

“Draw the Cords of Union Stronger”: The Musical Life of the American Shakers

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Ethnomusicological studies of cultural groups have long shown the importance of music as an emblem that maintains and reinforces group solidarity. Issues related to the assertion of “cultural identity” and the uses of music in negotiating relationships within multi-cultural contexts have assumed a prominent role in examinations of contemporary musical life. This essay deals with the role of music in the religious and social lives of the Shakers, an American sect, as a powerful instrument of spiritual expression and social integration. This role has changed significantly in recent decades as the Shakers have been threatened with extinction. As the remnants of an 18th-century experiment in utopian living, contemporary Shakers have had to fight for their continued existence. In this process—one undergone by innumerable cultural minorities around the world today—music serves simultaneously as a means of promoting a sense of belonging to the group, as distinguished from the outside world, and as a tool to promote mutual understanding with that same world.

Utopian experiments in communal living flourished during the first century of United States history, particularly between 1780 and 1860.¹ Nurtured in many cases by religious and social movements native to Europe, such communes prospered in the young democracy, where political, social and geographical conditions provided a testing ground for various idealistic and perfectionistic ideas. Those yearning to put (sometimes highly uncommon) communal ideals into practice found in the

United States, compared to Europe, more political and social tolerance and available land for establishing new communities.

Religious ideals formed the basis of many of these communities, which were to be "heavens on earth" of morally pure members, each sect defining "morality" in different ways.² Members dedicated themselves to forming a closer relationship to God, as well as human relationships that were marked by spiritual purity and harmony. These Christian communities (most of which were offshoots of Protestant sects) believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible. They took the life of Christ and the early Christian church as their models, particularly the latter's emphasis on the communal possession of all worldly goods (Kanter 1972:4). Spiritual ideals—in accordance with their various interpretations of the Bible—dominated over other considerations in the organization of their daily lives.

The Shakers (or "The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing") represent one of the most influential religious and social movements of this period. They have outlived all the other communes, though their numbers have diminished dramatically since the late 19th century. At the height of their movement in the middle of that century, the Shakers resided in nineteen main communities and several missions or short-lived communities, with a total membership of between 4,000 and 6,000 people (Andrews 1963:290-92; Patterson 1979:13).³ In contemporary times they are perhaps best known for the material culture they produced, such as the graceful architecture of their homes and the simple beauty of their furniture and household objects. But Shaker spiritual and social ideals, which stress a closer bond to God, simplicity in living, equality of the sexes and races, and the evil of war, have also drawn considerable admiration, as well as ridicule, during a national history marked by secularization, rapid industrialization, intolerance, and bloody conflict.

1. Shaker History and Beliefs

The Shakers began as a small group of English dissenters who became active during the mid-18th century and were probably influenced theologically by Methodists and French Camisards (Hadd 1989:2; Barker 1985). A young woman named Ann Lee (or "Lees") joined the Manchester group in 1758 and became its inspired and outspoken leader. Imprisoned and beaten for speaking out against the sinfulness of the Church of England, she and eight other members decided in 1774 to emigrate to the American colonies. The "Shaking Quakers"—so named because of "their

ecstatic and violent bodily agitation in religious worship" (Barker 1985:1)—arrived in New York on August 6th of that year, a date that is still celebrated in the Maine Shaker community. Within two years, they had bought a plot of land in upstate New York, erected buildings and begun to raise crops and hold religious meetings. Until her death in 1784, Ann Lee evangelized throughout New England, suffering with her group severe persecution from local church and political authorities.

In the years following Ann Lee's death, two American followers, Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, took over the responsibility of establishing and organizing Shaker communities, which eventually spread from New England as far west as Ohio and as far south as Kentucky. Those who joined these communities surrendered all their possessions to the church, agreeing to a "united inheritance" with other community members. They lived celibate lives in "families," with each group of 30 to 100 people divided into living units of girls, boys, women and men. An administrative hierarchy was established, made up of a "Ruling Ministry" that was headquartered in Mount Lebanon, New York; "elders" and "deacons" (both offices having male and female counterparts) gained responsibility for the moral and day-to-day guidance of each community of "Believers."

The theological basis of Shakerism lies in a Christianity based on divine revelation and the individual's receptivity to the Christ spirit. In referring to "Christ's Second Appearing," Shakers look not to a physical reappearance of Christ but rather to the reappearance of his spirit in each person. This is obtained through prayer, worship, confession of sin and moral living in accordance with early Christian communal principles. As in the primitive Christian church, all Believers become "members of Christ's body" (Andrews 1963:99).

Ann Lee never claimed to be the female reincarnation of Christ. Still, her charismatic personality inspired some of her early followers to venerate Lee as the second, female Christ. Contemporary Shakers, however, refer to "Mother Ann" as their "revered leader," whose special importance lies in having revealed the dual nature of God, male and female. A woman who grew up as a Shaker made reference to the many songs in which the word "Mother" appears:

I think one of the unique parts of Shakerism, and this of course comes forth in the songs, is the fact that we recognize a Father and Mother God. So many of the songs refer to "Mother." And a lot of people think we're singing these Mother songs to Ann Lee. This might, in some small way, have a bearing on Ann Lee but actually it's the Mother image, it's the Mother God that these songs are sung to, because we don't worship Ann Lee. ... Ann was the first

spiritual leader, but we don't worship her. And so I think the songs on "Mother" are indicative of what the Shaker faith is (Carr 1989).

Celibacy came to be regarded by the Shakers as "the chief factor separating believers from an impure world and allowing them to realize true Christian unselfishness" (Foster 1981:16). As a result of this rule, Shaker communities could never depend upon natural inheritors of their tradition. Instead, they gained new members either from among the young adults who had grown up in Shaker communities (as a result of being orphaned or given up as children), or from adult converts.

