the-less, it all tasted fine and no one died. (qtd. in Bealle 1997, 218)

As Richard Whatley’s comments suggest, while personal biases concerning taste and conceptions of what constitutes “traditional fare” may remain, dinner-on-the-grounds has become a opportunity for Southern and Northern singers to gather together and embrace

one another's differences through partaking in a shared meal to which everyone is able to contribute equally.

As this increased culinary diversity suggests, in the years since the revival of Sacred Harp in the North, dinner-on-the-grounds has provided a space for singers from the North and from the South to bridge gaps of social, cultural, and political differences. Of course, dinner-on-the-grounds is as much about socializing with one another as it is about sharing food; or as Buell Cobb puts it, dinner-on-the-grounds is "a great social hour as well as a communal feast" (1989, 17). It is thus only fitting that gaps between Northern and Southern singers would also be bridged through the social element of the tradition, which, as the following example from Kiri Miller suggests, is often the case:

I have overheard subtle bargains being struck in conversations over dinner-on-the-grounds: a conservative singer bemoans the decline of family values when spouses must take jobs in different cities, a liberal singer sighs sympathetically and offers the corroborating example of a gay couple she knows whose long-distance relationship is under constant strain. Neither directly challenges the other, and their exchange falls within the bounds of "fellowship". (2008, 197)

As a further application of those same community-making practices of the hollow square, dinner-on-the-grounds is a space that remains under the banner of communal fellowship. Thus, overt social, political or religious debates tend to be avoided in favour of a delicate balance between supporting diversity and personal expression, and maintaining an overall trajectory of collective cohesion. Dinner-on-the-grounds, as an extension of the practices of the hollow square, effectively takes hold of the community created within the square and branches it outward as a communal tie that both extends beyond and feeds back into the hollow square.

B. The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' Expression of Dinner-on-the-Grounds

For many, dinner-on-the-grounds has become a significant marker of a "traditional" Sacred Harp sing (Miller 2008, 53). The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus practices several variants of dinner-on-the-grounds; one of which is particularly in line with the traditional practice as expressed in the South, while the others have grown organically from within the group rather than as an attempt to replicate a "traditional" sing. For their monthly singing sessions, the Tuesday and Sunday groups each have their own food-based traditions and when both chapters gather together for the quarterly sings, all partake in a potluck dinner that is most akin to the conventional dinner-on-the-grounds. While some of these traditions may look and taste different from the traditional approach to dinner-on-the-grounds, what remains the same are the ways in which they function to create communal ties that both extend out of and feed back into the hollow square.

For the Tuesday group, the monthly evening singing session is bookended by culinary traditions both before and after the singing. Some members of the group—though not all—regularly meet for dinner and drinks prior to arriving at the singing session. This typically takes place at one particular pub close to the home where the singing is held. This tradition involves a certain element of exclusivity as it is the more seasoned singers and those who have reached a certain level of friendship with one another who typically meet for dinner. The pre-sing dinner of the Tuesday group can be seen as somewhat of a privilege that is afforded those who have sung with the group for a significant amount of time and who, in doing so, have developed a certain level of rapport with the other singers. The individual's participation within the hollow square and the

extent to which they are woven into the community created there thus results in an affirmation and extension of that fellowship through participation in the pre-sing dinner.

Unlike the pre-sing dinner, all singers of the Tuesday group—newcomers such as myself included—are welcomed to partake in a post-sing gathering for coffee, tea, treats and conversation. This is held within the kitchen of the home where the singing is being hosted and each member of the group takes a turn providing the treats to be offered. The typical contribution is something sweet such as cookies or pastries. Much like dinner-on-the-grounds, this tradition involves a certain amount of group collaboration and allows the singers not only an opportunity to partake of some sweets but also to further enjoy one another's company. As such, the post-sing snack—as well as the pre-sing dinner and drinks—have become an integral part of the Tuesday group's expression of Sacred Harp. As Tuesday singer Barbara Tose remarks, "the singing's nice but the socialness of it, too. I mean, the dinner beforehand, that's a part of it, the—just the banter back and forth [...] that's a part of it. The tea and cookies afterwards, that's another nice social part of it that I would really miss if we didn't do that" (Tose 2008). Like dinner-on-the-grounds, such occasions of communal eating and drinking as those practiced by the Tuesday group play a key role in enhancing the social element of singing Sacred Harp. For instance, Tuesday singer David Baril describes the following incident as being one of the "quintessential, archetypal moments" of the group:

Now I'm not sure how early it was in the history of the group—whether it was just a few of us there; And Catherine brought out her husband Gord's scotch collection and I had never been much of a scotch drinker and she had these little scotch glasses and we tasted all these different kinds of scotches and I discovered the scotch that I like. So, Sacred Harp introduced me to scotch! [laughs] (2008)

While a scotch-tasting may be out of sorts with the religious roots of Sacred Harp, such an incident is nevertheless reasonably in line with the tradition of dinner-on-the-grounds in that it serves to extend the social bonds forged within the hollow square beyond the practice of collective singing and into that of communal eating and drinking.

While the Tuesday group has engaged in food and drinks both prior to and after their singing session for the majority of time that they have been singing together, for the Sunday group such a tradition has only developed within the past few years. Beginning in 2005, the group began going out for dinner after the singing session. The reasons behind the development of this tradition are varied though there seems to have been little conscious intention for the tradition to serve as a replication of the conventional dinner-on-the-grounds. Rather, the after-sing dinner seems to have developed quite organically as a result of the sense of community that the group had forged from singing with one another. Practically speaking, the tradition began in part simply because the group began meeting in the mid-afternoon rather than in the evening so that when the singing finished at about five o'clock it seemed fitting to go out for dinner as a group (Taylor 2008). It was, of course, also around this time that the group had collectively formed a certain level of social bond with one another through their time spent in the hollow square that an extension of that sense of community seemed only natural. Interestingly enough, the tradition also developed around the same time that the group started singing once a month rather than once a week and thus going out to dinner after the sing not only extended the singing event but provided an opportunity for the singers to more effectively socialize now that they would only be seeing one another on a monthly basis. The decision to convene at a restaurant rather than to hold a potluck meal or to have the host

serve dinner seems to have been made largely on the basis of convenience. The selection of restaurant is subject to change from month to month and is settled upon simply via a conversation at the end of the singing session in which a consensus amongst those wishing to partake in the meal is reached. While speaking with singer Jo Brunskill about the development of the Sunday evening dinner tradition, it occurred to Jo that perhaps one of the reasons for this development was an effort on part of the group to offer her support after her husband John had passed away. She said,

I don't think we, we didn't do it much when John was alive. I don't know whether they did it for me; that's funny. Maybe they did it for me, I don't know. But it's really nice. Quite often it's just been Jim, who is Adrienne's husband and Harlon and Roger, me and my three men! [laughs] It's really nice. (2008)

Jo describes singing with the group and going out for dinner afterwards as having provided her with a "terrific support from the community" following the death of her husband (2008). The development of the Sunday evening dinner can thus be seen as a meaningful extension of the community formed within the hollow square.

After the conclusion of my first time singing with the Sunday group, I was welcomed to join the group for dinner at a Chinese buffet close by. Seated with the other singers in front of a plate full of chicken chow mein and vegetable fried rice, it occurred to me then that this gathering was a somewhat peculiar adaptation of dinner-on-the-grounds. However, sharing a meal with the other singers and continuing in conversation with them afforded me much the same value experienced by singers attending a more conventional dinner-on-the-grounds; just as singers in the South extend their fellowship with one another over an elaborate display of potato salad and fried chicken, so too was I

able to begin developing the friendships I had made within the hollow square at a small Chinese buffet restaurant in downtown Ottawa.

While the monthly singings' expression of dinner-on-the-grounds may differ somewhat from what is typically found at a Southern sing, what holds the same is the value of enhancing social bonds through a shared meal. This value is perhaps most evident at the Ottawa group's quarterly singing events in which the Tuesday and Sunday group combine not only to sing together at a local community hall, but also to share a potluck dinner at the conclusion of the singing. The purpose of the quarterly sings is not only to gather the Tuesday and Sunday chapters together but also, the event is publicized so that Sacred Harp singers from the surrounding areas may participate should they desire to. In an effort to preserve and affirm the group's secular orientation, these events are held on the solstices and equinoxes of each year rather than in relation to holidays of the Christian calendar. The holding of the quarterly sings on the solstices and equinoxes thus functions to clearly demarcate the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of Sacred Harp from the more religiously-oriented expressions of the tradition in its Southern context. However, of all the Ottawa group's food-based traditions, the potluck meal held on these solstice and equinox sings is the tradition most in keeping with the conventional expression of dinner-on-the-grounds. With each singer contributing a dish to the event and every one working together to produce a feast suitable to meet the needs of thirty or so hungry singers, the potluck provides a fitting extension of the shared and collaborative experience of singing with one another in the hollow square.

At the summer solstice sing that I attended in June of 2008, the conclusion of the singing session with "Parting Friends" and the subsequent gathering of everyone within

the centre of the square to shake hands provided for a seamless flow into the conversation and dinner to follow the singing. The community thus formed throughout the process of singing within the hollow square here granted the singers a moment to affirm their sense of fellowship by greeting one another in the centre of the square. Moreover, this affirmation then gave way to a further extension of community, branching outside of the framework of the square as the singers made their way to the tables of food awaiting them. Socializing with one another, the singers spoke not only of the sing and how the session had gone but of friends and families, jobs and retirement, homes and vacations, and everything in between. And just as the topics of conversation covered a significant breadth, the food provided was quite varied. Filling my plate with couscous, pasta salad, and chilli while trying to leave room for the impressive display of desserts, it is perhaps not all that surprising that several of my conversations with the other singers were ultimately geared towards exchanging recipes with one another.

While not held on the grounds of a church, nor literally on the ground as a picnic, the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of dinner-on-the-grounds—in all its variations—remains true to the Southern expression of the tradition in that it has both the same root and the same purpose. Rooted within the hollow square and branching out into expressions and affirmations of community, the Ottawa group's various culinary traditions all function both to extend the group's sense of community and to continually draw singers back to the hollow square.

The Sacred Harp Network: Affirming Identity and Overcoming Differences

Communal ties that extend outside of the hollow square to express and affirm a particular group's sense of community, also exist between individual groups and the network of Sacred Harp communities as a whole. These ties are formed primarily through the interactions that occur as a result of singers traveling to and singing with different Sacred Harp communities throughout the United States and Canada. Often forged amidst social and religious differences, these communal ties function to strengthen the individual group as well as the network as a whole. The communal ties that exist within the group are especially strengthened through interactions that highlight regional and religious differences and in doing so provide an opportunity for the affirmation of the group's own sense of identity against opposing influences. Conversely, the communal ties that are forged between the group and the network are strengthened through interactions in which differences of region or religion are overcome in favour of joining together under the banner of Sacred Harp.

A. Affirming Group Identity through Interactions with the Network

The strengthening of communal ties amongst a group through interactions with the network often comes as a result of encountering regional and religious differences. Though it is more common that these differences are overcome, when differences in region or religion do result in tensions between individuals and between communities, the end result is often not the breaking of social ties with the network but rather the strengthening of ties amongst the group. In the context of singing Sacred Harp,

differences in region and religion do not cause tension in and of themselves. Rather, such tensions arise largely as a result of the claims to authenticity that are typically attached to geographic and religious categories. By both Northerners and Southerners, singers from the South are often viewed as having a greater claim to the authentic practice Sacred Harp. This is due not only to the religious orientation of Sacred Harp communities in the South, but also to an assumption that, given the history of Sacred Harp in the South and the ability of a Southerner to come to the tradition through social ties rather than through revivalist means, Southern singers have an innately greater capacity for an authentic approach to singing Sacred Harp (Marini 2003, 94). In fact, Southern singers are often referred to as "traditional singers"—the connotation being that their counterparts in the North are, at least to some degree, removed from the heart of the tradition. As Kiri Miller notes, "despite the much-vaunted egalitarian aspects of the Sacred Harp singing convention, not all participants in the national community of singers are quite equal [...] some singers are considered "more traditional" than others (Miller 2004, 477). For Northerners this divide between Northern and Southern approaches to Sacred Harp and the issues of authenticity involved therein, often manifests as a frustration at not being able to obtain an equal level of competence as that of a "traditional singer". Conversely, for the Southern singer this divide often manifests as a concern over the secularization of Sacred Harp by Northern communities (Marini 2003, 94).

