

SACRED HARP COLORADO

December 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 Norumbega Harmony.

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

We've had a hiatus now with this newsletter of a few months, after a long stint by Pete Matthewson as Editor - **thanks, Pete!** I'm going to fill in for a bit and see if we can't try to get some additional people involved. In fact, if you want this newsletter to continue, you need to help! **Here's how:**

Each month I'll ask a question of general interest (or so it seems to me). Send me an answer and I'll put together those answers for the next newsletter. So to get started, I asked some of the people I know best: **How did you come to sing Sacred Harp?**

Here's what they had to say....

I heard about Sacred Harp from a friend, and decided to check it out. I've been singing in some form all my life, and almost immediately felt at home singing shapenote, even if I did think the scale was a little weird at first. I've always been much more interested in the act of singing rather than any kind of practice or performance, so I was really excited about my discovery of shapenote. At the time I lived in western Mass, where there are a plethora of singings, so it was easy for me to sing weekly, if not more frequently.

--Anne Marie Casper

I was mesmerized for years by the beauty of the shape note selections in the Christmas Revels albums. I eventually saw a notice in the Swallow Hill newsletter for the Sunday afternoon Denver singings, and began attending those. Bonnie began soon after that.

--Pat Dolan

In grad school, we had to choose between two required extracurricular activities -- playing an obsolete form of baseball, or singing in a 19th-century choir (I went to an unusual grad school!) Having no aptitude for sports, and a little experience in singing, I choose the choir. It was my first introduction to choral singing, and it included some shapenote pieces. However, I never knew that Sacred Harp still survived, and when I graduated, I kind of forgot about it.

Ten years later, I was attending a museum conference in Indianapolis, and heard a shapenote group sing at Connor Prairie, a living history museum outside Indianapolis. It reminded me of how much I enjoyed that music, and I went home and Googled Colorado shape note – Mary Lou's name came up, I contacted her, and have been singing ever since.

--Erik Mason

I first came to shape note in the late 1970s. I was living with a group, primarily folk musicians and contradancers, in an old farmhouse in Leverett, MA. We got snowed in, and one of us had a seven-shape book, so we enjoyed our forced temporary isolation singing around the wood stove with the one shared book.

The second time I came to shape note was in 1986, when I attended Friends General Conference (FGC), an annual gathering of Quakers, which was located that year at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. The gathering was also attended by a few singers from the Twin Cities area, most notably Robin Fox, who spearheaded the shape-note presence during the week.

My greatest spiritual need at the time was for SINGING, so I signed up for 100% singing workshops and in addition spent any open time with the spontaneous FGC shape-note group. This was my introduction to four-shape singing. When I got back to Colorado, I knew I had to keep singing and hunted up the singers in the region.

--Deb Robson

As a young married student at Brigham Young University in the '70s, I used to drop by the local library each month as they purchased new records to listen to the new music. One month I came across a collection of Alan Lomax's recordings of Alabama Sacred Harp music and was blown away. I'd never heard church music sung in anything but a smooth-blended English-choir style. Here were women singing at the top of their lungs, not trying to sound like the person next to them. That record became a treasure to our family, but we had no idea local groups formed and sung together.

In the late 1990s my wife Sharman and I were walking in a CU building looking for a Shakespeare play, where we heard a group singing Sacred Harp tunes. We quickly poked our heads in, but afraid of missing our play, didn't linger. Arriving home I searched on the Internet and found a homepage for Sacred Harp in Colorado. We came to the next Boulder singing, and haven't stopped since. It fills a spiritual and aesthetic need in us, for authentic participation within a great music-loving community!

--Brent Wilson

Back in the late '60s we moved to Cambridge MA and made friends with a lot of people who were fellow students of my husband's at the Episcopal Theological Seminary; among them was Warren Steel. We used to gather on my back porch to sing folk music and sometimes Warren would bring things he had photocopied from various sources. One of those sources was The Sacred Harp. Later he took me to Old Joe Clark's, a group house near Harvard where they held Sunday afternoon sings from The Sacred Harp.

Time passed, we were overseas for 3 years, and when we came back my life changed considerably and Warren, who by then was living in Oxford, MS, strongly recommended that I find the singers in the Boston area. So I did.

That was 1983. In the spring of 1984 he convinced me to go to my first National Convention and I haven't missed one since.

--Ginnie Ely

Don and I went to the first annual Prairie Home Companion convention in Moorhead, MN in the mid '90s. (A weekend with Garrison Keillor - heaven.) One of the workshops was given by a couple from the U of Tennessee Shapenote. We were not convinced, but wanted to do it again someday. We arrived back in Fort Collins and the next day found a notice in the paper of singings and the rest is history (as they say).

--Sandy Klein

So here is this month's question: What's your favorite tune, and why? Keep your answer short, include the page number so we can all look it up, and send it to Hill at Hill@sacredharpcolorado.org NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 20.

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 Singings weekly each Monday *except the first Monday* from 6:40 – 8:40 pm at St. Mark's Orthodox, 1409 South Vine. This group also sings monthly on the fourth Sunday, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM in the same location. Please bring a dollar donation to the book fund. For location confirmation or other info, 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 Singings 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 71mqbqt41@gmail.com .

FORT COLLINS The singing is the first Monday of each month 7-8:30 pm at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 2000 Stover Street. Exceptions are Labor Day (September) and sometimes July – see the web site for info. Or contact Hill Grimmatt 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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