Ann Lee, who was illiterate, left behind no theological treatises; it was only many years after her death that some of her words and acts, as recalled by followers, were collected and published.⁴ The Shakers follow no written doctrine that is unique to their sect. When asked about Shaker ideals, current members emphasize two major values: unity and simplicity. One Shaker writes:

As far as our everyday life goes, unity or union is of paramount importance—the union of Believers one with another and the union of the individual with his or her Heavenly Parents We are called into this Christ family to be part of the one body of Christ. We work in service for each other and for the good of the whole, not for self and selfish gain. It is in this service for others that we can forget self and deepen and strengthen our union (Hadd 1989:10).

Such a strong emphasis on the concept of unity has clearly served the health of Shaker communal life through the centuries, since any disharmony or strife that threatened to break up communities was considered inherently incompatible with Shaker beliefs. So long as individuals felt that their personal needs were being met even as they sacrificed themselves for the group's sake, such unity could be maintained.

The most well-known of Shaker songs, "Simple Gifts" refers to "the gift to be simple" as a freeing of the real self. Regarding this important Shaker value, the same Believer writes:

Simplicity ... comes from a Latin word meaning "without folds." Everything is laid bare, we are not hiding anything It is to be open and honest, not just with each other but with ourselves. Or, as Father James said, "Be what you seem to be and seem to be what you really are" (*ibid.*:10).⁵

By linking simplicity to candor (as revealed in this quote), the individual confession of sin and the "laying bare" of the soul gain a special importance in the spiritual life of the community as a whole.

Among utopian groups of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Shakers were not the only sect to extol an artless, more innocent world. The early

decades of American history were turbulent ones, marked by dramatic, often traumatic, political and economic changes. Against this background, religious revival movements proclaiming the virtue of "going back" to a simpler, more ordered way of life appealed to tens of thousands of people.

Shakers proclaim the godliness of physical labor. They frequently cite a motto from Mother Ann, "Hands to work, hearts to God," as well as the egalitarian principles of labor that are traditional to Shakerism:

... they (the highest spiritual leaders of the church) even had manual labor to do. The Ministry were often tailors, they made baskets, and so literally "hands to work and hearts to god" is taken very seriously in the community. Everyone, no matter who they are, takes part in some physical labor. ... I think that Shakers were always taught ... to put your very best into that work that you're doing, to put your religion into it, and I think that's why Shaker work—if I might be modest, I don't want to boast—but I do think Shaker work is superior because of the element of religion in it (Carr 1989).

The Shakers of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, form the last active Shaker community at present in the United States. In 1961 Delmer Wilson, the last male Believer to formally sign the membership covenant, passed away and the Ruling Ministry decided in 1965 to close membership to the Shaker society (Horgan 1982:181). (At that point, the society consisted of only the communities at Sabbathday Lake and Canterbury, New Hampshire.)

Around this time, however, the director of the Sabbathday Lake community museum and library declared his desire to adopt the Shaker life style and his energy and intellect spurred new life into the community there. Theodore E. Johnson (who passed away in 1986) wrote and spoke eloquently about Shaker history and beliefs. Partly due to his influence, several young people became interested in Shakerism as practiced at Sabbathday Lake and have since joined that community. They have been accepted by Shakers there as legitimate members, but the Ruling Ministry, centered in Canterbury, has not recognized their official status. In the meantime, the assets of the Shaker society have been turned over to a nonprofit corporation that is dedicated to ensuring the preservation of a Shaker village after the last Shaker has died (*ibid.*:182). The resulting disagreement over the distribution of funds from the trust and the admittance of new members has created some amount of estrangement between the two communities. In 1989 there were eight "members" of the Sabbathday Lake community, including three young members who are recognized by that community, but not by the Canterbury Shakers.⁶

2. Music as Central to Shaker Religious Expression

Music—specifically, singing—is a vital element of Shaker life as a means of religious expression and confirmation. “We must remember,” wrote one Shaker believer, “that these were not just songs, but deep feelings from the soul” (Patterson 1979:13). Singing has played an important role in the movement since its inception. Many followers observed Ann Lee singing, sometimes to herself and without text, and she considered song an important means of communicating to God and to people. On occasion she sang, according to a witness, “a melodious and heavenly song, instantly (filling) the assembly with inexpressible joy” (quoted in Brewer 1986:11). Members were encouraged to sing and dance at will during Shaker services. Such spontaneous singing and dancing sometimes became wild expressions of spiritual awakening. The singing was, following Ann Lee’s example, either textless, sung in “tongues” or used vocables like “la-la-la,” and the dancing consisted of fast twirling, kicking and jumping. After about 1790, Shaker services became more formal and songs were shared through oral transmission and sung in unison, without instrumental accompaniment. In later years, various forms of letteral notation were developed for transcribing Shaker music.

The sheer number of songs produced by the Shakers over the years testifies to their importance to the sect: one scholar estimates the number of Shaker songs surviving in manuscript at 8,000 to 10,000 (Patterson 1979:xiii). It is also likely that many songs were created that have not survived in manuscript or in oral tradition (Patterson 1966:79).

Daniel W. Patterson, a scholar who has conducted extensive research on Shaker music, has classified the various types and historical periods of Shaker hymnody to include:

- (1) congregational songs of the 1790s (consisting of wordless “solemn songs”);
- (2) long doctrinal hymns (sung from around 1805 to 1820);
- (3) shorter hymns of sentiment (used from 1820 on);
- (4) “laboring” songs (sung while performing dances and marches);
- (5) extra songs (appearing from 1809 and sung during pauses between exercises); and
- (6) gift songs (a kind of extra song that took phrases from secular song but developed its own unique forms) (Patterson 1979:34).

These categories, however, are highly flexible and not entirely mutually exclusive. Patterson (1976:8) has noted that many songs are multi-

functional (e.g., certain gift songs can be used as marches), and a listener cannot always distinguish types on the basis of the songs' outward characteristics. Features of form, mode and melodic type cross over different categories. In addition, neither older nor newer members of Sabbathday Lake use all these categories regularly or consistently. In interviews, they considered such classifications a matter for scholars rather than for the Shakers themselves.