Navigating these regional and religious divides becomes an integral task to any dedicated Sacred Harp singer as well as to groups such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. A common defence against claims of authenticity based purely on geographical proximity is to cite the history of shape note music as it existed in the North before it migrated to the

South. Typical of such a defence are the following comments from Ottawa singer Colin Hencin:

In my mind, Sacred Harp is a New England tradition and I know this is like a thing in Sacred Harp that the music started in New England and it moved to the South well, did it get good when it moved south or did it just move there and get preserved? But the Southern people certainly think of it as their music and they turned it into what it is and if you want to sing it, you should sing it like they do. But I don't. (2008)

Northern singers are often quite well versed in the history of Sacred Harp and, as the statement from Colin quoted above suggests, they are often inclined to turn to that history as a defence against exclusionary claims of Southern authenticity. It is important to note, however, that while Northern singers sometimes find it necessary to defend their ability to authentically practice Sacred Harp, they often also readily acknowledge their inability to replicate Sacred Harp as it exists—and in particular, how it *sounds*—in the South. For instance, Colin goes on to say of a convention he attended in Alabama: “I have heard the Southern sound and we don't have it. And I don't exactly know why, I think it has to do with the pace; I think it has to do with the accents” (2008). Thus the insistence on claiming a right to sing Sacred Harp is often balanced by and coupled with an acknowledgment of the inability to replicate exactly the Southern expression of Sacred Harp.

There are two particularly prominent narratives amongst the members of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus that serve to highlight the regional and religious tensions that the group navigates when forming communal ties across both regional and religious divides. In both cases, the group's interactions with the network, while involving a certain amount of tension, ultimately resulted in the strengthening of communal ties

within the group. The first narrative involves one of the Ottawa singers attending a sing in Washington, DC at which the Lee family was also in attendance. The Lees are a prominent Sacred Harp family from the South who are perhaps currently the definitive example of what it means to be "traditional singers". At the Washington convention the Ottawa singer met one of the older women of the Lee family. Barbara Tose describes the subsequent exchange between the two singers as follows:

She [the member of the Lee family] shook her hand and looked her straight in the eye and said, "I hope you're singin' this for the right reason" [imitating a Southern accent]. Yeah, and she's like, "yes, well, you know, I'm sure I am". But she didn't say what that reason was. But yeah, they have a very definite and a very religious thing, you don't fool around at their conventions you know. (2008)

This narrative highlights the fact that for many, to sing Sacred Harp authentically, one must do so as a religious practice. The fact that this has become a prominent narrative of the Ottawa group, however, points to the fact that while threatening communal ties across religious boundaries, such interactions often serve to strengthen the ties within a particular group. I would argue that one reason that this narrative is told so often amongst the group is that it expresses, affirms and defends the group's secular orientation. In a similar vein is the story often shared concerning a group of Southern singers who visited to sing with the Ottawa group. This narrative provides a good example of how Northern Sacred Harp groups encounter claims to authenticity that are based purely upon geography. Ottawa singer Robert Thompson tells the story as follows:

One of the stories you'll probably hear is when the Southern singers came here. They were on their way to whatever place in Vermont and they thought, "Hey, we'll go to Ottawa first!" And so we organized the sing for them and they came here. And they started out the evening by saying: "we gotta he'p [help] these

people sing this music!" [imitating a Southern accent]. And people were so offended! There were some of our singers who were so offended that they now use that phrase and it's a real touchstone to that whole experience. And you know, it's like a family, you have these little phrases that you say and everybody knows what the experience is and they know what you're getting at: "Gotta he'p these people". (2008)

Much like the narrative of the Ottawa singer's encounter with a member of the Lee family, this narrative—and the resulting catchphrase—functions largely as a means for the group to assert their own autonomy within the greater Sacred Harp community. Both narratives serve to highlight differences between Northern and Southern singers, reflected in the tendency to adopt a Southern accent in the telling. These narratives have gained prominence, in part, because they provide a means to express the legitimacy of the group against perceptions that to sing Sacred Harp authentically, one must be a Christian from the South. While such experiences and their resulting narratives have value in affirming group autonomy, it is worth pointing out that another reason why these narratives have gained prominence is that generally such experiences are the exception to the rule in terms of interactions with singers from across regional and religious boundaries. As Colin Henein concludes his version of the first narrative: "But that's the only case that happened—I mean, it's a story because nobody else has ever really experienced that" (2008).

B. Overcoming Differences and Strengthening Communal Ties

Overall, interactions between members of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and their fellow singers across North America have proven to be a positive means of forging

and strengthening social ties between the group and the network. United by what Ottawa singer Dave Baril refers to as the "universal language" of Sacred Harp (2008), by most accounts members of the Ottawa group who have ventured out to a foreign sing have found what Kiri Miller describes as a "welcoming community of consent" (Miller 2008, 203). For instance, Colin Hencin describes his journey to a sing in Southern California as follows:

And I am pretty shy, and I was shy at the time too so I was like, okay, I'm in another country, and I'm traveling by myself and I'm here for this sing. [...] And so I had to figure out how to get there and all this kind of stuff. But when I got there [...] they were like, "Oh! You're from Ottawa! That's great! That's wonderful!" And there was a guy there, I don't remember his name, but he was very welcoming and so I felt quite good there. And everybody wanted to know about singing in Ottawa, and how big was our group and did we do this and all this kind of stuff. (2008)

Entering as a shy stranger and parting as a new friend, Colin's experience in Southern California is quite typical of those recounted to me by many of the Ottawa singers who have attended sings across Canada and the United States. Jo and John Brunskill took various road trips across North America in a school bus which they had converted into a camper and throughout their travels they made sure to stop at as many sings as they could find. In recounting their journey to the Southern United States and singing with the people there, Jo remarks: "They were tickled to bits that Canadians would come down and sing with them!" (2008).

Facilitating such positive interactions is both a certain amount of respect on the part of secular singers for the ways in which religious singers approach Sacred Harp, as well as a willingness to compromise their own secular approach to the tradition in order

not to offend those they are singing with. Despite turning to the history of Sacred Harp in the North as a means to claim authenticity, there remains a level of reverence for the tradition as preserved and expressed within the South. For instance, in discussing whether or not she would feel comfortable attending a Sacred Harp sing in the South, Barbara Tose states: "I would be, yeah. I'd be much more careful going to a sing where I didn't know people, because again, I don't want to be disrespectful of their beliefs. You know, they allow us to use the music for whatever we want [...] and I wouldn't want to offend somebody, as a visitor, you know" (2008). Similarly, Jo Brunskill remarks:

The religiosity doesn't have any impact on me. But I do, especially at big sings or something, I do respect the people to whom it means *a lot*. We've sung with a group in the very south of Georgia [...] And it really means an awful lot to them so I'm very conscious of the fact that, you know, you don't giggle when you think it's funny [laughs] because you don't want to hurt their feelings, you're a guest. (Brunskill)

Such an attempt towards self-censorship out of respect for those who sing Sacred Harp as a religious practice is also evident in the following account from Colin Hensein:

I have a little Darwin fish bumper sticker that I used to have on my car and I took it off before I went to the sing—the Young People's Sing. Because I'm like, you know, it's, you have to respect other people's traditions and I don't have to throw in their face that for me this is an intellectual interest or a hobby and for them it's, you know, they're there thinking about God and I'm there thinking about music. (2008)

Rooted in a respect for the religious roots of the tradition and for those who sing Sacred Harp as a means of religious expression, such efforts are aimed toward bridging the gap between sacred and secular practitioners of Sacred Harp.

The formation and strengthening of communal ties, often facilitated by somewhat compromising one's own approach to the tradition, is accomplished primarily by the

interactions between singers from varying contexts who, in singing, mourning and eating with one another effectively bridge the regional and religious gaps that exist within the Sacred Harp network. Forging friendships and sharing songs with singers from across North America, differences in region and religion often fade to the background in favour of a shared expression of song and a strengthening of community. One of the best stories I have heard to illustrate this point is one that was told to me by Jo Brunskill as she recounted her various experiences traveling through and singing in the South:

What did surprise me, the family in this group—and it's a well known family—it's the Lees. One of the sisters came and sat by me and said, "You sing alto?" I said, "Yes".
"Well I'll sit by you and then I can follow you."
And I said, "But you're a *Lee!*" [laughs]
"Oh yeah, but I don't read the music, I just sing whatever the person next to me sings!"
[laughs] "Alright! I'm not the expert, you are!" (2008)

Here we find a complete reversal of the regional and religious dynamics that govern so much of the relationship between Northern and Southern singers as Jo, the Northern and secular singer, is looked to by one of the revered "traditional" singers of the religious South for assistance singing. In a similar account of the extent to which practicing Sacred Harp together allows singers to overcome differences is the following description from Sheldon Posen of his experience attending a convention in New England in the late 1970s:

One person got up right towards the end of the singing that afternoon and said that this was the first time that anybody from his family had been north of the Mason-Dixon Line without a gun in their hand. You know, come to sing rather than to fight and that really caught me up short, I'll always remember that. (2008)

Conclusion: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

Concerning practices such as the memorial lesson and dinner-on-the-grounds, Kiri Miller argues that such expressions of community become as much a part of the Sacred Harp experience as the communal singing. She goes on to state that, "over time, these practices have enabled singers of sometimes radically opposed religious and political beliefs to develop a pluralist ethos of tolerance and empathy" (Miller 2008, 44). Laura Clawson argues that it is the appeal and structure of the musical practices of Sacred Harp that allow singers from diverse backgrounds to "move toward a common ground and shared community" (Clawson 2004, 314). I would further argue that in addition to the purely musical practices of Sacred Harp that bridge regional and religious gaps by inviting everyone to share in a communal expression of song, traditions such as the memorial lesson and dinner-on-the-grounds, in functioning on the same community-making principles of the hollow square, further facilitate the coming together of singers from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, just as the memorial lesson and dinner-on-the-grounds operate on a balance between individual expression and group collaboration, interactions that occur between groups such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and the Sacred Harp network as a whole hinge upon a balance between affirming group identity and achieving collective consensus. Thus the community-making principles that govern the singing of the hollow square are by and large the same principles that create the communal ties that branch out of the square both within an individual group and within the network at large. Singers of Sacred Harp gather together not only to share songs with one another, but also to become part of a community; a community that overcomes regional and religious divides to embrace both the grief of collective mourning and the

joy of a shared meal. The communal ties that branch out of the hollow square are the "bonds of love" that connect singers to one another when they part. So too are they the "drawing bands" that continually call singers as both wayfaring strangers and parting friends back to the hollow square to reunite with one another in their "portable homeland" (Miller 2008, 47).

Chapter Four

"And Form a Sacred Song": Masquerading the Sacred through Song

*"Come, let us raise our voices high,
And form a sacred song
To Him who rules the earth and sky,
And does our days prolong."*

-Excerpt from "Morning Prayer" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 411)

The words of *The Sacred Harp* are amongst the most passionately religious of all Christian hymnody (McKenzie 1989, 153). The music through which these words are delivered and the manner in which they are to be sung provide a thoroughly fitting vehicle for the expression of the words. Whether stringently declaring the impermanence and triviality of earthly pleasures or rejoicing in the anticipation of union with Christ after death (Cobb 1989, 25), the songs of *The Sacred Harp* not only feature intricately intense and often haunting melodies, but the manner in which they are typically delivered—communally and with great ardour and volume—provide for a powerful reflection and expression of the lyrical content. For such explicitly and passionately religious songs to be sung within the expressly secular context of a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, a comfortable distance is established between the singers and the songs that they are singing.

When speaking with Ottawa singer Carla Boucher concerning the potential difficulty of singing lyrics that she did not necessarily agree with, she said: "If it's historic music, I don't care. You try it on to look through the eyes of the people in the period" (2008). The space between the religiosity of Sacred Harp and the secular orientation of revivalist singers such as those of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus is one occupied by and

navigated through a type of masquerade. At the crossroads between the secular orientation of the Ottawa group and the religious disposition of Sacred Harp, the various members of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus can be seen to participate in a masquerade in which the masks and costumes that the singers put on are not physical constructions, but rather are the songs they sing. Masquerade has found a wide range of social and historical uses, one of which is as an instrument for reviving the past. For instance, concerning the elaborate masquerade balls of the Victorian age, Helene Roberts writes: "the costume could act as the medium through which an individual of the present could step into the past [...] it was a material, achievable, and understood means by which Victorians attempted to revive the past" (1980, 40). Singing in the antiquated style of Sacred Harp music and giving voice to the religious content of the lyrics, the singers of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus are in a sense "trying on" the mask of Sacred Harp. This is a mask that not only depicts a bygone era dating back to North America's colonial period but also one that portrays and gives expression to a religious conviction often contrary to that of the singers.

