

Sacred Harp Colorado

June 2008

Who We Are and What We Do

The Rocky Mountain Shape Note Singers exist to preserve and promote the music and the traditions of American shape note harmony along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. We sing principally from the 1991 Denson revision of the Sacred Harp (Red Book), but use some songs from the Cooper Book (Blue Book). From time to time we will sing from other traditional books such as the Missouri Harmony and Noremberga Harmony depending upon the spirit and the occasion. We welcome any and all to join us at our monthly singings held in the cities along the Front Range. Loaner books are available for use or purchase. Our monthly singings are usually held to the schedule supplied at the end of this newsletter, but holidays or special circumstance may dictate that we move a singing date. If you are new to us, please contact one of our members listed below for current location, day/date and time of a singing in your area.

Editorially Speaking

Well, it is beginning to warm up down here in the Valley – Some 93 degrees on the south porch today. One thing this weather will do is loosen up your vocal cords and send you hunting for some Southern lemonade and a good Sacred Harp singing. There are a load of singings listed in the Looking Ahead for you to add to your calendar for the summer and more than that in the 07/08 Minutes book. Get out there and show our politicians and your green friends that four dollar gasoline doesn't shake your love of the music and that you will drive/fly as far as you have to sit in the square and sing with your friends.

And speaking of singing with friends, we bring you one of Martha Henderson's treatises on Sacred Harp, purloined from the fasola.org Singings List. Martha is one of the best at candid convention portraiture. If you have led a song at a major convention, the odds are excellent that there is a picture of you out there somewhere. As you shall soon see, she writes with feeling as well – Enjoy.

History, Traditions And Culture - How Can I Keep From Singing Martha Henderson

Dear singers,

As some of you know, I used to write a lot to the fasola list. I kept a notebook and wrote ideas or whole articles in it. Recently, I discovered a piece that was just about done, yet I had never sent it to the list. Here it is, almost 10 years later.

When I was small, I used to like to sing. It was a natural part of me, and I threw myself into it without artifice or self-consciousness. I distinctly remember my first-grade Christmas program. Our class's contribution was "Jingle Bells." I stood right at the front of the group and sang that song at the top of my lungs. I don't remember another thing about that program, so the singing made an impression on me, if on no one else.

At age 12, I was singing songs into a reel-to-reel tape recorder I'd received as a present. It was the latest thing back then before cassette tapes, and I thought it was really cool. I'd sing into it and then play it back to hear how I sounded.

So why was it that, only a few years later when I had the opportunity to join choirs in high school and college, I never even tried out because I thought I couldn't sing?

I regret this now. I think of all the singing opportunities I missed. But somehow, in the time after I was singing into that tape recorder, and in the time after I sang so loudly at the very front of my group for the Christmas program, I had acquired a fear of singing in front of people, especially alone as I would have to do in an audition. And I really thought that my voice wasn't good. I had gone from just reveling in the joy of singing -- not caring how I sounded -- to worrying what other people would think of me when they heard my voice.

It seems as if this is not an isolated phenomenon. I've heard many people, all adults, say that they can't sing. Where on earth did they get that idea? In my case, it was probably adolescent anxiety that stole my confidence; but I've heard other people say that this choir director, or that teacher, said or did something that shamed them in front of everyone into thinking that their voice, and therefore their very self, was inferior. That caused a wound so deep that many of these people are still silent 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years later. That's a terrible shame.

Except in rare cases of tone deafness, everyone has a singing voice and is able to use it. It's a God-given part of us, unique and therefore special. No one should be able to take that away from us. All that's required is practice and instruction. And yet, so often, people have the idea that singing is only for performance, and that you have to be "really good" to perform for others. Singing just to sing, and to be with others, and to share with others things that can't be shared in words, is something they can't grasp. It used to be part of the general culture, but now is foreign to most people.

When I found Sacred Harp (or maybe it found me), what kept me coming back in those early days was that I could just go, with my inferior (I thought) voice, and sing in harmony with others for the fun of it. No choir director to stop me or criticize, and no audition. No one around me paid attention to what I sounded like. I could hardly even hear myself because of the volume! Gradually, over a period of years, Sacred Harp helped me find my voice, and with it, that part of me that I had lost. As I found that, I began to listen to others' unique voices and appreciate each voice, and the soul of person behind it. From there, the path led onward to higher things.