Of all these song types, the gift song has received the most scholarly attention, perhaps because of its distinctiveness in the context of American religious song. Gift songs reflect a particularly intense and unusual period of Shaker history. From about 1837 to 1847, renewed spiritual exuberance swept through all the Shaker communities.⁷ Members reported that historical personalities—some famous, such as Mother Ann or Christ, others ordinary—visited them, communicated with them and sometimes used them as their "instruments." Spirits often brought "gifts" of song to Believers, producing within one decade innumerable new pieces of music.⁸ Such inspired songs were sometimes sung in unknown tongues, since "native" spirits of American Indians, Chinese, Eskimos and others taught songs in their own languages. Many were irregular in rhythm or tempo, or contained unusual text setting. In some cases phrases sung with vocables were introduced into a song, alternating with normal text. In short, both in musical and textual content, these gift songs tended to be irregular and "strange" compared to other religious folk song.

The reception and transmission of gift songs represent a classic musical example of what Victor Turner labeled "liminality," in which everyday conventions and structures break down within a group. This stage of community life is marked by "intense comradeship and egalitarianism," and leads, according to Turner's model, to the social and cosmic oneness of "communitas," a much-desired state for the religious utopian community (1969:95-6). Indeed, the excitement and interest in Shakerism engendered by the gift song period was extreme and never to be surpassed or repeated. The Shakers today concentrate on singing what Patterson refers to as "spirituals," or religious folk songs from the 18th and 19th centuries. These are generally short songs, with four to eight lines of text, and are dominated by gift, laboring and extra songs. For those brought up in the Shaker community, the contrasting category to spirituals contains "hymns" or "anthems," which are described as "formal" and "long." A "hymn," to them, is a song originally sung in four-part harmony and to instrumental accompaniment. (When they now sing "hymns," the Sabbathday Lake Shakers perform them in unison and a cappella.)



Ill. 1. Sister R. Mildred Barker of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker community

The current preference for the spirituals can be linked to several factors. Sister R. Mildred Barker had developed a great affection for them in her childhood and learned hundreds of them during her early years as a Shaker.⁹ She became an important source of musical inspiration and knowledge for the community as a whole. Theodore Johnson, the newer Shaker, also liked these songs in particular and encouraged their use. Today's Shakers say that the hymns are too formal and "professional," meaning that they require particular skill to perform, in contrast to their "small songs," which most people can learn quickly.

Concentrating on this repertoire highlights a "back-to-the-roots" attitude that has grown among them in recent years. This attitude stresses the spiritual essence of Shakerism as opposed to the later, 19th- and 20th-century efforts to adapt to "the World" and adopt some of its ways. These efforts began in the 1860s, when demands for "modernization" of the communities became louder. Up until that time, most Shakers felt that unison singing lent itself best to spiritual expression and that the use of musical instruments was "worldly." One Believer wrote in 1868:

I have not doubt that the introduction of any worldly instrument into our meetings at this time, would banish every good Spirit from them, and would entirely destroy the spiritual gift of the meeting. Of course its tendency would be to make the young Worldly and draw them back into the flesh (quoted in Brewer 1986:174).

After the Civil War, however, organs were gradually introduced into Shaker communities, first to be used for music lessons and then in worship services. Shakers growing up in Maine during the 1930s report the existence of an orchestra. At that time, the Shakers sang in worship service mainly hymns in four-part harmony from a hymnal published at the Canterbury community in 1908. The "spirituals" were also sung, especially in private, but Shaker worship centered around hymns similar to those sung in mainstream Protestant churches in America.

Group dancing became an established part of Shaker services in the early 19th century. Marching in formation in male and female groups was adopted in 1822 and lasted, depending upon the community, until around the turn of the century (Hadd 1989:13). Communities discontinued marching when they no longer had enough members to carry it out properly. Some songs are sung today to the accompaniment of "motioning" or gestures, perhaps derived from the original dances. Such motions describe and reinforce the meanings of the sung words, such as crossing the arms over the breast to express the phrase "to keep her (Mother's) blessing snugly."

3. Current Song Practice and Repertoire

For present-day members, the act of communal singing expresses and reinforces their deepest values: unity, spirituality, and the humble confirmation of their duty to God. The singing of a cappella songs is an important element of the services of the Sabbathday Lake community, which are held twice a week. Two hymns, called "set songs," are sung at the beginning of each service. Copies of these are made from hymnals and distributed to guests. In the course of the service, participants bear testimony regarding a particular subject selected for that day (e.g., the cross). In response to this, anyone can then begin singing, "pitching" a song that confirms what has just been said. Sister Frances Carr related in an interview:

Somebody will say something and it will bring a song to mind, and that is your answer to the person who has said something, you know, to just pitch a song that's come into your head and ... it's like you're in union with what they said, by singing that song (Carr 1989).

In this way, singing comprises a major portion of any given service. After the first two set songs, all others are sung without hymnals or printed sheets, so that the tunes and words are learned over months and years of attending such services. Some songs are sung several times throughout a given year, others less frequently; there is no particular directive or pattern in this regard. Outside of services, members can sometimes be heard singing Shaker songs as they perform their daily chores. They have recorded an album of their songs and perform frequently for schools, community groups and in folk music concerts as a way of introducing their culture to the outside world.