It is the religious conviction of the mask worn by secular revivalists of Sacred Harp that I will be focusing on in this chapter. In participating in a masquerade of the sacred, the singers of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus place themselves in a delicate position between the secular and the sacred. Each singer navigates this space differently—from those for whom the mask of Sacred Harp is exclusively a facade and merely a temporary, playful guise of the religious, to those who find genuine personal and spiritual significance in the songs they are singing. Furthermore, this orientation of a singer toward the religious content of *The Sacred Harp* is subject to a significant degree

of change over time. This process of transformation typically follows a trajectory towards an increased level of engagement and identification with the religious themes and content at work within the songs of *The Sacred Harp*. In order to demonstrate exactly how such a shift can take place, I will be looking at various formal elements of the Sacred Harp tradition that, while initially accommodating the distance between a secular singer and the sacred lyrics, often ultimately function to overcome this barrier and draw the singer into a closer level of engagement with the religious implications of singing Sacred Harp. Thus, as I hope to show, what may begin as a purely secular practice—a masquerade of the sacred—often involves an increasingly blurred line between secular and sacred as the divide between singer and song is progressively breached over time and as the singers are compelled to continually fluctuate between imitation and sincere expression. This is a fluctuation that, in affording the singer the opportunity for a genuine engagement with and expression of conservative religious convictions while remaining under the guise of playful masquerade, places the singer in a position poised between an adherence to and a departure from the status quo of postmodern society.

Between Affirmation and Negation: Cultural and Historical Functions of Masquerade

Before proceeding on to an examination of the place which masquerade holds within the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of Sacred Harp, it is beneficial to examine the nature and function of masquerade as utilized in some of its more obvious contexts. Across a vast and varied multitude of cultural and historical contexts, masquerade has performed a wide range of social, religious, and political functions.

While the particular manifestation of masquerade may change significantly from context to context, there is a sense in which the nature and function of masquerade—at the most basic level—remains considerably similar. From the ritual masked performances of tribal myths conducted by various North American native groups to the elaborate masquerade balls of Victorian England, it remains the fundamental nature of masquerade to serve as a means of communicative expression through the creation of a liminal space (van Gemep 1960, 11).

Between the mask and the wearer of the mask lies a space which straddles and continually re-negotiates such dichotomies as male and female, private and public, living and dead, rich and poor, past and present, sacred and secular (McAlister 2002, 10). Each of these negotiations ultimately occurs within a larger social framework in which the masquerade, as a communicative device, can serve either to affirm or to negate the status quo. For instance, in performing the traditional myths of an aboriginal group, masquerade might serve to renew the social order by communicating to each new generation the traditions and social standards of the group (Levi-Strauss 1999, 14). Conversely, various expressions of Carnival—a tradition intricately dependant upon the use of masquerade—have commonly been viewed as a means of subversion and protest against the established order (Humphrey 2001, 27). Concerning the role of masquerade in offering participants of Carnival the opportunity to step outside of conventional social limits, Helene Roberts writes: "The reveller at carnival time acts in ways unthinkable in his normal life and dress. The reveller's release from the ordinary restraints of society is largely effected through the adoption of costume and mask and, through their aid, the adoption of another outward appearance" (1980, 11).

In many cases, the question of affirmation or negation of the social order becomes significantly complex as what may first appear as a protest against the established order may in fact operate ultimately to reinforce the status quo. Two prominent examples of a masquerade being positioned somewhere between affirming and negating the social order are the traditions of mumming and Carnival. The mumming traditions of Newfoundland take place during the evenings of the Twelve Days of Christmas; during which time groups of individuals disguised in costume travel from house to house within their community and as "mummers" or "janneys" they remain in disguise until their identity is surmised by an undisguised member of the hosting home (Faris 1969, 130-133). The behaviour of the mummers—especially before their identity is exposed—is typically considerably boisterous and disruptive; behaviour which Melvin Firestone attributes largely to the social freedom afforded by the mummers' use of costume, saying: "By donning disguises they make themselves unknown and so escape their customary social roles. It removes some of the inhibitions normal to individuals in their daily lives, and as 'janneys' their behaviour becomes somewhat unpredictable and capricious" (1969, 63). Concerning the potential destabilization of the social order involved in the tradition, Gerald Sider writes: "This form of mumming is finely balanced between deference and aggressive mockery. As with many ritualized inversions of the social order, it can be either a reaffirmation or an attack on this order" (1976, 116). While elements of the tradition suggest mumming to involve a disruption of the social order, most scholars agree that the tradition is ultimately one of "social reaffirmation" (Szwed 1969, 118), operating to reaffirm the status quo by allowing for a "socially approved means of

displacing hostility" (Firestone 1969, 73). Typical of such a view is John Szwed's argument that:

Despite the seemingly disruptive nature of mumming practices, the ritual culminates in a reaffirmation of ties that express a formal societal rejection of the sort of behaviour portrayed in the mumming [...] hostility is expressed toward the hosts through mummer's aggressive behaviour, while the hosts show similar hostility toward the mummies in the form of anxiety over the unpredictability of the situation. Through the aggression of both, frustration is eased. (1969, 117)

As with the case of Newfoundland mumming, Carnival is a tradition that, as Abner Cohen writes, is: "precariously poised between the affirmation of the established order and its rejection" (1993, 3). It is thus often the case that the liminal space created through a masquerade extends to the social function of the masquerade in that it occupies a space somewhere in between the affirmation and negation of the status quo. Being placed so delicately between affirming and rejecting the established order, Carnival provides an especially useful comparison for the role of masquerade in Sacred Harp revivalism. For many, Carnival has been viewed as a source of authentic social and political protest. This view of Carnival as subversion is summarized by Chris Humphrey as follows: "by making use of images and practices which broke with social norms the participants were seeking to undermine or change the present state of society" (2001, 27). Such views have been countered by those who rather perceive Carnival to function as a "safety-valve"—an event which, while involving the release of tensions and aggression ultimately serves to affirm the same status quo it at times appears to protest—such as in the case of mumming. Phythian-Adams argues: "if such customs deliberately distorted certain aspects of the social order, there was no question of altering the whole: in

disfiguring the structure temporarily, the participants were in fact accepting the status quo in the long run" (1972, 66). Similarly, Terry Eagleton states:

Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. (1981, 148)

Contemporary scholarship on the matter has tended to prefer a more balanced, contextual approach. Rather than resorting to the polarized debate of Carnival as functioning either as a genuine protest or as a mere safety-valve, scholars have opted to exploring the ways in which Carnival can at once be a tool of protest and a means of social affirmation (Humphrey 2001, 35). Stallybrass and White argue:

It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are intrinsically radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression. The most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle. (1986, 14)

Similarly, Abner Cohen states: "Conflict is part of the very essence of the celebration. It is built into its very structure. This is why Carnival should be conceived as a kind of a joking relationship characterised by both alliance and enmity at one and the same time" (1993, 131). Cohen's remarks concerning Carnival could be applied to many uses of masquerade and can quite fittingly be applied to the use of masquerade in Sacred Harp revivalism. The playful tension between alliance and enmity plays a major role in any revivalist's approach to singing Sacred Harp. This tension comes especially into play in a secular singer's approach to adorning the religiosity of the Sacred Harp mask.

In his discussion of Sacred Harp's contemporary navigation of sacred and secular contexts, Stephen Marini writes, "the religious meaning of Sacred Harp today, I think, reflects the displacement of the sacred from primary religious institutions to secondary expressions" (2003, 86). Marini goes on to argue that, "since the 1960s, postmoderns have increasingly sought effective communities outside of primary religious institutions, often in cultural movements like the folk music revival" (2003, 91). As Marini's comments suggest, for many contemporary singers of Sacred Harp, practicing the tradition addresses a need once fulfilled by religious institutions. With the decline of the established church in contemporary Western society, a need for religious expression is thus fulfilled via a masquerade of the sacred—one which revives a past in which religion held a more integral and prominent position in society at large. Here then is an especially unique example of masquerade facilitating the expression of otherwise suppressed needs. While in many of its manifestations—such as in the case of mumming and Carnival—masquerade is employed as a means of momentarily unleashing the over-indulgent, potentially aggressive, and often times rather base, elements of the self and of a society, in the case of secular Sacred Harp revivalism, masquerade is utilized as a means for expressing highly conservative values. Within a postmodern context in which society at large has become increasingly non-religious, alliance with the status quo connotes a general disassociation with religious institutions. Engagement with conservative religiosity, in some sense, thus comes to signify a degree of departure from the established order. Here then the topsy-turvy world of the Carnival masquerade is itself put on its head as religious conservatism becomes an expression of divergence from, rather than adherence to, the status quo. While for some revivalist singers, the masquerade of

the sacred remains purely a facade—and thus falls in line with the ‘safety-valve’ approach to masquerade in that it offers its participants just enough of the religious to soothe an unmet need—for others, the masquerade of the sacred facilitated by singing Sacred Harp cultivates sincere spiritual meaning and can thus be viewed as something of a genuine departure from the status quo of postmodern society. Both expressions, however, exist simultaneously and thus on the whole the masquerade of the sacred enacted by a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus does not settle entirely within either the realm of affirmation or of negation of the status quo but rather, can be seen to continually travel between the two.

The ability to travel between the purely imitative and the sincerely expressive is afforded via the liminal space that is created by masquerade. Under the guise of masked play, a revivalist singer of Sacred Harp finds him or herself in a world that is not entirely sacred or secular, past or present, imitative or authentic. Donning the mask of Sacred Harp, a singer performs the rituals of a tradition that is deeply entrenched in Protestant Christianity. The degree to which this performance is carried out with an element of sincerity or whether it remains purely a facade depends upon each individual singer’s navigation of his or her changeable position between adherence and departure.

The Guise of Play: Establishing a Masquerade of the Sacred

In her discussion of Rara, a carnivalesque-tradition practiced by the lower classes of Haiti, Elizabeth McAlister argues that the participants of Rara, in donning the mask of playfulness, are enabled to frequently and with considerable ease, alternate between the harmlessly amusing and the meaningfully expressive. She writes:

But Rara's religious work is largely secret and is purposely kept hidden. Surrounding and hiding Rara's religious core is an outer layer of carnivalesque play. This combination of religious seriousness and public play enables certain kinds of speech and assembly in the face of political insecurity that characterizes Haiti's history. A Rara band may salute the spirits in the crossroads at one moment, then sing in favour or disapproval of particular politicians. The very next instant the band can launch into the absurd ditties of Carnival. The two registers of seriousness and play can happen simultaneously, or the band can move swiftly between them as a protective technique. (2002, 7-8)

While the Haitian traditions of Rara are, in many readily apparent ways, worlds apart from the Sacred Harp revivalism of a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, several useful parallels can nevertheless be drawn concerning the use of masquerade as a means to establish liminality and to move between seriousness and play. The gap between the explicitly religious elements of Sacred Harp and the secular orientation of the vast majority of the Ottawa group's singers is one occupied by a masquerade that enables the singers to don the sacred without necessarily embracing the beliefs expressed therein. By placing the religiosity of *The Sacred Harp* at a fixed distance from the singer's true identity, this masquerade enables a degree of engagement with the text that often manifests as a highly playful interaction.

Shortly into my time singing with the Ottawa group, I became aware that certain songs incited particularly playful interactions between the singers and the lyrics. For instance, it has become customary when singing "Lover of the Lord" for singers to sarcastically wag their fingers at one another upon singing the latter half of the line, "Oh you must be a lover of the Lord, or you can't go to heaven when you die" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 124). This playful interaction with the words allows the singers to express their disagreement with the specific doctrine being expressed by the text and furthermore, in serving largely to downplay the theology of the text, this instance demonstrates the

group's overall approach to the religious content of *The Sacred Harp*. While such an action might be frowned upon if enacted within a religious context, even the more religious members of the Ottawa group find little fault with it. Another similar instance of the Ottawa group's masquerade of the sacred facilitating a playful interaction with the religious lyrics of *The Sacred Harp* involves the group's approach to the song "Rose of Sharon" (Appendix 5). Colin Henein describes the group's unique expression of the song as follows:

"Rose of Sharon" is a fun one! It's *hugely* irreverent in this group. [...] It's from the Song of Songs so it's like very *seductive* lyrics. And it's really, the Ottawa group really camps it up. I mean, I'm sure the Southern singers would be horrified by it. But, um, everybody sings all the parts and the men sing all the women's parts in falsetto and it's really quite funny. So that one's fun too because it has that sort of a, quite a loud sense. I like it when people are really into them. (2008)

The group's approach to "Rose of Sharon"—in particular the gender-role reversal involved—indicates a level of playfulness that allows the singers to simultaneously engage with and distance themselves from the text at hand. In the group's approach to both "Lover of the Lord" and "Rose of Sharon", a masquerade of the sacred manifests in a particularly playful manner that can be seen to largely undermine the religious content of the text. While indicative of the extent to which the masquerade of the sacred functions to create a comfortable distance between singer and song, these examples do not, however, paint the entire picture.