I discovered what an integral part of me my singing had become when I caught a cold. One day, feeling particularly down, I tried to sing a song with words that fit what I was feeling and a melody that went straight to my heart. But all that came out of my mouth was an airy squeak. Laryngitis had stolen my voice and, with it, a part of my spirit. Though I could still speak, an essential part of me was missing. I was cut off from my soul, and that which needed to be expressed -- and could be expressed only with song -- was stuck inside of me. Others have had similar experiences. One singer who had to take blood-pressure medication found that it affected his voice such that, though it sounded just as good to others, it didn't *feel* right to him. Because his voice had changed, his whole self felt out of kilter. An important piece of his identity was missing.

Another singer from our group was out of singing for a long time because of illness. When she finally managed to make it to singing at our February convention, she said to me afterwards, "I feel like my soul has been through a car wash!"

I think we all take singing for granted because we are there all the time. But singing is not a

given. Any one of us could be gone at any time, or unable to attend because of illness.

Singing is, instead, a precious gift, and while we are granted the grace to be able to sing with others, we should spend our time there in wonder and gratitude that we were given voices to sing with, and given love as well, to share in a way that we can only do through singing. Let's pay attention, and appreciate what we have while we have it. For, as the poem says, "I shall not pass this way again."

Looking Ahead

Camp Fasola (Denson Book) 27 June thru 4 July 2008 at Camp Lee in Anniston, AL. An old fashioned week long singing school in two parts. See the January 2008 on line issue for details.

2008 National Shape Note Gathering (various books) 10 – 12 July 2008 at the Ozark Folk Center, Mountain Home, AR. Look for more information concerning instructors and shape note books to be used in the coming months.

Sacred Harp Singing Convention (Denson Book) 26 – 27 July at Coker United Methodist Church, San Antonio, TX. This singing celebrates the 125th anniversary of Coker Methodist. More info contact: Mike Hinton at: 210/545-2245 or phnxmike@aol.com.

East Texas Convention 9 – 10 August (Cooper Book) Henderson Community Center, 302 Fair Park, Henderson, Texas. More info: Robert Vaughn, (903) 863-5379.

West Texas Singing 16 August (Denson Book) Crosbyton Primitive Baptist Church, 401 S. Emerald St., Crosbyton, Texas. More info: Kathy Taylor, (806) 789-2493.

Southwest Texas Convention Fall Session 30 - 31 August (Cooper Book) Location to be determined, Austin, Texas. More info: Alexa Gilmore, (512) 963-6932, or Gaylon Powell, (512) 249-8931.

Where We Sing and How to Find Us

BOULDER Regular singings are 2nd Friday of each month 7-9 pm, at the home of Peter and Mary Lou Van Laanen. Contact Mary Lou for details at 303-447-9379 or e-mail her at vmarylou@indra.com

DENVER Sings weekly each Monday except the first Monday from 6:40 – 8:40PM at St. Andrew's Church, 2015 Glenarm Street or St. Mark's Orthodox, 1409 S. Vine when St. Andrew's is not available. This group also sings monthly on the fourth Sunday, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM in one of these two locations. Bring a dollar as a contribution to the book fund. For the location of any specific singing, please contact Pat Dolan at 303-778-6297 or e-mail him at ruralplain@aol.com or Sharon Kermiet at skermiet@goodwilldenver.org.

COLORADO SPRINGS - Sings regularly on the 2nd Sunday from 1:30 to 3:30 pm at the Pikes Peak Primitive Baptist Church 12th and Pikes Peak on the Westside. Please bring a dollar donation to the book fund. Pete Mathewson is the contact at 719-469-5241 or e-mail

him at 71mgbgt41@gmail.com.

FORT COLLINS - The singing is normally the first Monday of each month 7-8:30 pm at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 2000 Stover Street. Contact Hill Grimmett for specifics at 970-231-1197 or e-mail him at hill@sacredharpcolorado.org

Sacred Harp On The Web

Our local websites are Sacred Harp Colorado at www.sacredharpcolorado.org and the Rocky Mountain Shapenote Singers at <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~dakspk>. The national web site is www.fasola.org

Sacred Harp Colorado Newsletter Editor:

Pete Mathewson
417 Carson Ave.
La Junta, CO 81050
719/469-5241 cell
71mgbgt41@gmail.com