An overview of Shaker songs in contemporary use was obtained by recording the nine Shakers who were members of the Sabbathday Lake community in February to March, 1989. In total, 104 recordings were made of 68 different songs that they had selected themselves. They came to each recording session with a list of songs to be performed, and when this list was exhausted, they sang songs suggested spontaneously by the members of the group. The purpose of this recording was to publish on compact disc a selection of their repertoire. Because the last comprehensive recording of Shaker songs had appeared in 1976, the Sabbathday Lake community felt it was time to make a new recording of their more commonly sung songs.¹⁰



III. 2. *The Shakers of Sabbathday Lake making the 1989 recordings. From left to right: Sister Marie Burgess, Brother Wayne Smith, Brother Arnold Hadd, Sister R. Mildred Barker, Sister Frances Carr and Sister Meg Haskell.*

The 1976 recording had been assembled from recordings made from 1963 to 1976 and was accompanied by extensive background notes written by Daniel Patterson. Patterson has exerted a profound influence on the contemporary Shakers and their music for over three decades. His 1979 book, "The Shaker Spiritual," is a compendium of Shaker music transcribed from manuscripts as well as from oral tradition, with detailed historical references concerning those Shakers who received or created the songs. Mildred Barker, at 91 the oldest singer participating in our recordings, referred to this book several times in her conversations about Shaker music. She related, for example, that she keeps a copy of it on top of her night stand so that she can study it at night before going to sleep. Barker also mentioned while recording in 1989 that she had recorded all together 182 songs for Patterson. The other Shakers also made frequent reference to this book, to his notes accompanying the 1976 recording and to his other articles. Facts concerning the historical background of specific songs (such as who received them and when) are quoted from these publications, as well as Patterson's judgments about them (e.g., "David calls this is the 'quintessential Shaker song'").

The present-day Shakers have also learned "new" songs from this scholar. For example, in 1978 Patterson presented eight songs from manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries in a booklet for the annual meeting of the Friends of the Shakers. These songs, he wrote, neither had "retained a place in Shaker oral tradition" nor had been previously published (Patterson 1978:3). Four of these—unsung by the Sabbathday Lake community until 1978—were performed in the 1989 recording session, as well as in other contexts.¹¹

Three of the Shakers who sang on the 1976 album—all female—also were present for the 1989 recording session; the three young members and one young man who was said to be on trial for one year also participated. (Two elderly women also living in the community were infirm and unable to participate.) The recordings thus present a mixture of singers who had grown up with this repertory of songs, learning them orally from their elders, and young singers who had already lived several years in the community but had not grown up there. These newer members (two men and one woman in their twenties and thirties) have also learned the repertory directly from older members, as well as from listening to earlier recordings.

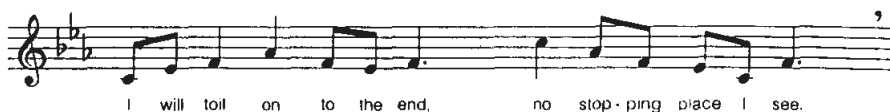
Among the 68 songs sung in 1989, the origins of 52 could be established. Using Patterson's typology and members' own descriptions, the following breakdown of song types emerges:


- (1) 2 songs from the Gospel Parents (songs from the 1780s, both attributed to James Whittaker);
- (2) 3 short hymns from the early 19th century;
- (3) 1 ballad from 1813;
- (4) 6 extra songs from the 1820s and 1830s;
- (5) 5 laboring songs from the 1820s to 1840s;
- (6) 8 gift songs from the late 1830s to the 1850s; and
- (7) 27 laboring and extra songs from the 1850s to 1889.

Of these traceable songs, many come from Mount Lebanon, Canterbury and from the Maine communities at Alfred and Sabbathday Lake itself. Only one is attributed to a "Western" community ("Little Children, says Holy Mother" from Pleasant Hill, Kentucky).

The typical form of songs recorded in 1989 comprises two sections of melodic material, each repeated once with the same text: A A B B.¹² In many cases (25 songs from 68), the cadential phrase of B contains melodic material from the closing of section A (e.g., songs transcribed in Examples 1, 2 and 6). Only two songs have multiple verses.¹³ Dotted rhythms dominate many of the melodies, and the singers sometimes exchange dotted rhythms for repeated eighth notes, especially at fast tempos and depending on the word accentuation. Many songs have a range of an octave or more, making it difficult to set a beginning pitch. During the recording session, opening pitches were set by one of two female singers, but in some instances the singers stopped and began again because the range was too high or too low for them. The broadest range of a song recorded was an octave and a sixth.

In terms of mode, there are more instances of the Ionian mode than of any other single mode (about 25%) which, according to Jackson (1964:17), is typical of Anglo-American folk song as a whole. One song is in Mixolydian and six songs are in the Dorian mode. Many songs, however, have "gapped" scales, either pentatonic or hexatonic. These include minor scales missing the sixth degree, major scales missing the fourth, sixth or seventh degrees, and various pentatonic scales. The first half of the following song is based on an anhemitonic pentatonic scale which, according to the classification of American folk song modes developed by Anne Gilchrist and modified by Cecil Sharp and George Pullen Jackson (*ibid.*:16-18), is equivalent to a Pentatonic Mode 2:





I will toil on to the end, faith in God my strength shall be.

I will gain a full do-min-ion or eve-ry pas-sion strong.

Then with cour-age, I will la-bor, O my soul to-il on, to-il on.

Ex. 1. "I Will Toil on to the End"

This transcription contains no bar lines because of the irregular beats at the end of each phrase, which make it difficult to establish a definite duple or triple meter. In some songs the A section is in a pentatonic key, which expands in the B section to become the Dorian, Aolian or Mixolydian mode. This can be observed in an 1826 laboring song that originates from Mt. Lebanon, in which the B section shifts to the Mixolydian mode:



The roll-ing deep may o-ver-turn, the val-leys sink, the

moun-tains burn. But thou my soul shall firm-ly stand, sup-

port-ed by God's right-eous hand. To

Thee O Lord, my thanks I give. 'Tis by thy ho-ly

faith I live. My life I free-ly have laid down, to



Ex. 2. "The Rolling Deep"

According to the above folk song mode classification, the A section is in Pentatonic Mode 4, which has alternating minor thirds and whole steps.

