

Sacred Harp Colorado

August 2009

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 Norembega 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

As we go forward toward the Rocky Mountain Convention, this issue will focus mainly on how we sing and why we sing the way we do. Mike Hinton opens with his Top Ten Things list for Sacred Harp singing and all of these items are of specific import for the convention setting. This is followed by Karen Willard's clarification of the age old question: Do we hafta sing the notes ?? Martha Henderson speaks to maintaining integrity and dignity in the tunes we lead. Robert Vaughn discusses the difference between "favorite" and "better" when we speak of the book we personally prefer to sing from.

Denver Group Schedule Change – Sharon Kermiet

Effective September 2009 the Denver Group will cease the regular monthly singings it has traditionally held on the 4th Sunday of the month. It will continue singing in Denver every Monday evening except first Monday of the month from 6:40 – 8:40. The Denver singing group is delighted to arrange special singings, in addition to the regular Monday evening singings, for out of town visitors to the Denver/Boulder area whenever possible. Out of town singers should call Sharon Kermiet at 303-931-8445 or email her at skermiet@goodwilldenver.org and at coral96@indra.com to arrange a special singing.

Top 10 Things I Learned At Camp Fasola – Mike Hinton, San Antonio, TX

10. Only 1 person should sound the pitch for a leader, more than one causes confusion and delays starting a tune
- 9 Accent, Accent, Accent (primary and secondary) - many long time singers fear this important element in our singing is getting insufficient attention.

(Accent is "about the placement and the relative strength of the beat that surges through their music. They feel that the strength and the exactness of the beat are most important in making their singing effective" Cobb, The Sacred Harp, pg 48)(Rudiments of Music - paragraph 16)

8. When your name is called to lead, know what tune you will lead and announce the page number when you stand and begin moving to the hollow square.
7. "Front bench" singers have a responsibility to watch the leader.
6. Try singing a different part. "Some people are singing a part which is not 'best' for them."
5. When in doubt or have a question, look in the "Rudiments of Music" in the front of the book.
4. If there is a repeat, then repeat the notes and words. To omit "note" repeats is to give the notes less credence than the words.
3. Know your song and be ready to start after the pitch is given
2. Have a "sense of the speed" of your tune before you start beating the time.
1. The most important person in the room is in the "hollow square"

Repeats in the Notes – Karen Willard, Buckley, WA

If I can speak to what probably lies behind the Camp Fasola teaching [in support of Mike's item #4 above? ed.]

Being mindful of using more than your fair share of time on the floor at a large singing is an admirable thing. And it is something that convention Chairmen often mention during their welcoming remarks.

But I've noticed, at large singings around the country particularly outside of the South, that the trend of those leaders who repeat on the notes as well as the words in comparison to those leaders who repeat on the words but not the notes does not usually break down between those who are clearly mindful of the time and those who are not. Instead, the breakdown, at least on the surface, seems to be most often between those who are longtime singers, and those who are newly come to the tradition. One could easily become concerned that not repeating on the notes is because the notes are felt to be a chore to be gotten through as quickly as possible and then left behind.

The reason often tendered by our elders in the singing community for doing with the notes everything we plan to do with the words, is that this is the time for the class to focus on the music itself, and to figure out what the leader is asking the class to do for their song. We don't "rehearse" our songs. We don't count out a couple measures before starting to sing in order to set the tempo. Instead we launch into our song by singing the notes and do all our discovery, rehearsing, and learning during that exercise, including how to negotiate the repeat. Then we sing the words...

Speaking of Verses and Pace – Martha Henderson, St. Paul, MN

In addition to the discussion about singing the repeats on the notes, I'd like to add a few things.

1. When you first come to the square and announce your song, also tell people what verses you want. Don't sing the notes, then stop and tell people the verses. It interrupts the flow of the song, and it sends the message, "OK, the notes were just a perfunctory rehearsal. Now we'll sing the real song."
2. Unless your group is really new to the song and needs a little grace to get through it, don't sing the notes slowly and then speed up the words. Stay at a steady pace. Unless, of course, you've realized that you picked a pace that was too slow. That happens sometimes. But in general, aim for continuity.
3. In the same vein, I really wish that people wouldn't do a song all the way through and then stomp their foot and take the song at a much faster pace on a third (or even second) repeat. In my opinion, the song has its own dignity that should be preserved, and speeding up for a final repeat doesn't do that.

Rethinkin Our Thinkin - My Book's Better Than Your Book – Robert Vaughn, Mount Enterprise, TX

Back in December of 2007, I made a series of posts on some historical (and other) inaccuracies of Sacred Harp called [Rethinkin our thinkin](#) (all are available from this link). In the course of posts, I discussed six "myths". Today I want to think about one more.

Myth # 7. My book is better than your book.

In a singing tradition that has developed different followings of different books, it is inevitable that most singers will adopt a favorite book. This is reasonable and expected. Also inevitable, it appears, is the adoption of a not-so-reasonable "my book is better than your book" attitude by some.