While the group as a whole maintains a secular orientation that establishes a gap between singer and song, each individual singer navigates this space differently and thus each singer can be seen to wear the mask of Sacred Harp in a distinct manner. The masquerade of the sacred performed by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus operates within an

ever-changing liminal space in which the individual singer is enabled to travel freely between the sacred and the secular. Consequently, what is in one moment a playful downplaying of the religious themes of a text can easily become, within the next moment, a quiet embracing of a text's meanings and significances. It is the liminality of masquerade that enables this flexibility of movement between play and seriousness. Concerning the ways in which the guise of playfulness functions within the context of Rara to facilitate such a movement, McAlister writes:

The Rara festival moves back and forth from the most intense religious work to the silliest Carnival, from painful memories (of the period of slavery) to innovation, from powerful political possibilities (such as mass mobilization) to shouting misogynist vulgarities. One minute a Rara band can invoke the supernatural and gear up for a fight, and the next minute it can sing silly songs, recalling the lighthearted celebrations of Carnival. (2002, 9)

In the case of Rara, serious political or religious expression, while being outwardly expressed, remains largely hidden beneath the guise of playful masquerade. In the case of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' practice of Sacred Harp, while the downplaying of religious themes often takes the form of an outward expression of disagreement with or indifference to the religious content of *The Sacred Harp*, the embracing of that same material often comes only by an intensely personal experience in which the individual engages with and embraces the text in a way not necessarily encouraged by the group at large. Thus in both cases, the surface remains one of playfulness, while sincerity remains significantly hidden beneath the mask. To look purely upon the appearance and to take it at face value, would be to neglect the deeper reality occurring behind the masquerade and to undermine the degree to which the liminality of masquerade offers the wearer of the mask the ability to travel between the harmlessly amusing and the meaningfully

expressive. If left only to observe the surface-appearance of the Ottawa group's interaction with Sacred Harp, and having witnessed such instances of playful interaction with the religious content of the tradition as those alluded to above, it would have been reasonable for me to conclude that the group participates in a masquerade of the sacred which serves exclusively to downplay the sacred and reinforce the secular orientation of the participants. However, in my discussion with many of the Ottawa singers, it was the reality beneath the mask that came forth most strongly. While for many, the mask of Sacred Harp remains purely a facade—a playful means to participate in a tradition otherwise alien and inaccessible to them—for others it facilitates a serious and meaningful engagement with the sacred. As we will see, while the group as a whole maintains a secular orientation in its masquerade of the sacred, each individual singer navigates the space between secular and sacred differently and thus each singer can be seen to wear the mask of Sacred Harp in a distinct manner.

Approaching the Words of *The Sacred Harp*: Three Categories of Masquerade

It is the words of *The Sacred Harp* that primarily and most directly provide the explicit religious element of the tradition as a whole. Thus, in looking at how a singer practicing the tradition within a secular context dons the mask of Sacred Harp, it is necessary to first examine varying approaches to the lyrics before continuing on to discover how the music influences a singer's interaction with those lyrics. That each member of the Ottawa group participates in a masquerade of the sacred in a distinct manner is in fact most evident in the varying ways that singers approach the words of *The Sacred Harp*. Approaches to singing the words of *The Sacred Harp*, as expressed by the

various members of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus whom I had the opportunity to speak with, can best be divided into three main categories. In the first category are those singers who maintain that they do not find any meaning in singing the words of *The Sacred Harp* but rather, chose to sing “in spite of the words” and prefer to focus their appreciation of singing Sacred Harp on the musical attributes of the tradition rather than the lyrical. Within the second category of singers are those who, though not finding a particular religious significance in the lyrics of *The Sacred Harp*, nevertheless read their own meaning into the lyrics and identify, if not with the specific theology of the texts, then with the general themes at work therein. Finally, in the third category are those singers for whom the words of *The Sacred Harp* hold a particular religious significance, namely Christian. If we place these three categories of Sacred Harp singers on a spectrum ranging from secular to sacred engagement, the first category of singers—those who sing “in spite of the words”—can be placed on the secular end of the spectrum, while the Christians of the group can be placed at the sacred end of the spectrum (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Three Main Categories of Sacred Harp Singers

As I hope to show, the navigation of this spectrum not only changes from singer to singer but can also fluctuate for a given singer both from song to song and progressively over time as the singer's relationship with the tradition evolves. Thus, when found on the secular side of the spectrum, a singer's portrayal of the religious remains purely imitative and consequently the masquerade of the sacred is firmly upheld as merely a playful guise. However, when a singer moves towards the sacred end of the spectrum, while an element of masquerade may remain, his or her portrayal of the sacred begins to straddle the line between imitation and authenticity as the playful guise becomes, at least in part, a sincere personal expression.

A. The First Category: Singing in Spite of the Words

For the first category of singers, as the potential significance of the words of *The Sacred Harp* recedes largely to the background, it is the importance of the music itself that takes centre stage. For this category of singer, the religious content of *The Sacred Harp* is kept rather firmly at bay so that any degree of personal attachment with the text might be avoided. Thus, the religiosity of *The Sacred Harp*, for those who belong to this category of singer, remains purely a mask—something to try on and to play with, but not to personally identify with in any serious manner. Typical of such a singer's approach to *The Sacred Harp* are the following remarks from Colin Hencin, who has been singing with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus for roughly ten years:

I think I don't notice the words [...] I think the words are a real challenge for people. I'm the kind of person who never knows the words to the songs. I'm always about tunes. I guess after I've sung them for ten years I could probably sing most of them without the book, but I probably couldn't tell you the

words; I could only do it while I'm singing [...] So I think that is sort of my self-defence mechanism; it's not about the words for me. I think that a lot of the words are—I think there are some songs where the words are offensive [...] But, you know, if you said, "Oh this is a horrible song, look at this song," I think I'm the kind of person who would then say, "Okay, well you have to understand this music in its context." And this is a historical tradition and I'm singing it in that way and I'm not necessarily singing it because this stuff is what I—a belief that I necessarily subscribe to. (2008)

There are a number of things worth pointing to in Colin's description of his approach to the religious language and themes of *The Sacred Harp*. First is his assertion that for him the words go largely unnoticed. As with many singers in the Ottawa group, such an assertion is coupled with a favouring of the music over the words. Similar sentiments were echoed in the comments of many of my informants who balance their disengagement from the words of *The Sacred Harp* with a heightened degree of focus on the music itself. For instance, when describing what first attracted her to Sacred Harp, Barbara Tose states, "it was about the music though—it wasn't about—I mean, it's not about the words for me" (2008). For this category of singers there is an evident desire to distance oneself from the words as well as a consciousness of problems some people may find with the words of *The Sacred Harp*. Such an awareness is evident in Colin's remarks concerning potentially offensive lyrics—a consciousness that is counteracted with what he refers to as his "self-defence mechanism": a distancing of himself from the words and a focusing instead upon the music. Similarly, singer Adrienne Stevenson remarks, "I'm much more attracted to the music than to the words [...] [the words] may be a deterrent for some people getting into it as they think, oh it's *religious*, you know. But I think the music is so much more important" (2008).

The distancing by the singers of this category from the words by means of focusing on the music is often accompanied by an appreciation of the historical context in which the songs were originally written and performed. This is evident in Colin's statements concerning the placement of the music within its appropriate historical context and his ability to then partake in Sacred Harp as a "historical tradition". Such an appreciation of the historical context of the language of *The Sacred Harp* is echoed in many of the statements from singers who belong to this category. For instance, in discussing the importance of keeping the historical context in mind when singing from *The Sacred Harp*, Adrienne Stevenson remarks: "it helps you feel closer in touch with history in some senses—to get a little bit of the feel of a different time" (2008). For many singers this sense of an appreciation of the historical context of the songs is tied to an understanding of both the possibilities and limitations of folk song revivalism. Sheldon Posen, the founder of the Ottawa group and a performer of other genres of folk music, in describing his ability to sing from *The Sacred Harp* without any personal religious conviction, says:

The other thing that I say to people is that I can sing this music the way a revival singer from the North can sing any music, any folk music. I'm not a sailor but I can sing sea shanties, I'm not English but I sing English ballads, I'm not anybody who comes from Chapeau, Quebec but I can sing—but I sing their ballads. And they enjoy it. (2008)

For this category of singers then, the words of *The Sacred Harp* hold little importance, certainly no religious significance, and can in fact be viewed as potentially problematic or offensive. As a result, a distancing of oneself from the words is accomplished, largely by an appreciation of both the music and historical context of *The*

Sacred Harp, as well as an understanding of the revivalist context within which the music is being expressed. The result, as is echoed in some of the preceding statements, is an especially playful sense of masquerade—a “trying on” of the religious nature of a music as one might wear a costume, enabling engagement with the tradition while maintaining a strict divide between the religious content of the lyrics and the singer’s own beliefs. In this sense, any expression of the religious conveyed by a singer in this category ought to be placed firmly within the realm of the imitative.

B. The Second Category: Reading One’s Own Meaning into the Words

Between those for whom the words of *The Sacred Harp* hold no religious or spiritual significance, and those for whom *The Sacred Harp* provides a meaningful expression of their Christian faith, lies this category of singers who find that they are able to read their own personal, spiritual significance into the words of *The Sacred Harp* while not necessarily subscribing to the specific doctrines or theology contained within the text. Emblematic of this category of singers’ approach to the words of *The Sacred Harp* are the following comments from David Baril, who has been singing from *The Sacred Harp* for twenty years:

Some people in the group, I’d say, just ignore the words, and sort of say—and delegate it to, “that was then this is now.” What I would say is that much of the text is written in such a way that it’s very easy to take it at a *metaphorical* level. Most Christian theology, the Church has literalized by the fundamentalists in the conventional churches. It’s susceptible to much more symbolic and metaphorical interpretation. And so I have no problem singing that stuff because I find it quite easy to just transpose it into the metaphors and what it was actually originally conceived as. (2008)

Such an approach to the words of *The Sacred Harp* is shared by Kringen Henein, who, along with her son, Colin, has been singing Sacred Harp for roughly ten years. Concerning her approach to the words, she says: "For me, the Bible is full of metaphor and the meaning often lies beneath the surface. I guess you could look at some of the lyrics in this way as well, and in that sense, there is certainly spirituality to be found in the songs" (2008). The approach to the words of *The Sacred Harp* for this category of singers is one in line with their view of religious texts in general: as texts not necessarily to be taken literally, but rather to be read at a symbolic and metaphorical level. As David Baril goes on to explain of his approach to religion: "The problem with the traditional interpretation of theology is people point at the moon with their finger and they mistake their finger for the moon. So people who get hung up on the text are getting hung up on the finger and forgetting that it's really pointing at the moon—right?" (2008). When I then asked David if singing from *The Sacred Harp* had a spiritual significance for him, he said,

Absolutely! That's what I mean, is that, the text really points at fundamental spiritual truths. You know there's a lot of preoccupation with death. What is there more fundamental to coming to terms with the significance of being in the world than coming to not only an *understanding* but to an *acceptance*, and a sort of a positive relationship with death? And so, you know, a lot of what the music is about is about coming to terms with accepting suffering and accepting death and that's really the task of spiritual work in life is really to come to accept suffering and death. (2008)

As David's comments suggest, for singers within this category, the words of *The Sacred Harp* are open to personal interpretation and singing the words provides an opportunity to engage in a practice which for them is, at least to some degree, spiritual in nature.