Most of the songs using pentatonic scales, however, are in Pentatonic Mode 3, either in major or minor form:



Ex. 3. *Pentatonic Mode 3*

Most songs have identifiable “tonics” or central tones. Melodies typically begin with an upbeat going from the dominant to the tonic, and both sections A and B usually end on this same note (see Examples 1, 6 and 7). Phrases within those sections end either on that note or its dominant. In one case, however, this central tone is ambiguous:



Ex. 4. "Living Souls, Let's Be Marching"

This laboring song originated in Tyringham, Massachusetts. The tonic of the A section sounds like F, with the second phrase ending on the domi-

nant C. In the B section, however, the tonal orientation shifts to C and the song ends on that note. Therefore, although the A section sounds like a hexatonic major scale based on F and missing the seventh degree, the B section shifts to C as tonal center—a Mixolydian mode missing the third degree.

Most of the songs have a duple meter, though fifteen are in triple or 6/8 time (e.g., Example 4). Sixteen of the 68 songs contain shifts between duple and triple meters. In some cases, phrases of uneven lengths also demonstrate how unwieldy texts were fitted into musical phrases.

The musical score for "In Yonder's Valley" is written in 3/4 time and consists of eight staves of music. The melody is in a key with one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words spanning across bar lines. The score illustrates irregular phrasing, with some lines containing 4, 3, or 5 measures, and others containing 7 or 6 measures. A double bar line with repeat dots appears after the third staff.

In _____ yon - der's _____ val - ley, there grows sweet
 un - ion _____ . Let _____ us a rise and _____
 take our fill. The win - ter's past
 and _____ the spring ap - pear - eth. The tur - tle
 dove is _____ in _____ our land. In
 yon - der's _____ val - ley, there grows sweet - un - ion _____
 _____ . Let _____ us a - rise and _____ take our fill.

Ex. 5. "In Yonder's Valley"

The A section contains irregular phrases of 4 + 3 + 5, and the B section can be divided into phrases of 7 + 6. The awkward setting of the words

"(the turtle dove) is in our land," and "let us arise" occurs not infrequently in this repertory.

In a few cases, an "extra beat" appears in the ending note of each phrase, as in "I Will Toil on to the End" in Example 1 and the following song:

The image shows three staves of musical notation in a single system. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the song. The second staff contains the melody for the second line, which includes a repeat sign (double bar line with two dots) before the final phrase. The third staff contains the melody for the third line. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes) and rests, with some notes having accents or slurs.

I will walk with my child - ren, in ho - ho - ly gar - ments un -
 spot - ted, un - spot - ted with sin. I will walk with the ho - ly, I will dwell
 with the low - ly, and they with my spi - rit and po - wer shall be filled.

Ex. 6. "I Will Walk With My Children"

Such metrically ambiguous songs usually are sung in a slow tempo, such as this song and "I Will Toil on to the End." In general, the recorded songs contained moderate to fast tempos.

In only one song do the women and men divide to sing different sections, singing in unison again after a few short phrases.¹⁴ Dynamic changes occur in the recordings of two songs¹⁵; variation in tempo takes place in three of the recordings,¹⁶ in which a section is sung at a faster tempo when repeated.

Since many songs were transcribed in several communities and at different times, only an in-depth study of all manuscripts of each song would allow one to formulate general conclusions regarding differences between oral and written tradition. A comparison of the recorded songs with one or two of their manuscript versions reveals many minor rhythmic changes and, less frequently, alterations in pitch. From this comparison emerges a trend toward the "regularizing" of rhythmic patterns and melodic phrases found in the manuscripts (which could have, of course, already undergone "regularization" themselves). The contemporary singers sometimes make meters consistent throughout a song and some pitches are altered to match earlier phrases. Comparison of the 1989 recordings and earlier ones made by Mildred Barker show many differences in the nuances of performance. Barker's songs (recorded in the 1960s and 1970s) sometimes contain embellishments, such as an anticipation just

before the beat of the following note. While these are still audible in her singing in 1989, the rest of the group omits such ornamentation.

While recording the songs, the Shakers evaluated their own performances among themselves and occasionally referred to the 1976 recording as a model. This earlier recording served mainly as a guide in performance style. One long discussion ensued, for example, over the song "Let Me Have Mother's Gospel"; a Brother thought their version sounded lifeless compared to the older recording, in which "the Sisters are rocking the house down" with their enthusiasm. Furthermore, the others repeatedly asked Mildred Barker for her opinion about their singing. She remarked at one point that they "jerked" the words too much, that the songs should "flow" more. In her absence, the other Shakers quoted her past instructions, such as that certain songs were "prayers" and should be sung as such. Alone in interview, Barker commented:

To me, singing is something you're telling, you're not just singing words put into a tune, to me it's always some kind of experience that you're giving out and trying to explain and it has to be done differently, I think In the songs that we sing, oftentimes they forget to interpret what they're doing, they just sing words and I say, "babble away" (laugh). But you've got to interpret what you're trying to tell people ... not just stand up there and put it to the tune or the time or anything of that sort. Oftentimes you have to change the time and all that to get your message through ... (Barker 1989).

In stressing the importance of "interpretation" in singing Shaker songs, Sister Barker reveals her flexible attitude regarding their performance. Above all, the important goal for her is that the listeners should "get the message" in the songs.

The group sang without written texts, and discussions occasionally arose when members simultaneously sang different words. No pattern emerged as to how such variation was resolved, for even Mildred once deferred in her opinion to the rest of the group. More often than not, such differences were decided in favor of "what we normally do in Meeting" rather than to ascertain what was written down in some manuscript.

4. Song Texts: Religious Imagery and Utopian Ideals

Geertz attributes to religious symbols the function of synthesizing "a people's ethos—the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world-view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of

order" (Geertz 1965:205). From this perspective, the kinds of symbolic images found in Shaker songs indeed propagate the essence of their world view. Arboreal images, for example, abound in Shaker songs and represent specific values important to the sect. In seeking a closer relationship to God, Believers strive toward humility to help them overcome the barriers of pride and self-will. This is represented symbolically in song texts through the image of the willow that "bows and bends" and can thereby survive the most violent storm, in contrast to the strong, proud oak, whose branches break off during gales:

Who Will Bow and Bend Like the Willow

Who will bow and bend like the willow?
Who will turn and twist and reel?
In the gale of simple freedom,
from the bower of union flowing.