I am a "Cooper Book" singer. It is my book. It is my heritage. I grew up in an area and a community that used the Cooper Book. I grew up in a family that used the Cooper Book. My Dad's uncle has a song in the book. That song, written by a young man who died an "untimely death",^[1] (and those circumstances) forever anchors our family to one book more than others. The past is what it is and can't be changed. I wouldn't want to. Yes, my favorite Sacred Harp book is the Cooper Book. That doesn't mean it is better than the Denson Book or the J.L. White Book. Just that it is my favorite. If your favorite is the Denson, that doesn't mean it is better; if your favorite is the J.L. White, that doesn't mean it is better. Just that it is your favorite.

I can now hear some scholar say, "but this" and "but that", explaining musical technicalities, historic anomalies and various personalities. I say, if Sacred Harpers had listened to the

"better" music boys,[2] there would be no Sacred Harp today. They "knew" what was *better*, and it wasn't *The Sacred Harp*.

Remember music is an art as well as a science. They say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" -- or in this case "beauty is in the ear of the *be-hearer*". A person's favorite song is that person's favorite song, regardless of what some "expert" finds wrong with it. And a person's favorite song book is that person's favorite song book, regardless of what some "expert" finds wrong with it.

My book is not better than your book (nor yours mine). My book is my book. Your book is your book. The twain may never meet...But we'll meet together at your singing and sing from your book, then at my singing and sing from my book. Hopefully we'll love every minute of it!

[1] He was only 26 when he contracted typhoid fever and died.

[2] Lowell Mason, Thomas Hastings and company.

20th Annual Rocky Mountain Convention at a New Location This Year – Sharon Kermiet and Mary Lou VanLaanen

The singing school on Friday night, both all-day singings, and an informal singing session on Saturday evening will all be held in the dining hall at Colorado Christian University. The CCU dining hall has resonant acoustics and seems that it will be wonderful for Sacred Harp songs. Parking is available near by the hall. Thank yous go to Bonnie and Pat Dolan for scouting this location.

Events and times for the convention are as follows: Singing school Friday from 7:30 to 9:00PM. Saturday Sacred Harp singing from 9:00AM to 3:00PM. Saturday social singing from 7:00 to 9:30PM. Sunday Sacred Harp singing from 9:00AM to 2:30PM. Your singing school instructor is Gaylon Powell of Austin, TX.

Question of the Month: *What do you like the most about Sacred Harp conventions and all-day singings ??*

Late morning of the first day. People's voices and hearts have warmed to the music, and that is generally the best part of a convention for me. - **Mary Lou VanLaanen**

Well, that's easy--we don't have to stop! At least for quite a while. I actually get a decent dose of singing in. The other singings keep the pump primed. I equally enjoy the opportunity for visiting and getting to know my neighbor singers a bit better. - **Deb Robson**

Next Month's Question: *Why does the editor always seem to publish material about Sacred Harp which are written by singers from outside Colorado ??*

Looking Ahead

East Texas Convention 8 – 9 August (Cooper Book) Henderson Community Center, 302 Fair Park, Henderson, Texas. More info: Robert Vaughn, (903) 863-5379.

West Texas Singing 15 August (Denson Book) Crosbyton Primitive Baptist Church, 401 S. Emerald St., Crosbyton, Texas. More info: Kathy Taylor, (806) 789-2493.

1st Annual Washington State Cooper Book Singing 15 August (Cooper Book) Buckley Hall, Buckley, WA. With Saturday evening social and preceded by the monthly Cooper Book singing on the 14th. More info: Karen Willard Karen@Weelyrd.net.

Southwest Texas Convention - Fall Session 29 - 30 August (Cooper Book) Austin Waldorf School, 8700 S. View Rd., Austin, Texas. More info: [Alexa Gilmore](mailto:AlexaGilmore@gmail.com), (512) 963-6932, or [Gaylon Powell](mailto:GaylonPowell@gmail.com), (512) 249-8931.

Rocky Mountain Convention 25 - 27 September (Denson Book) Colorado Christian University, 8787 W. Alameda Ave. Denver, CO. More info: Sharon Kermiet at skermiet@goodwilldenver.org.

Where We Sing and How to Find Us

Arkansas Valley Regular singings are 1st Tuesday of each month from 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the home of Pete and Susie Mathewson 417 Carson Ave. La Junta. Contact Pete at 719/383-9056 or 71mgbgt41@gmail.com.

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

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.

DENVER Sings weekly each Monday except the first Monday from 6:40 – 8:40PM at St. Mark's Orthodox, 1409 S. Vine, Denver. Special singings may be arranged, in addition to the regular Monday evening singings, for out of town visitors to the Denver/Boulder area. Out of town singers should call Sharon Kermiet at 303-931-8445 or email her at skermiet@goodwilldenver.org and at coral96@indra.com to arrange a special singing. 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.

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

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