The level of engagement with the words practiced by this category of singers does not, however, diminish the importance of the music. For instance, for Krigen Henein, who appreciates the ability to read her own meaning into the words of *The Sacred Harp*, it remains the music that primarily produces meaning—a meaning which she describes as bordering on having a spiritual significance in and of itself. She says:

I think any spiritual buzz we get from this activity has more to do with the music, the amazing harmonies, and the collaboration we experience in putting the parts together into the whole that is Sacred Harp. Hmm, that does sound a bit spiritual. So, maybe the answer is yes. But it is the music rather than the lyrics—at least for me. (2008)

For others in this category it is not necessarily the prominence of music over words, or conversely the prominence of words over music, that produces a meaningful experience—but rather it is the perfect marriage of the two. As David Baril discusses of his approach to the balance between words and music in comparison to that of fellow singer Colin Henein:

It's the marriage of the two. To me, I mean, Colin and I have had this conversation. He hardly knows what the words are; to him it's the tune. And I remember having an argument with him once saying, "Oh no, no, no, the text is more important!" And then I realized afterwards that what comes to me first is the tune and then the words often will surface from the tune. The tune sort of provides the foundation and the text is the elaboration of the music in some ways—a manifestation of the music. (2008)

As both David and Krigen's comments suggest, for singers of this category, while the words acquire a greater significance than experienced by singers of the first category, the music of *The Sacred Harp* nevertheless remains central to their experience. For this category of singer then, an element of masquerade remains in that they typically do not

adhere to the particular theology espoused by the text. However, through their identification with the overall themes of the text and a willingness to embrace an element of spirituality both within the music and the words, the line between secular and sacred is often times blurred as their expression of Sacred Harp becomes one which is not exclusively an imitative artifice but rather bears an element of sincere personal expression.

C. The Third Category: Singing the Words with Religious Conviction

This final category of singers constitutes the smallest portion of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus. This is perhaps surprising given the religious nature of Sacred Harp music, but perhaps not so surprising given the secular context established by the group as a whole. Of all the singers I had the opportunity to speak with about their experiences singing Sacred Harp, only two identified themselves as being Christian. Furthermore, only one of these two singers described the words as having a particular significance for him, while for the other Christian singer it remained the music and social experience of the group, and not the words, that garnered meaning for him.

For Robert Thompson, who has been singing with The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus for eight years now, the words of *The Sacred Harp* do hold a particular religious significance. When asked what role the words play for him, he responded: "For me it's quite meaningful. I enjoy all the songs about hope, or dying and looking forward to that type of thing—celebrating, almost a *celebration* of death. It's a bit more profound than that, but it speaks to me" (2008). When asked further if singing Sacred Harp was a spiritual experience for him, Robert replied, "Absolutely, it is, yeah. *Music* is a spiritual

experience [...] Part of the attraction is probably the Christian content. I'm a Francophone but I get open appreciation for those guys that written the words and that—Wesley and all those guys. So an appreciation for the poetry, the words to describe the Christian experience" (2008). As Robert's comment concerning the spirituality of music in general suggests, it is again the marriage of the words and music for singers in this category that produces the greatest level of meaning. For Robert, as for many singers of the group, it is the music that registers more easily at first and it is only once a certain level of comfort with singing the notes is attained that the words begin to cultivate meaning. As Robert describes his experience at a sing held the weekend prior to my interview with him:

And even last Sunday, some of the songs—we were a bit more [in number] than usual—and some of the songs were like, "Oh, wow! Yeah! I can't remember the last time we did this song like *this!*" It just felt good and for me at some point when I'm comfortable with the music, then the words stick out—have more meaning. (2008)

Despite the significance granted the words by a singer such as Robert, even within this category of singers who identify themselves as Christian, problems arise with certain words of the text that lead to a distancing from the text similar to that practiced by the other two categories of singers. In a similar approach of placing the words within the historical context within which they were written, Robert states: "It's like the Bible also, there's stories and there's words in there that could be offensive but you have to put it in the context of things" (2008). Elaborating on the types of words found within *The Sacred Harp* that he views as potentially offensive—and furthermore as out of line with his own beliefs—Robert goes on to describe the lyrics to the song "Lover of the Lord":

Some of the songs are pretty awful. Like, "you can't go to heaven if you..." How does it go? "You must be a lover of the Lord, or you won't go to heaven when you die." So that's not a really great message but, you know, I mean it's

a message, and it's probably a message of the time. Like a lot of the messages then were kind of like—well, that's not really the way we see things today. So you can take it with a grain of salt for sure. (2008)

John Moffatt, a member of the United Church, expressed a similar understanding of the difference between his faith and the particular theology expressed within the Sacred Harp.

When asked if singing Sacred Harp held a spiritual significance for him, he answered:

"Not particularly. I go to church on a very regular basis, but the words to many of these songs are not consistent with the theology of my church and to what I believe. I have done it mainly because of the musical sound, the musical constructs, and the social engagement" (2008). As John Moffatt's comments indicate, even for those who self-identify as Christians, there remains an element of masquerade at work in their participation with the Sacred Harp tradition due to discrepancies between their personal convictions and the particular doctrinal viewpoints expressed within the songs.

Formal Musical Elements Influencing Engagement with the Words of *The Sacred Harp*

While it is the words of *The Sacred Harp* that primarily provide the religious element of the tradition as a whole, given the unique form of music and singing involved in Sacred Harp it is especially difficult to divorce the meaning of the words from their expression through the music—as several of the previously quoted statements from the Ottawa singers suggest. Furthermore, it is in fact the music itself that often times provides singers with something of a religious experience, even for those for whom practicing Sacred Harp is chiefly a secular activity. For instance, when speaking with Ottawa singer Barbara Tose about her first experience singing Sacred Harp, she remarked:

Pippa jokes that you can feel the molecules aligning; and whether it's the harmony or whether it's the ancient, you know the tradition of it, it's sort of steeped in sacredness. What it is, I'm not quite sure but there's something about the music that *does* something. And I think it really does something to you physically; that you can feel *completely* lousy before you go and not want to be there and you start singing and it just—everything goes away. So, and that happens with other types of singing, too, but this type in particular I think really—there's something about it! (2008)

Given the potential for engaging with the sacred based purely upon the musical elements of the tradition, it is important to take a closer look at the ways in which the music of Sacred Harp influences a singer's engagement with the sacred.

When considering their effect upon a singer's navigation of the space between secular and sacred, formal musical elements of Sacred Harp can be divided into two main categories: those which fortify the barrier between singer and song and those which serve to break down that same barrier. The convergence of these two opposing influences heavily marks the secular singer's experience of Sacred Harp; in particular the way in which he or she approaches and interacts with the sacred.

A. Building Barriers: Singing the Notes and Musical Complexity

Concerning their respective influence on how a secular singer participates in a masquerade of the sacred when singing Sacred Harp, the tradition of "singing the notes" and the overall complexity of Sacred Harp music can be seen to serve the same function. Both of these formal elements of Sacred Harp thrive within a masquerade of the sacred because they effectively occupy and fortify the space between singer and song.

The traditional Sacred Harp custom of singing the notes requires that when beginning a song, the singers first sing the syllables attached to each note—the *fa, sol, la*,

or *mi*—before proceeding to the lyrics of the song. This tradition dates back to the earliest days of shape note singing within the schools of New England and was first practiced purely for educational purposes when teaching new singers how to read music. Despite the fact that many members of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus are capable sight-readers of music and thus the intended educational purpose of singing the notes is for many, in essence, nullified, this is a tradition that the group has preserved in its practice of Sacred Harp. In my interview with Sheldon Posen, he described having to fend off some initial complaints voiced by singers who were opposed to being obliged to sing the notes at the beginning of every song. He says:

We sang the music and I remember even then I was having to fend, "why do we have to do the notes?"—kind of thing. By then I think I had realized that singing the notes was its own reward. That it was not only fun it was sometimes better than singing the words. And it had its own charm to just hear all the different words being sung to whatever note was being sung at the same time as yours and that it was this wonderful melodic cacophony, or cacophonous melody, that was just wonderful. (2008)

The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' custom of singing the notes is thus not only an effort to retain something of the traditional ethos of Sacred Harp music, but also is a result of the group having discovered the custom to offer its own unique benefits. One such benefit of singing the notes, as hinted at by Shelly Posen's remarks concerning the experience of singing the notes often being better than that of singing the words, is that the practice creates a buffer between the singer and the lyrics of the songs. As Kiri Miller states in her article, "First Sing the Notes":

For singers who are not entirely comfortable with the texts to the hymns—most of which are explicitly Christian and many of which discuss death, hell, and the agony of Christ in frank terms—"singing the notes" of each tune serves as a kind of buffer for engagement with the words. (2004, 487)

The practice of singing the notes thus provides the singer with a way to engage first with the music and the language of the solfege system before approaching the lyrics of the songs. So isolated from the words themselves, many have in fact viewed the solfege system as constituting of its own unique language. For example, Buell Cobb writes of the singing of the notes: "Before the words are sung, the participants run each song through with its fa sol la's, to all appearances using their solemnization like some unknown tongue to insulate and heighten their experience" (1989, 2). Thus, not only can the language of the solfege system provide a comfortable distance between the singer and the lyrics, but the practice of singing the notes can also provide, in and of itself, a meaningful expression of the music. It was in fact the sound created by the singing of the notes that initially drew me to Sacred Harp music when I first heard a recording of "Rocky Road". The singing of the notes added an element of mystery as it seemed to me that these antiquated voices were being raised in a foreign language as of yet unknown to me. And in fact, the solfege system does act as something of a foreign tongue—one that creates a language barrier between the singer and the text; a barrier that, while initially put in place purely for educational purposes, now offers secular singers a comfortable distance from which to approach the religious content of the text.

The seemingly nonsensical language of Sacred Harp's solfege system provides the singer an access point both to the lyrics of the songs as well as to the music. It is through the singing of the notes that the singer first becomes acquainted with the complex melodies and harmonies of each tune. The complexity of the music of Sacred Harp can be seen to act in much the same way as the practice of singing the notes—that is, it provides a distance between the singer and the religious content of the lyrics. This distance

facilitates a comfortable approach to Sacred Harp music for those potentially apprehensive about the language of the text. The elaborate runs of notes, the powerful melodies, the intricate harmonies and the overall complexity of the tunes can provide a challenge for even the most experienced singer—especially one unaccustomed to the very unique sound and particular practices of Sacred Harp. For newcomers in particular, the music of Sacred Harp demands such a great deal of focus that one may not initially be able to pay very much attention at all to the words of the songs. The same holds true for even the most experienced Sacred Harp singer upon trying a new song for the first time—it is the music, not the words, that first demands the attention and focus of a Sacred Harp singer. For instance, one of my informants, Robert Thompson, who happens to be one of the few Christians of the group, pointed out that even though he does find meaning in the words, it is a meaning that is only available once a certain level of comfort with the music has been attained. He explained:

Maybe at first the music, for me that's what it was, but then, the words stick out once you've got through the technical stuff. Yeah, that's where I find total satisfaction, saying okay, yeah, this is a beautiful song, or I love the message, or yeah, this is the space I'm in. (2008)

A similar sentiment to Robert Thompson's was voiced by David Baril in his previously quoted statement concerning how the music, for him, provides a foundation for the words and the words subsequently constitute a "manifestation of the music" (2008). In my first experience of singing Sacred Harp, I certainly found that the music itself posed such a great challenge that, especially early on, the words would pass by largely unnoticed as I struggled simply to follow the notes and to keep up with the group. Thus for those who find particular religious significance in the words of *The Sacred Harp*, it can be seen that

the musical complexity constitutes a gateway to the words or functions as a barrier that must be overcome before engaging with the words. This is a barrier that, for those potentially uneasy about the lyrics of the songs, provides a comfortable distance between the singer and the religious content of *The Sacred Harp*. Thus, both the singing of the notes and the overall complexity of the music occupy the distance between singer and song in such a way that keeps the explicitly religious meanings of the text largely at bay. In effect, within a secular context such as that of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, these formal elements of the Sacred Harp tradition serve to reinforce a masquerade of the sacred by fortifying the distance between singer and song.

B. Breaking Barriers: Vocal Projection and Song Selection

Not every traditional Sacred Harp practice adopted by The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus serves to distance the singer from the words. On the contrary, certain traditional practices ensure an enhanced level of engagement with the religious content of the songs; most prominent are the customs pertaining to vocal projection and song selection.