Who will drink the wine of power,
dropping down like a shower?
Pride and bondage all forgetting,
Mother's wine is freely working.

Oh, ho I will have it,
I will bow and bend to get it.
I'll be reeling, turning, twisting,
shake out all the starch and stiffening.

I Will Not Be Like a Stubborn Oak

I will not be like a stubborn oak
but I will be like a willow tree.
I'll bow and bend unto God's will
and I will seek his mercy still.

The vine is another arboreal metaphor found in Shaker songs. Assigning it with the attribute of steadfastness (because of its deep roots), Believer's compare their conviction with the vine. The fallen Shaker is represented by the "barren" vine, with "withered branches:"

I Am the True Vine

I am the true vine which my Father hath set
In his lovely kingdom far.
Every branch found in me which bringeth forth fruit
He purgeth it with care.

But the vine that is barren He will reject
 And from Him He will cast away.
 Withered branches He'll shake off and cast in the fire
 that in me there be found no decay.

O We Have Found a Lovely Vine

O we have found a lovely vine
 in Zion's valley blooming
 whose blossoms shoot and promise fruit
 that's beautiful and cheering.

Whose verdant branches spread so wide,
 it shades the meek and lowly,
 it's dazzling light does shine so bright,
 it truly fills the valley.

Frequently, the valley serves as another symbol of humility, not in relation to the "valley of death" but rather as a "low" place of modesty and the condition of being blessed. Significant themes in the 1989 repertoire include "Zion" as heaven on earth, as well as supplications for righteous behavior, freedom from carnal desire, and a deeper spiritual bond to God. The words "love," "peace" and "light" appear frequently.

The song texts make few direct references to Biblical scripture. One of the few that does is a gift song called "Come life, Shaker life," received in 1843 at Mt. Lebanon:

Come life, Shaker life, come life eternal,
 shake, shake out of me all that is carnal.
 I'll take nimble steps, I'll be a David.
 I'll show Michael twice how he behaved.

"Michael" refers to "Michal," the daughter of Saul who, in the second book of Samuel, witnesses David "leaping and dancing before the Lord" (II Samuel 6:14-16). The phrase "I'll be a David" reasserts the Pentecostal history of Shakerism.

Monographs focusing on the gift songs by Edward Andrews (1962) and Harold E. Cook (1973) included transcriptions of songs with non-sense syllables or in some "foreign tongue." Interestingly, none of these is included in the contemporary Shaker repertoire. Only five of the recorded songs contained meaningless words, and those have tame expressions such as "lo-lo-lo" or "talla-me-ho." One can surmise that this represents a concession to World opinion, as songs in pseudo-Chinese might be regarded as silly by outsiders; at any rate, they have not survived oral tradi-

tion in the Sabbathday Lake community and have not been reestablished in its repertoire.

Song texts can fulfill a supporting function in the utopian context. In her analysis of early American utopian communities, Kanter (1972) evaluates the sense of group solidarity and individual commitment necessary for the survival of such communities.¹⁷ Her research has shown that emphasis on the community as a "family" that extends beyond the conventional blood family contributes significantly to such solidarity and commitment.¹⁸ The texts of Shaker songs reflect and reinforce the concept of "family" and a familial-like unity. Members are children to the Heavenly, or Holy, Father and to a spiritual Mother, and they work and worship together with "brethren" and "sisters." Such expressions of relational ties and comradeship stand out in the following two examples:

Beautiful Treasure

Beautiful brethren and sisters too,
loving companions so faithful and true.
Onward my spirit is marching with you
on to the realms of glory.

Love that is pure unites us as one
in bonds that nothing can sever.
Growing stronger, day by day,
as we journey along together.

My Dear Companions

My dear companions, let's move on.
The strong shall help the weak along.
We'll join our hearts in a cheerful song
and all move on together.

We'll bear and bear and yet forbear,
and in each other's burden share.
We'll give and give and again forgive,
as we would be forgiven.

The lyrics of some songs refer directly to the Shakers as children or contain childlike expressions. (e.g., "Come little children, come to Zion," "Lo, lo, on this pretty path I will go"). One historian has noted that "the example of little children was always deemed of great value because the Shakers encouraged members of all ages to be childlike, that is simple and innocent (Brewer 1986:79).

Unity within the Shaker community is also reinforced through the performance of ritual and music. The services on Sundays and Wednesdays bring all members living at Sabbathday Lake together, along with interested neighbors, friends and followers who cannot, for some reason, live at the community.¹⁹ Furthermore, annual holidays specific to the Shakers are celebrated with worship and singing, such as the birthday of Ann Lee on Feb. 29th (or 28th) and the arrival of the Shakers in America in August. Patterson identifies one recorded song, "Pretty Love and Union," as having been composed in the 1820s for Mother Ann's birthday (1979:233). The following song, "Oh I Love Mother," was reportedly sung for Ann Lee's birthday observance in 1989 in response to testimony concerning Lee's widespread influence even today:



Oh I love Mo - ther, I love Her po - wer, I know 'twill
help me in ev - ery try - ing hour. Help me to shake off,
help me to break off, help me to shake off ev - ery bond and fet - ter.

Ex. 7. "Oh I Love Mother"

Shaker songs serve as a group marker, a distinguishing factor that contrasts them from other religious and social groups. Although relationships between these songs and the melodies of Anglo-American folk song can be established in some cases (e.g., Patterson 1979:289), the specific themes of Shakerism give their songs a unique imprint. Worship of a Holy Mother as well as a Holy Father, abhorrence of "carnal pleasure," adherence to values such as humility, flexibility, simplicity and unity—all these themes appear frequently in their repertory. Additionally, despite the melodic, rhythmic or modal influence of early American folk song, the Shaker repertory displays enough irregularities and variety to make it unique. One song, "Simple Gifts," has become a nationally known emblem for Shaker culture as a whole.