Sacred Harp singing, particularly as it developed in the Southern United States, has become synonymous with a particular style of vocal projection that involves a near shouting on the part of the singer (Scholten 1980, 32). As an instructional pamphlet intended for newcomers to Sacred Harp entitled "First Time at a Sacred Harp Singing?" points out: "The symbols used to indicate loudness or softness in regular music are conspicuously absent from *The Sacred Harp*. And many experienced singers do sing at a consistent *fortissimo* that can be alarming to people hearing the music for the first time" (Grayson 2004, 2). This pamphlet—an adaptation of *A Beginner's Guide to Shape-Note*

Singing written by Lisa Grayson, a prominent Sacred Harp singer from Chicago—goes on to give the following advice:

In Sacred Harp singing, loud is usually good, and louder is better. This is partly because of the music's origins as a true folk music sung by ordinary people for pleasure and worship, partly because loud singing provides more catharsis, more instant gratification, more visceral pleasure, than controlled singing. (Grayson 2004, 2)

As this description suggests, the volume at which Sacred Harp tends to be sung is often linked to the music's folk origins. While doing away with some of the more religiously-oriented traditions of Sacred Harp, this style of singing is a Sacred Harp convention that many singers of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus take great delight in retaining. This is largely due to the same type of physical and emotional release described in the pamphlet. One of the Ottawa singers, Barbara Tose, describes the volume of Sacred Harp singing as being an important factor in initially drawing her to participating in the tradition. She says:

It was the sound of the music; it was that you sing it *full-out*. I think there's something to that as well, because you just don't get to sing *loud* anywhere [...] I had a time in my present apartment where I have neighbours who banged on the wall every time I sang or played music and so it kind of intimidates you into not doing that sort of thing in your own space. And so Sacred Harp is a place where I can go out and just really use my voice. (2008)

Thus for Barbara, the Sacred Harp tradition as it had developed within the rural spaces of the Southern United States, grants her the means to escape the confines of urban living by providing an environment in which she is able to more fully engage in a cathartic expression of music. The adoption of this practice by The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus accordingly serves not only to feed into the revivalist ethos of the group but also provides

singers of the group with the opportunity for the same physical and emotional experience of those singing within a religious context.

The passionately loud fervour in which the songs of *The Sacred Harp* are expected—and indeed *encouraged*—to be delivered, facilitates a greater level of engagement with the words and in turn with the religious content of the text. One of the first things pointed out to me upon attending my first sing with The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus was that this music is intended to be sung loudly. However, it took several singing sessions before I felt at all comfortable projecting even close to the level at which the other singers were belting out the songs. It was thus at the same time that my comfort level with the music—and accordingly my familiarity with the words—began to emerge, that I found myself able to begin singing at a volume more appropriate to the tradition. This simultaneous progression of becoming more affiliated with the words while at the same time becoming able to properly project those words encouraged me to engage more fully with the lyrics. Not only had I begun to notice the words that I was singing but in reaching this new level of proficiency I was becoming increasingly comfortable projecting these words at a near shout. This is a progression experienced by many of the singers with whom I spoke. What began as a relatively apprehensive, quiet, or even unnoticed interaction with the words, slowly developed into a booming declaration of the words of *The Sacred Harp*. There is, I found, a significant difference between simply speaking or softly singing the words of *The Sacred Harp* and delivering them as loudly and as passionately as is typical of the tradition. Part of that difference is certainly the greater connection to the tune of the songs which is achieved by such a boisterous interaction with the music itself. But part of it, at least for myself and for several of the

singers I spoke with, is also a greater level of engagement with the words. While for many, the impassioned declaration of religious conviction remains purely a facade, it is one which, over time, becomes increasingly comfortable to wear and to play with.

Further enhancing the potential for an increased level of engagement with the words of *The Sacred Harp* is the democratic process by which songs are selected to be sung. At a typical sing of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, the song selection process is one which grants every singer, even a newcomer such as myself, the same opportunity to choose songs as every one else seated within the hollow square. Beginning with one singer and proceeding around the hollow square, every one taking their turn at calling a song, each singer will get the opportunity to pick at least three songs for the group to sing by the time a session is over. Criteria for song selection changes from singer to singer. Often singers will choose from their favourite numbers while other times they will pick out something new that the group has not done before in an effort to explore how that particular song sounds. For those few singers for whom the words of the songs have a particular religious significance, the lyrics may significantly influence their selection process. For most, however, it is the tune of the songs that proves the greatest factor in song selection. For instance, some prefer to select the fast-driving "fuging tunes"¹ while others prefer songs of a slower tempo, typically done in a minor key. And because everyone is granted equal opportunity to select a song, a singing session often features a wide variety of both song styles and lyrical content.

¹ In "Rudiments of Music", John Garst defines the "fuging tune" as follows: "A fuging tune has a least one section in which the parts fall in one after the other, with the same or similar rhythm and with related melodic lines, at different pitches. At the end of the section, the parts come together" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 23).

As previously discussed in chapter two, song selection serves as a means for personal expression. Whether the musical qualities of a song or the lyrical content of a song play the more prominent role in an individual's criterion for song selection, the songs they choose—and in particular those which they favour over a significant amount of time—become in some sense emblematic of that person. Furthermore, because everyone is generally encouraged to select whichever song they would like to, this means that the other singers are expected to participate in and sing along with whichever song is selected. As a result, those who may be uncomfortable with certain lyrics—and with the words of *The Sacred Harp* in general—may be called upon to sing songs which they find to have particularly challenging lyrics. Two singers in the group are in fact known to take advantage of this fact—both having a particular song that they prefer not to sing due to lyrical content, each will often call for that song as a playful joke against the other. The traditional practices of song selection can thus be seen to foster an increased degree of engagement between the singers and the religious content of the songs not only as each individual is prompted to engage with the songs of *The Sacred Harp* as a means of personal expression, but also as a result of each singer having to comply with the choices of all others present. In the group's collective masquerade of the sacred, each member is obliged not only to 'try on' each song that they choose as a vehicle of personal expression but also, to subsequently 'try on' each song chosen by his or her fellow singers and to participate in the collective expression of that song. Thus, much like the conventions concerning vocal projection, the processes of song selection serve to bridge the space between singer and song by encouraging a deeper level of engagement with the text. The influence of both of these formal elements becomes all the more prominent when the

barriers set up by the singing of the notes and the overall complexity of the music are overcome as a singer becomes increasingly proficient with the tradition at large.

**Blurring the Lines of Masquerade:
The Process of Increased Engagement with the Sacred**

As I have demonstrated, various formal elements of The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' practice of Sacred Harp can function to reinforce a masquerade of the sacred by enhancing the barrier between the religious content of *The Sacred Harp* and the secular orientation of the singer. As I have also shown, the majority of singers in The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus appreciate such a buffer between themselves and the religiously explicit lyrics of the songs. It is this distance between singer and song that, in manifesting as a masquerade of the sacred, enables secular singers to participate in a tradition they otherwise would be largely alienated from. However, the liminality of masquerade, while enabling singers to cloak themselves in a religious expression contrary to their own beliefs, also offers the singer the ability to freely travel between the playfully imitative and the sincerely expressive—all while remaining within a masquerade of the sacred. As discussed, traditional practices pertaining to vocal projection and song selection significantly aid in this freedom of movement by serving to break the barrier between singer and song. Once this barrier is broken, it is up to the individual singer to navigate the space between secular and sacred. While some remain at a significantly fixed distance from the sacred, most do venture—at least to some extent—away from mere imitation towards finding an element of genuine personal meaning. This is not to suggest that singers come to necessarily embrace the doctrines, beliefs, and overall theology expressed

in the songs, but rather that they come to interact and engage with the general themes at work in the text. While singers in the first or second category may never enter the third category of singers, it is not at all uncommon for singers in the first category to enter the second and for singers of the second category to become more deeply entrenched in their personal attachment to and identification with the texts. Overall, the dividing lines between those who find meaning in the texts and those who do not become increasingly blurred as the distance between secular and sacred—between imitation and sincere personal expression—is progressively diminished.

Once overcoming the barrier set up by the form and complexity of the music of Sacred Harp, a singer becomes increasingly able to interact with the words of the songs. Even those singers keen to maintain a clear division between themselves and the words—singers belonging to the first category—engage with the less religiously explicit themes of the songs. For instance, when speaking with Sheldon Posen, who belongs to the first category of singers, he described for me his appreciation of the song “David’s Lamentation” (Appendix 6). This song is written from the perspective of King David after losing his son, Absalom. In reciting the simple words of a portion of that song to me—the lines: “oh my son! [claps the beat] oh my son!”—Sheldon became visibly moved before going on to explain: “Breaks me up, makes me weep. It’s an incredible song” (Posen 2008). While an important element of Sheldon’s enjoyment of “David’s Lamentation” is the music—in particular, the silent beats that follow each declaration of “oh my son!”—as indicated by the fact that in simply reciting the lyrics an emotional response was elicited, the words undoubtedly play a central role in his attachment to the song. While more religiously explicit themes may be kept at bay by such a singer, the paternal sentiment

expressed in a song such as “David’s Lamentation” provides an opportunity to engage with the lyrical content of the song. Similarly, it has become quite common amongst the group to sing particular songs in response to particular occasions or world events. In such instances, it is the words, not the music, that draw the singers to the song and in such instances a greater level of linguistic engagement is experienced by even the most non-religious of singers. As Colin Henein describes this practice:

People will look for songs on particular occasions, you know, whether it's because there's been some kind of weird natural disaster [...] there's plenty of good natural disaster music in the Sacred Harp, right? Or whether it's seasonal or whatever, and I think people generally enjoy that and I think that's fine, I enjoy that. (2008)

As with Sheldon Posen’s connection with the words of “David’s Lamentation”, as Colin here describes, it is common for members of the group—even those who sing largely in spite of the words—to find significance in the words of *The Sacred Harp*. At the first sing I attended, after one song was finished a member of the group pointed out that the lyrics reminded her of a story that was in the news at the time and her remark incited some conversation amongst the group as to how the lyrics related to that story.

While for many singers belonging to the first category, the level of linguistic engagement may end here with an increased interaction with the words in a thematic, largely non-religious, sense, for others in the same category, singing from *The Sacred Harp* over a number of years can lead to a deeper level of engagement with the religiously explicit language of the songs. For instance, Barbara Tose, who has been singing with the group for nearly fifteen years, has come to be associated with the song “Restoration” (Appendix 7) due to the frequency with which she requests it. While Barbara describes herself as belonging to the category of singers who find no meaning in

the words of the songs, in describing her appreciation of "Restoration", she cited the line "I will rise and go to Jesus" as one of the reasons why she so appreciates it. Furthermore, she went on to relate to me a story in which that particular lyric brought her comfort and encouragement:

I took a course once where, you know, one of those self-discovery things and we had to go out and do this huge long walk, get to some goal and back again without speaking to each other and do it as a group. Well we gave up on the not speaking to each other fairly early on. But it was very, very tough and we got the farthest of anybody but we still didn't get to our goal. And my ankle was hurting and all kinds of stuff was going on and I was really resentful but this song kept coming into my head and I thought of the melody and I'm thinking, "what is that melody?" you know, "na na na na na" [sings the melody for the line "I will rise and go to Jesus"]. And I'm thinking oh yeah, that's "Restoration"! And I thought of the words and I thought yeah that's cool you know. So some of them do; some things make you stop and think about them. (2008)

It is significant that in this story Barbara first recalls the melody of the song and only then do the words come as it is this progression from music to words that marks the process by which many singers ultimately come to interact with the language of *The Sacred Harp*.

Going on to describe how her experiences singing Sacred Harp have encouraged in her a sense of spirituality, Barbara says,

Again I really like the melody but the words are kind of cool, too. So, yeah, it's not as much about the words but there's still something in the words. And I think there is something to the music that is partly the words. Again, maybe just the hundreds of years of people singing that, those words, make it special or something, I don't know. It's interesting and I would say—I'm a minister's kid who grew up basically an Atheist, or an Agnostic—and I've come to a more spiritual place than I've been over the years, and I think Sacred Harp had something to do with that. It's not informed anything that I truly *believe*, but it's there somehow, you know. It's there in the background. (2008)

Again in this case, it is not the words in isolation, but rather the words as experienced through the music that allows for an interaction with the religious content of the lyrics. In providing the gateway through which the words must be approached, the music of Sacred

Harp thus serves as a barrier that, once overcome, places the singer in a position from which he or she is free to move back and forth from the realm of the secular to that of the sacred. Thus, while the masquerade of the sacred enacted by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus may begin as pure imitation beneath the guise of playful revivalism, it ultimately offers the participants the opportunity for sincere meaning and personal expression. As the examples mentioned above indicate, this is an opportunity that is taken advantage of—in varying degrees—by even the most secular-oriented singers of the Ottawa group.

Conclusion: Finding “Free Church” in a Postmodern Context

Donning the mask of Sacred Harp, non-religious singers of a revivalist group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus cloak themselves in the Christianity of the colonial era, and in doing so place themselves in a space between the secular and the sacred. The liminal space created through this masquerade of the sacred, though offering the singer the opportunity to participate in a religious tradition without subscribing to the beliefs fundamental to that tradition, ultimately also offers the singer the opportunity to travel between the purely imitative and the sincerely expressive while remaining under the guise of a playful masquerade. As we have seen, this latter opportunity becomes increasingly obtainable as a singer's proficiency with the tradition increases over time.

Further complicating this masquerade of the sacred is the larger social framework within which it is performed. As previously noted, the type of masquerade performed by the Ottawa group is one poised not only between the secular and the sacred but also between adhering to and departing from the postmodern context within which the tradition is practiced. Putting on the mask of Sacred Harp and overcoming the musical

barriers that may otherwise prevent a full measure of engagement with the lyrics, a singer who subsequently opts to travel between the spheres of the secular and the sacred—and as a result to proceed from the purely imitative to the sincerely expressive—in effect employs the liminality inherent to masquerade in order to step outside of the largely non-religious milieu of postmodern society and into the traditionalist Christian ethos of the colonial era. This departure from the established order of the postmodern social framework remains under the guise of playful revivalism—beneath which the singer is permitted to refrain from subscribing to the specific theology expressed within the songs. As such, this masquerade of the sacred is indicative of the extent to which organized religion no longer holds an explicitly central role in contemporary Western society but has instead become increasingly relegated to “secondary expressions” existing outside the confines of the established church (Marini 2003, 86). Consequently, the masquerade of the sacred enacted by the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus does not fit entirely within the category of affirmation or of negation of the status quo, but rather is one which remains suspended between the two.

That non-religious singers practicing Sacred Harp within a revivalist context might delight to find within the tradition the ability to express and experience the sacred, without having to subscribe to the ordinances of a particular faith, is reflected in the following statement from Ottawa singer Carla Boucher:

I think a lot of people who do it like the opportunity to sing the sacred words without having to profess a faith or to account for their sins, one way or the other, or do any of the ongoing administrative committee work that is otherwise part of the church. Like I think it's free church for a lot of people—and that's exactly that sense. So even people who say that it's a secular practice I think find that it is a—has a spiritual dimension. You cannot get away from the words. (2008)

The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' practice of Sacred Harp offers its members a space in which to engage with the sacred without demanding "explicit doctrinal consensus" (Bealle 1997, 241). While the sacred has been replaced by a masquerade of the sacred, it would seem that not all sincerity is lost. Though donning the mask of Sacred Harp may for some remain purely a practice of imitation—a 'trying on' of the sacred in which religious tradition and personal identity exist largely in isolation from one another—for others, engaging with the religious content of *The Sacred Harp* comes to provide an element of genuine personal meaning and considerable spiritual satisfaction. It is here, at the crossroads between the secular and the sacred, that the line between imitation and sincerity is breached and what was once strictly a playful facade comes to bear a degree of resemblance to the identity behind the mask of Sacred Harp.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Sacred Harp Revival and the Postmodern Pilgrim

*"I am a stranger here below,
And what I am is hard to know [...]
I find myself out of the way,
My thoughts are often gone astray,
Like one alone I seem to be,
Oh, is there anyone like me?"*

-Excerpt from "Jackson" (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 317)

In "On Folk Festivals and Kitchens", folklorist and musician Sheldon Posen—the founder of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus—writes concerning the North American folk music revival:

People were shopping for alternatives to what was offered them either by the marketplace or by their culture. Many were looking to give their lives new or expanded meaning by adopting aspects of the lives of others. With varying degrees of sincerity and innocence, people became tourists—or pilgrims—traveling in someone else's culture. They made choices from a menu they saw offered them by the rest of North America and the world, of music to play, food to cook, clothing to wear. The feeling was, the more 'authentic' the item or emulation they found, the more valid the experience of it and the transformation it produced. (1993, 128)

As Posen's comments suggest, the North American folk music revival began as a search—a search in which the singer as pilgrim traveled to unfamiliar cultures to take hold of and try on the traditions of that culture in an effort to discover authentic meaning and induce a genuine personal transformation. One tradition discovered by these revivalist pilgrims was Sacred Harp.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, the chief question at hand was stated as follows: how is Sacred Harp expressed within an urban, Northern, and most critically a *secular* context? In the subsequent chapters, I have examined the several ways in which

the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of Sacred Harp is a translation of the tradition that is significantly unique to the group's particular context. I have also demonstrated the extent to which the Ottawa group's variant of Sacred Harp remains in keeping with the overall functions of Sacred Harp as it is expressed within its conventional home of the rural, religious South. I have established this continuity between Northern and Southern expressions of the tradition primarily by exploring the social and personal meanings that the Ottawa singers derive from their interaction with Sacred Harp. In chapters two and three I discussed how the Ottawa group's engagement with the forms and practices of Sacred Harp—both the fundamentally musical traditions as well as its expressly social traditions—results in a fulfillment of the community-making and community-affirming functions of Sacred Harp. In chapter four I examined the ways in which the Ottawa group's enactment of the forms and practices of Sacred Harp establishes a liminal space between the secular and the sacred in which the singers are able to cultivate personal meaning through their interaction with the sacred while refraining from adhering to the particular doctrines of the Christian faith. Overall I have demonstrated that, while contextual differences invariably influence the expression of Sacred Harp in the Northern landscape, it is the very forms and practices of the tradition itself which ensure that Sacred Harp remains a communal expression of sacred song.

Throughout this thesis I have also sought to answer what is in many ways the counterpart question to the chief inquiry at hand. That counterpart question being: what benefit and meaning do non-religious singers derive from practicing Sacred Harp within an urban, Northern context? In addressing this question, I have explored the various implications of practicing Sacred Harp within a postmodern framework. It is these

implications which I would now like to focus on so that, in drawing together all that has been discussed of Sacred Harp and of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus, some conclusions concerning the interaction between Sacred Harp and postmodernity might be reached. In some ways this interaction is an unexpected one, given that Sacred Harp runs significantly against the general current of postmodernity. Where the postmodern trajectory points towards the "atomization of social life" (Karner and Aldridge 2004, 12) and the secularization of social and political structures (Sommerville 1998, 250), the general thrust of Sacred Harp is towards community and religion. How is it then that Sacred Harp has come to be expressed within an environment which would appear to be considerably opposed to the very nature and overall function of the tradition? How exactly do these strange bedfellows—Sacred Harp and postmodernity—meet? And what can this unexpected amalgamation tell us about Sacred Harp as a tradition, postmodernity as a social condition, and folk revivalism as a means of cultivating social and personal meaning?

Community and Religion in Postmodern Society: Disappearance or Dispersal?

In his book *Intimations of Postmodernity*, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman notes that postmodernity has often times been defined in terms of what it is *not* rather than in terms of what it is. Rooted in a general suspicion, or even an outright rejection, of objective definitions, it is entirely fitting that postmodernity be defined in terms of lack. In his account of the works of Jean Baudrillard, Bauman writes,

History has stopped. So has progress, if there ever was such a thing. Things we live with today are identifiable mostly as vestiges: once parts of a totality which gave them a place and function, but today just pieces condemned to seek a

meaningful design in vain and destined for a game without end [...] to which most biographers give the name *postmodernity*, which means hardly anything more than the end, absence or disappearance. (1992, 6)

Of greatest relevance to the current discussion, two notable “disappearances” of the postmodern age involve the breakdown of the traditional community and the destabilization of institutional religion. The effects of the former are seen most clearly in a general bent towards the increasing isolation of the individual within society (Kärner and Aldridge 2004, 6) and the latter is most evident in the secularization of social and political structures (Sommerville 1998, 250).

However, both the breakdown of the traditional community and the destabilization of institutional religion have not seen the extinction of either community or religion from postmodern societies. On the contrary, the departure from traditional forms of both community and religion has tended to result in a search for new forms and expressions of both. Bauman describes the postmodern age as one marked by: “the lust for community, search for community, invention of community, imagining community” (1992, 134). The age of the breakdown of the traditional community thus in turn becomes the age of “the obsessive search for community” (Bauman 1992, 136). This search for community often involves a considerable degree of overlap with a quest for religious meaning outside of institutional contexts. Concerning this overlap, H.B. Cavalcanti and H. Paul Chalfant write:

The need for external corroboration presents a problem for the postmodern individual. Since the traditional forms of communal life are no longer so readily available and sustainable, the quest for community intensifies. Believing in something makes it only more urgent for the believer to find a group that shares a somewhat similar view of the world. (1994, 3)

As these comments suggest, while the postmodern era has seen the removal of the organized Church from the former positions it held within various social and political institutions and activities (Sommerville 1998, 250), this has not corresponded with a disappearance of religious faith amongst the general populace of a secularized society. As C. John Sommerville notes, "the secularization of a "society" is not the same thing as the secularization of a population [...] we can quite properly speak of a secular society which contains an entirely religious population" (1998, 251). The result of the secularization of a society can thus be understood as involving "the declining scope of religious authority" (Chaves 1994, 740), rather than the outright disappearance of religious belief from the populace of a society. The postmodern age, an age marked by the deterioration of traditional forms of community and religion, thus becomes an age of the "obsessive search" for alternative expressions of both community and religion—two searches which are considerably liable to intersect, as they do with the Northern revival of Sacred Harp.

Sacred Harp as Substitute

It is this interplay between the deterioration of conventional forms of community and religion, and the ensuing human drive to find fitting alternatives for both which Stephen Marini brings into view when he argues that Sacred Harp "provides an extraordinarily intense cultural community to which [...] many Northern singers [are] drawn" (2003, 91) and that this participation of Northern singers with Sacred Harp reflects "the displacement of the sacred from primary religious institutions to secondary expressions" (2003, 86). The postmodern seeker thus finds a substitute for both traditional community and institutionalized religion in the communal expression of sacred song that

is Sacred Harp. Of the Northern expression of the tradition, Laura Clawson writes: "Sacred Harp singing affords communal spirituality" (2004, 312). Engaging in the forms and practices of Sacred Harp, the postmodern singer finds social meaning through the tradition's creation of community. Interacting with the songs of *The Sacred Harp* the postmodern singer finds personal meaning through a masquerade of the sacred.

A. Rediscovering Community

The immediate result of the breakdown of the traditional community in the postmodern age, according to Zygmunt Bauman, is "the ensuing appearance of the 'masterless men'—vagabonds, vagrants, shifting population no where at home, belonging to no specific community or corporation" (1992, 6). Where the postmodern age intersects with the time-honoured traditions of Sacred Harp, the vagabond of postmodernity meets the wayfaring stranger of Christianity—both being drawn together by their shared rootlessness and perpetual sojourning to find within Sacred Harp a "portable homeland" (Miller 2008, 47). Congregating in the hollow square, the vagabond and the stranger enact the forms and practices of Sacred Harp to find that they are participating in the creation of a community and, in doing so, that they have come to belong to that community. For the postmodern individual faced with the threat of "the atomization of social life" and the consequent "perceived lack of shared meaning and group solidarity" (Kamer and Aldridge 2004, 9), Sacred Harp restores a balanced relationship between the individual and the collective in which both the autonomy of the individual and their belonging to the collective are preserved. In chapter two I demonstrated how the forms and practices of the hollow square ensures both the creative input of the individual as well as the individual's

overall cohesion with the group as a whole. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter three, this sense of belonging created within the hollow square branches out into further social expressions that serve both to extend and affirm community.