Kanter also observes in successful utopian societies an emphasis on a natural basis for harmony in society, under the assumption that an un-

derlying order for human society exists that must be discovered and followed (1972:37). Modern civilization is out of balance with nature and this order, and humankind must go back to a simpler state in order to live in harmony with each other and with God. This has meant in most utopian communities leading a rural existence in the middle of unspoiled nature.

The virtues of nature and of rural living lie at the heart of Shaker culture. Everyday life at Sabbathday Lake centers upon working the extensive acreage of fields and orchards that have been in their possession for two hundred years. Sheep are kept for their wool, vegetables and fruits are raised for their own consumption and herbs are grown for sale in their gift shop and through mail order. The Shaker men also cut wood to be sold to neighboring farms. Closeness to nature—and thus to God—is frequently extolled in their song texts:

Tree of Life

I'll walk with Christ in valleys low
where streams of living waters flow,
where saints in garments white as snow
rejoin in full redemption.

'Tis here the tree of life is seen
and here in verdure evergreen
Elysian fields in beauty gleam
here in God's new creation.

The "Tree of Life" is portrayed on the cover of this volume in a gift drawing received in 1854. In the inscription, the artist, Hannah Cohoon, relates that she had received the drawing from Mother Ann, and had learned that this tree grows in the "Spirit Land." In relation to Shaker values and the song quoted above, the symbolism of this drawing is manifold. The tree has many branches and leaves, just as the Shaker family has many members, all joined as one. It grows in "Elysian fields" within the beauty of God's own nature. Under its shade the Believer walks with Christ and meets the "saints" or spirits of old.

5. Shaker Song as Tradition Bearer

The "aura of history," or as Max Weber puts it, the "authority of the eternal yesterday" (quoted in Kanter 1972:123) plays an important role in

contemporary Shaker life. Believers hold a deep respect for tradition—that is, ideas concerning and symbols of recurring patterns of life from the past. They maintain, for example, a museum and an extensive library filled with physical artifacts and manuscripts of 18th- and 19th-century Shaker culture. The Sabbathday Lake community publishes a quarterly periodical, "The Shaker Quarterly," which presents articles (by both Shakers and non-Shakers) on ideology, present activities and especially about past history and specific deceased Believers. The past continually brings life to their present-day spiritual lives. Lacking a theological text considered sacred to their order, the Shakers often transmit their ideology through stories about the founders and deceased followers. The lives of these people and the moral examples they set remain vivid in the minds of contemporary Shakers. Shils comments as follows on the significance of such stories, also with regard to music:

Together with the supplementary traditions of religious music, tales of the lives of founders and saints and their wonders ... all of these form a supporting system of traditions of physical artifacts, actions, and patterns of symbols which uphold and keep on the right track the presentation and reception of cognitive religious beliefs, popular and learned (Shils 1981:96).

This "supporting system" holds a central position at Sabbathday Lake.

The Shaker lifestyle, centering around farming, shepherding, and other work related to the land, derives from a pre-industrial age and contrasts strongly with that of the large urban centers of the Eastern seaboard not far away. Visitors to their farm therefore may have the impression of having gone back a century in time. While the Believers normally wear historical costumes only for special performances or presentations, other objects of their everyday lives are derived from 19th-century Shaker craftsmanship, from the houses they live and worship in to the furniture they use.

The importance of tradition and history is also evident in the Shaker relationship to music. The youngest song recorded in 1989 is attributed to the year 1889,²⁰ and members have little interest in singing hymns in four-part harmony out of the 20th-century hymnals. As noted earlier, this movement toward Shaker musical "roots" began in the early 1960s, and was partly fueled by the enthusiasm of a young Shaker (Theodore Johnson) and an older one (Mildred Barker), by the work of the scholar Patterson, and by the shrunken size of the community, which made four-part singing more difficult. Perhaps the readoption of the older repertoire is also related to the reassertion of tradition at a time when the very future of the

Shakers was under attack. On the other hand, the musical and textual content of songs is clearly affected in the course of oral transmission (as it certainly always has been) and the impact of previously recorded materials on song learning has yet to be established. The 1989 recording session witnessed a structure of negotiation, in which words and pitches were sometimes altered as a result of mutual discussion, showing a flexible attitude toward traditional materials. It should also be noted that the Shakers are not again taking up, for example, the charismatic style of worship that marked early Shakerism. Although they sing the gift songs, the spiritual manifestations that originally brought them those songs have not reoccurred. In this sense, one could speak of a case of "selective tradition," as described by Shils (1981:201).

6. Shaker Song as Mediator to the Outside World

The Shakers have intense contact with the "public" from mid-spring to early fall of each year. Thousands of tourists, as well as scholars and followers, come to visit Sabbathday Lake during this period. For almost six months a year, tourists have access to the museum and can be seen photographing the various historic buildings on the Shaker grounds. Workshops are held on a regular basis, displaying different aspects of traditional Shaker culture such as wool spinning, cooking and singing. A gift shop is also open during this period, providing some extra income to the community through the sale of handmade goods and homegrown herbs. Scholars can conduct research into the Shaker past at the museum and the library.

The relationship of the Shakers to the outside world is a complex one. When Shaker communities were first established by their American organizers, Christian communism was equated with separation from the world. Only through geographical isolation from the rest of society and the development of economic self-sufficiency could the Shakers achieve a pure, utopian community of their own. However, as could only be expected, the non-Shaker world impinged constantly on that of the Shakers. Ties to "the World" were necessary, if only to replenish the supply of future Shakers (Mandelka 1984:3-16). Even when some degree of economic self-sufficiency could be achieved, outside events such as war and economic depression or recovery dramatically affected the lives of Believers.