B. Rediscovering the Sacred

In light of the fact that in the postmodern age the “declining scope of religious authority” (Chaves 1994, 740) has not resulted in the disappearance of religious beliefs amongst the populace of secularized societies, Peter Glasner argues that it is necessary for “a distinction to be made between religion and the religious” (1977, 113). In her summary of Glasner’s views, Liana Giorgi writes:

That religion, as an identifiable system of beliefs and practices that find expression in and through the institution of the Church, is distinct from the all-too-human urge to seek and evolve ideational meaning systems and then endow these with a faith that is very akin to what we usually associate with religious fervour (hence ‘the religious’), regardless of whether these explanatory paradigms involve the postulation of a transcendental reality or not, is not only a justifiable and rational distinction to make, but a very useful one too. (1992, 639)

This distinction between religion and the religious is highly useful for the current discussion, given that, while the expression of Sacred Harp within a postmodern context is not a practice of an institutional religion, it does readily involve interaction with the sacred—or the religious—as a means of cultivating personal meaning. In other words, though religion is absent in the postmodern expression of Sacred Harp, the religious remains. In the previous chapter of this thesis I argued that in their practice of Sacred Harp, each singer of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus navigates the space between the secular and the sacred in a unique way. Furthermore, despite the overall secular orientation of the group, the majority of the singers derive significant personal meanings

from their interaction with the songs of *The Sacred Harp*. Taking their position in the liminal space of the group's collective masquerade of the sacred, the secular singer interacts with *The Sacred Harp* largely on a symbolic level and in this way is able to interact with the sacred and to cultivate personal meaning from that interaction without having to subscribe to a particular religion (Bealle 1997, 241). The poetry of *The Sacred Harp*, continuously staging weighty battles between life and death, heaven and hell, hope and despair, salvation and damnation, affords the singer the opportunity to cultivate meaning within a space that is significantly foreign to, and largely at odds with, a postmodern worldview. Taking hold of a remnant of Colonial America, singers practicing Sacred Harp within a postmodern context step into a world in which meta-narratives—specifically the grand narrative of Christianity—remain thoroughly intact and in which good and evil, past and future, redemption and destruction all remain authentic and clearly defined categories. Stepping into the pre-modern world of *The Sacred Harp*, the singer is free to engage with the themes, characters, symbols and events found there in a uniquely personal way. Forsaking for a time the subjectivity and fluidity of the postmodern age for the objectivity and rigidity of a pre-modern world, the singers seem temporarily to echo the sentiments of Aldous Huxley's Savage upon discovering the banality of a sedated dystopia in *Brave New World*: "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin." (Huxley 1977, 237)

Sacred Harp: a Fruitful Transplant in Northern Ground

If no genuine social or personal meaning—akin to that experienced by singers practicing Sacred Harp within its conventional context—was present, the practice of Sacred Harp by a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus would consist essentially of theatre and, in postmodern terms, could rightly be considered as empty simulacra—a copy of the real but essentially void of meaning (Baudrillard 1994, 1). To suggest such an expression of Sacred Harp consists of an authentic translation of the tradition would be problematic at best. It would also be problematic however to argue that the Northern revival of Sacred Harp consists of a thorough replication of Sacred Harp as it developed in the rural, religious South. To do so would be to undermine both the deep-rootedness of Sacred Harp in the Southern landscape and the significance of the familial and religious bonds that typically connect singers practicing Sacred Harp in its conventional context. Thus, it is necessary to find some middle ground to account both for the social and personal meanings cultivated within the postmodern context as well as the unique translation of Sacred Harp that is enacted by a group such as the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus.

Ultimately I find it is most useful to consider the expression of Sacred Harp within the postmodern context to be neither an empty imitation nor a thorough duplication but rather a fruitful transplant. To borrow a metaphor from agriculture, Sacred Harp, taken from its traditional home in the rural, religious South to be replanted in urban, secular, Northern ground, is, as it grows, continually reshaped by its new environment. Nevertheless, due to the forms and practices innate to Sacred Harp itself, this transplantation ultimately produces fruit largely in keeping with that of Sacred Harp's

conventional expression—fruit that singers partake of both in their participation with the community and their interaction with the sacred. The question then remains: what does this transplantation reveal about Sacred Harp as a tradition, postmodernity as a social condition and folk revivalism as a means of cultivating social and personal meaning?

In their article "A Formalization of Postmodern Theory", authors Kenneth Allan and Jonathan Turner posit that both the increased atomization of individuals at work in the postmodern age as well as the detachment of cultural symbols from their original meanings has not necessarily resulted in the inability of the postmodern individual to forge meaningful communal attachments or to cultivate genuine meaning from fragmented cultural symbols. While the postmodern age has seen the destabilization of the traditional community, Allan and Turner argue that "it does not follow that individuals are marginal to the many groups to which they belong and that they are incapable of using group symbols to sustain meaningful attachments" (2000, 382). Furthermore, while acknowledging the fragmentation of cultural symbols in the postmodern age, they write,

It is not certain that postmodernists' claims are correct. It is true that more symbols circulate as commodities [...] but it is another matter to postulate that systems of symbols have become so destabilized and dereified that they have lost the ability to provide stable meanings [...] Our guess is that symbols operate as they always have, providing meanings that give individuals a sense of order. (2000, 382)

Operating significantly against the conception that, in the postmodern age, vestiges of the past—having been thoroughly fragmented from their original attachment to an authentic meaning and purpose—are therefore "condemned to seek a meaningful design in vain" (Bauman 1992, 6), the expression of Sacred Harp in the postmodern

context is one which produces genuine social and personal meanings. In line with Allan and Turner's propositions, the expression of Sacred Harp within a postmodern framework suggests that the fragmentation of individuals and of cultural symbols has not resulted in meaninglessness. Social and personal meaning is produced via the interaction between a group of individuals and a tradition such as Sacred Harp. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the interaction between the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus and Sacred Harp has produced a variant of Sacred Harp that is both contextually unique and considerably faithful in terms of both form and function to conventional expressions of the tradition. The Ottawa group's variant of Sacred Harp thus offers a unique demonstration of how traditional cultural expressions and forms can be introduced into the postmodern framework in a manner which produces authentic meanings both for the individual and for a community. The Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of Sacred Harp is also a tribute to the flexibility and fruitfulness specific to Sacred Harp as a tradition that, in its very forms and practices, prevents cross-cultural adoptions from consisting of empty imitation and ensures rather that they be dependant upon communal expressiveness and interaction with the sacred. As the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus' expression of Sacred Harp demonstrates both the flexibility of Sacred Harp as a tradition and the ability for such a tradition to be transplanted into a postmodern landscape and produce genuine social and personal meanings, folk revivalism can be viewed as a bridge between the postmodern condition and the "communal spirituality" of Sacred Harp (Clawson 2004, 312).

Folk Music Revivalism: Building Bridges to an Idyllic Past

To return to the definition given in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Tamara Livingston defines music revivals as: "social movements which strive to 'restore' a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society" (1999, 66). Livingston further elaborates that the purposes of a music revival are twofold; first "to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture" and second, "to improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by revivalists" (1999, 68). Livingston's remarks indicate an intricate relationship between music revivalism and social restoration whereby the music of a bygone era is perceived as both a source of opposition against contemporary culture and as a means of improving upon a perceived cultural lack. This nature and purpose of folk music revivalism is echoed in Richard Blaustein's description of the causes of folk revival. Blaustein writes:

One source of folk revivalism is alienation from an unsatisfactory cultural identity, leading to folk romanticism; a second source is a subjective sense of deteriorating tradition, resulting in grass-roots preservationism. Historically, these two types of folk revival movements are equally prevalent and rarely separable; instead, they tend to reinforce one another in a symbiotic fashion. (1993, 264)

Blaustein's description of the causes of folk revivalism can be quite readily applied to the North American folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s. In the early 1980s, R.

Raymond Allen gave the following account of the mid-century revival:

During the past two decades, many young Americans have felt disillusionment with their cultural *Gesalt*. Rapid modernization and technological advancements cause psychological stress, which, for a small group, has been eased by the revival of an old folk form symbolic of a happier past when people lived closer to nature. Whether or not rural culture is, in reality, an idyllic garden of Eden, is inconsequential. The point is that old-time music represents the mythos of simpler existence, and playing it brings revivalist musicians spiritually closer to that way of life. (1981, 79)

As the views of Livingston, Blaustein and Allen suggest, folk music revivalism is simultaneously oppositional and restorative—a curious balance concerning which Robert Cantwell writes:

Thus the folk revival was neither reactionary nor revolutionary, though it borrowed the signs of other such movements and subcultures to express its sense of difference from the parent culture; it was, instead, conservative, or, more precisely, restorative, a kind of cultural patriotism dedicated to picking up the threads of a common legacy that the parent generation had either denied or forgotten to reweave into history. (1993, 51)

In keeping with Cantwell's remarks, Tamara Livingston and Gillian Mitchell each highlight restorative elements of the folk music revival. Livingston observes, "Many revivalists seem to be in search of a personal authenticity in historical forms" (1999, 74). And Mitchell remarks: "it is possible to look at the revival as an attempt by young people to regain some kind of ethnic and social identity for themselves" (2007, 92). Thus, at its core, the North American folk music revival can be seen as a search for both individual and social meaning—an attempt to recover both personal identity and community.

With the breakdown of traditional communities and the destabilization of institutional religion, the postmodern age became the age of the "obsessive search" for new forms and expressions of community and religion. By the middle of the 20th century in North America, folk music revivalism emerged as a means of recovering personal and social meaning through the adoption of the musical traditions of 'the folk'. The revivalist—a postmodern pilgrim—set out in search of expressive forms that would enable him or her to restore what had been fragmented: the self and his or her place in society. Discovering Sacred Harp amongst the various musical traditions of the Southern United States, the revivalist pilgrim found a tradition especially suited not only for the

recovery of personal meaning through his or her interaction with the songs of *The Sacred Harp*, but also for the recovery of social meaning via the communal activity necessary to enact the tradition.

Conclusion: Revival and Restoration

When asked what practicing Sacred Harp with the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus has meant to her, Adrienne Stevenson remarked: "It's a singing community. That's why we're friends with these people is to sing with them. And I think it brings together people who I think might not have otherwise come in contact, because you love to sing" (2008). Contrary to the familial and religious bonds that typically connect Southern Sacred Harp singers, the chief "common factor" of the Ottawa Shape Note Chorus is Sacred Harp itself (Dundes 1965, 2). For some this difference has provided reason for questioning the authenticity of the Northern expression of Sacred Harp. However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, it is the linking together of Northern singers by Sacred Harp itself which ensures that the Northern expression of Sacred Harp remain a communal expression of sacred song. In the verse from the Sacred Harp song "Jackson" quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the 'stranger here below' laments of his unhinged identity and perpetual isolation: "what I am is hard to know [...] like one alone I seem to be". Discovering in Sacred Harp "a welcoming community of consent" (Miller 2008, 203) within which to interact with the sacred without having to adhere to any sort of "explicit doctrinal consensus" (Bealle 1997, 241), the postmodern pilgrim effectively employs folk revivalism as a means of cultivating both social meaning through their interaction with a community and personal meaning through their interaction with the sacred. With the

revival of Sacred Harp in the North, the 'stranger here below' of the postmodern age not only revives a musical tradition but also, in and through his or her interaction with the tradition, rediscovers what was seemingly lost: participation in a community and interaction with the sacred.

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Appendix I

Lyrics to "Sacred Throne"

Beneath the sacred throne of God
I saw a river rise;
The streams where peace and pard'ning blood
Descended from the skies.

I stood amazed and wondered when
Or why this ocean rose;
That wafts salvation down to man,
His traitors and His foes.

That sacred flood from Jesus' veins
Was free to make a way;
And Mary's or Manasseh's stains,
Or sins more vile than they.

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 569)

Appendix 2

Lyrics to "Hallelujah"

And let this feeble body fail,
And let it faint or die;
My soul shall quit this mournful vale,
And soar to worlds on high,

Shall join the disembodied saints,
And find its long sought rest,
That only bliss for which it pants,
In my Redeemer's breast.

Refrain

And I'll sing hallelujah,
And you'll sing hallelujah,
And we'll sing hallelujah,
When we arrive at home.

O what are all my suff'rings here,
If, Lord, Though count me meet
With that enraptured host t'appear,
And worship at Thy feet!

Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away,
But let me find them all again,
In that eternal day.

Refrain

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 146)

Appendix 3

Lyrics to "Parting Friends"

Farewell my friends, I'm bound for Canaan,
I'm trav'ling through the wilderness;
Your company has been delightful,
You, who doth leave my mind distressed.

I go away behind to leave you;
Perhaps never to meet again,
But if we never have the pleasure,
I hope we'll meet on Canaan's land.

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 267)

Appendix 4

Lyrics to "Sweet Prospect"

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye,
To Canaan's fair and happy land
Where my possessions lie.

O'er all those wide, extended plains
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Son forever reigns
And scatters night away.

Refrain

Oh, the transporting rapt'rous scene
That rises to my sight;
Sweet fields arrayed in living green
And rivers of delight.

No chilling winds or pois'nous breath
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death
Are felt and feared no more.

Refrain

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 65)

Appendix 5

Lyrics to "Rose of Sharon"

I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley;
As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters;
As the apple tree, among the trees of the wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.

I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste;
He brought me to the banqueting house,
His banner over me was love!

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples,
For I am sick of love;
I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes and by the hinds of the field,
That you stir not up, nor awake, my love till he please.

The voice of my beloved, Behold! he cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.
My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 254-259)

Appendix 6

Lyrics to "David's Lamentation"

David the king was grieved and moved,
He went to his chamber, his chamber, and wept;
And as he went he wept, and said,

O my son! O my son!
Would to God I had died,
For thee, O Absalom,
my son, my son!

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 268)

Appendix 7

Lyrics to "Restoration"

Come, though fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

Refrain

I will rise and go to Jesus,
He'll embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior;
O there are ten thousand charms.

Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount—O fix me on it—
Mount of God's unchanging love.

Refrain

(The Sacred Harp 1991, 312)