The Sabbathday Lake Shakers today strive to achieve a balance between maintaining a strong sense of group identity and continuing their

intense relationship with the outside world. Although they live in a physically isolated location, the automobile and improved roads have made their settlement far more accessible than in earlier times. The Believers consider visitors not simply as a potential source of income but more as a chance to educate the public about themselves. On the other hand, they are fighting not to become "museum pieces" themselves. Their thirty-year conflict with the Canterbury community over the admittance of new members and the expenditure of trust funds on a museum village indicates the depth of their feelings on this matter. In interviews, several Shakers expressed their dismay over the fact that many in "the World" know them only through their furniture, original pieces of which are sold at auction for astronomical prices.

One aspect of their past culture they would like to be known for is their music. The Shaker spirituals, they feel, show that they are not museum pieces, but rather reveal their vivid spirituality and lively existence. This holds true in spite of the fact that the music itself—with its folk song modes and 19th-century texts—seems archaic to the typical American. But of all the artifacts of Shaker tradition that have been handed down, today's Believers most willingly use music to promote outside understanding of themselves and their lives. Outsiders reinforce the high value the Believers themselves place in their music. The Shakers are proud of (and grateful for) the attention paid to their music by World scholars such as Patterson, as well as other outside recognition bestowed on their song tradition. That Mildred Barker has received an award from the National Endowment of the Arts (an American federal cultural agency) for her knowledge of Shaker songs, or that the melody of "Simple Gifts" was used by Aaron Copland as a theme in "Appalachian Spring," are considered confirmations of the wonder and power of Shaker music.

Thus we see the contradictory, paradoxical roles assigned to Shaker song: music unifies the group in an extraordinary way, separating it from "the World," and yet music also forms a link to that world. One can discern other layers of roles for this repertory, for example as an exclusively Shaker artifact, yet simultaneously a distinctively American one when presented to an international audience. From these observations, one can conclude that the assignment of a musical repertoire to single, monolithic functions (a special temptation in the context of relatively closed cultural groups) can sometimes obstruct, rather than further, the understanding of its true use and meaning.

Notes

- 1 The sociologist Rosabeth Kanter defines utopian communities as "voluntary, value-based, communal social orders" that strive to create an "ideal of the good, to contrast with the evils and ills of existing societies" (1972:2-3).
- 2 Some of the religion-based utopian communities thriving between 1780 and 1860 include: the Harmony Society, the Zoar Separatists, the Amana Community and the Bethel Community (all started by German immigrants or German-Americans), the Oneida Community, the Jerusalem community, Hopedale, Bishop Hill (a Swedish sect), Oberlin, and the Order of Enoch. While some of these organizations were centered in one settlement, others founded several communities spread over several states.
- 3 In contrast to these figures, one Shaker scholar estimates that the numerical height of the Shaker church was reached before 1784, the year of leader Ann Lee's death, at which time from 8,000 to 9,000 people called themselves Shakers (Johnson, quoted in Hadd 1989:7). The Western Reserve Historical Society estimates that the total number of covenant members of all communities from 1787 to the present has reached approximately 17,000 (Andrews 1963:290-92).
- 4 A book solely for the use of the elders appeared in 1816 entitled "Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee" (Hancock); a later publication for broader distribution was called "Testimonies Concerning the Character and Ministry of Mother Ann Lee and the First Witnesses of the Gospel of Christ's Second Appearing; Given by Some of the Aged Brethren and Sisters of the United Society" (Albany 1827).
- 5 "Father James" refers to James Whittaker, one of the original English Shakers and early leader of the group.
- 6 The Canterbury community consisted at that time of two women in their 80s.
- 7 Some gift songs date from the years after 1847; this decade, however, saw the most intensive period for the reception of such songs.
- 8 Spirits of the dead also presented Shakers with gifts of drawings, such as the "Tree of Life" reproduced on the cover of this volume. Patterson has written a monograph on these drawings and the gift songs (Patterson 1983).
- 9 R. Mildred Barker, who was born in 1897 and grew up in the Alfred, Maine, community, lived at Sabbathday Lake since 1931, serving as its spiritual leader for many years. She passed away in 1990.
- 10 The earlier recording is entitled "Early Shaker Spirituals," Rounder Records 0078.
- 11 Some were sung, for example, during the Maine Traditional Music Festival held at Waterville, Maine, in April, 1988.
- 12 In those cases not fitting this pattern, four followed the pattern A B A B, two had repeating stanzas of A, another contained A A B A B A (transcribed in Example 5), and five were through-composed.
- 13 "O Brethren Ain't Ye Happy" and "Lovely Love Is Flowing Sweetly."
- 14 "We are Strong."
- 15 "Break Forth Into Singing" and "Arise and Sing of Mother's Love."
- 16 "Come Little Children, Come to Zion," "Come Life, Shaker Life," and "On Zion's Holy Ground."
- 17 Kanter's concept of "commitment" is based on the sociological term expounded by Becker (1960).
- 18 Kanter analyzes the factors contributing to the relative success of some communities compared to others. Success she measures in terms of length of existence; 9 "successful" communities had existed over 25 years, while 21 "unsuccessful" were shorter lived. (Of all these groups, the Shakers are the only group still surviving to the present.) She maintains that upholding a sense of group solidarity and the commitment of individual

members were achieved through particular strategies, which include: (1) the lack of individual property and the sharing of all goods, (2) the equal division of labor and job rotation, (3) celibate living, resulting in weakened ties to individual partners, (4) females are freed from sexual stereotypes, (5) the concept of a larger "family" is stressed, (6) clear boundaries are set between the group and the outside world through strict membership requirements, special markers of identity such as uniforms or special names, and owning one's own land, set apart from the world, and (7) the group has its own music (and/or, dance) and regularly held rituals to express and reinforce values. Most of these points are characteristic of Shaker villages in different locations and historical periods.

- 19 Frances Carr relates that when she was growing up in the 1930s, obligatory meetings for learning songs were held on Sunday evenings for the younger people.
- 20 "I Will Come Down in the Valley," received by Eva Frank of Sabbathday Lake.

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