

“WE’LL ALL SHOUT TOGETHER IN THAT MORNING”: ENTRAINMENT
AND COMMUNITY IN THE TORONTO SHAPE NOTE SINGING GROUP

FRANCES G. MILLER

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores entrainment in Sacred Harp singing using an ethnographic examination of the Toronto Shape Singing Note group. It is accompanied by a qualitative exploration of interpersonal synchrony and affiliation among group members and examines what happens when interpersonal synchrony is destabilized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Entrainment “describes the interaction and consequent synchronization of two or more processes or oscillators.” (Will 2004, 1) Identified first in 1665 by Dutch Physicist Christiaan Huygens, entrainment theory has since been applied widely in mathematics and in the physical, biological and social sciences. Despite obvious applications within the study of music the concept of entrainment has only recently begun to be explored in ethnomusicology. In 2004, Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager and Udo Will presented an overview of the concept and called for its use in ethnomusicology. They note that there are four modes of data collection that are available to ethnomusicologists when discussing this phenomenon: Ethnographic examination and introspection, musical sound, visible physical behavior (gesture), and physiological processes (heart rate, respiration, brain waves, etc). (Will 2004, 23-24) This project employs the first, second and third modes of data collection and argues that ethnomusicologists can presume the existence of entrainment simply through ethnographic observation. A growing body of research has shown that interpersonal entrainment increases prosocial behavior among those who engage with one another synchronously. (Cirelli, Wan & Trainor, 2014; Trainor, Cirelli, 2015) Using an ethnographic examination of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group I propose that singing Sacred Harp music increases feelings of affiliation and pro-social behaviour among singers and promotes feelings of affiliation across socio-political bounds.

For Kerry

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was nearly 15 years ago when I heard a Sacred Harp song for the first time. Like many shape note singers, I remember that moment with crystal clarity. I was on a break from a stressful office job downtown that involved collecting and cataloging music. I had just ordered a box set called *Goodbye, Babylon* (Dust-to-Digital, 2003) that included a curated collection of spirituals and roots music, gathered by song collectors early in America's recording history. One day, on my lunch break, I "ripped" a few of the CDs to my computer, put the music on my iPod, and set off walking along Queen Street in Toronto. When the recording of "Present Joys" by the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers began to play, I stopped dead in my tracks. What I heard was a complex, four-part, contrapuntal piece of music, being sung using a solfège of some kind. The confusing thing was that this complex choral music seemed to be sung by voices that were untrained in the classical sense. There was no attempt at traditional blending; it was the timbral antithesis of a choir, at least as I understood it. I rushed back to my desk and on to the internet, I wanted to know everything. I joined the Toronto Shape Note Group in 2011. What has followed has been well over a decade of learning, both as a singer and as a researcher, and this project marks a culmination of these efforts.

When I began work on this PhD, I didn't realize I was simultaneously starting a challenging new chapter of my life. For the past decade, I have been grappling with a debilitating chronic illness that has impacted my ability to read, write, and synthesize complex thoughts. The result has been many challenging stops and starts that required me to review and relearn everything dozens of times. This was a frustrating and painful

process that left me feeling unmoored both in life and work. Now that my illness is managed, it feels right to acknowledge the past versions of myself that struggled with it so much. Thankfully, all of these versions of me were deeply, perhaps problematically, stubborn. The logical decision should have been to quit. Instead, I did what I could when I could do it and eventually, years later, I found that I had finally finished.

There are a few people I wish to thank at the end of this now decade-long endeavor. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my longtime friends and fellow singers in the Toronto Shape Note group especially Frank Griggs, Naomi Duguid and Nicole Collins. Without your openness and without our many, many long conversations, I would not have conceived of this project, and I certainly would not have completed it.

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Chapter One – Introduction

*How pleasant 'tis to see
Kindred and friends agree
Each in his proper station move
And each fulfill his part
With sympathizing heart
In all the cares of life and love.
-Isaac Watts¹*

This dissertation explores entrainment in Sacred Harp singing using an ethnographic examination of the Toronto Shape Note group accompanied by a qualitative exploration of interpersonal synchrony and affiliation among group members. Entrainment “describes the interaction and consequent synchronization of two or more processes or oscillators.” (Will 2004, 1) Identified first in 1665 by Dutch Physicist Christiaan Huygens, entrainment theory has since been applied widely in mathematics and in the physical, biological and social sciences. Despite obvious applications within the study of music the concept of entrainment has only recently begun to be explored in ethnomusicology. In 2004 Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager and Udo Will presented an overview of the concept and called for its use in ethnomusicology. They believed it could offer “a new approach to understanding music making and music perception as an integrated, embodied and interactive process and [could] therefore shed light on many issues central to ethnomusicological thought.” (Will 2004, 1)

Clayton, Sager and Will note that there are four modes of data collection that are available to ethnomusicologists when discussing the phenomenon: Ethnographic examination and introspection, musical sound, visible physical behavior (gesture), and

¹ From the song “Sharon” in *The Sacred Harp* 1991, 212.

physiological processes (heart rate, respiration, brain waves, etc (Will 2004, 23-24) This project explores the first, second and third modes and argues that ethnomusicologists can presume that existence of entrainment simply through ethnographic observation. The presumption, that interpersonal synchrony exists in music, opens the field up to new modes of inquiry whereby robust studies of interpersonal synchrony (often interchangeably called entrainment or interpersonal entrainment) can be applied to explore social behaviors in musical groups. In particular, my project explores a style of community music making and the way rhythmic synchrony in the performance of the music promotes prosocial behavior. This is not simply an exercise to prove the obvious, that entrainment exists in the performance of Sacred Harp singing, but to note the unique ways Sacred Harp singers entrain to one another and to examine what that has meant for the proliferation and mythology of the tradition.

A growing body of research out of McMaster University has recently shown that rhythmic entrainment increases prosocial behavior among those who engage with one another synchronously. (Cirelli, Wan & Trainor, 2014; Trainor, Cirelli, 2015) In previous research² I have noted that friendships in shape note singing extend across socio-political divides where they otherwise may not. In addition to my thorough examination of entrainment in shape note singing I want to take a speculative approach to these theories and propose that singing shape note increases feelings of affiliation among singers and promotes the formation of friendships across socio-political bounds. The project goes on to explore the negative effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the

² In 2012, I completed the Major Research Paper “Here Tonight: An Ethnography of the Toronto Shape Note Group” as part of the requirements for the completion of my master’s degree.

Toronto group and the wider shape note singing community as this synchrony is destabilized.

Shape Note Singing and The Sacred Harp

Shape note singing is a choral tradition rooted in the American Bible Belt where churchgoers gather together, outside of their time of worship, to sing from an oblong hymnal known as *The Sacred Harp* (1991). The melodies of this music call to mind an old-timey familiarity while the harmonies recall something far older through the preference of open harmonies and voice crossing. The words of *The Sacred Harp* are representative of the religious culture from which they were derived—primarily Baptist—and spew forth a barrage of often heavy-handed religious rhetoric preaching eternal salvation, death and resurrection.

The Sacred Harp or shape note singing tradition was born out of New England singing schools with roots tracing back as far as Elizabethan England (Cobb 1989, 59). The name “shape note” (or Shaped Note) comes from a pedagogical tool of assigning shapes to the degrees of a seven-tone scale. This is the system still used today in *The Sacred Harp*. Since its creation by B.F. White in 1844 there have been many revisions of *The Sacred Harp*. The most recent edition and the most popular book of the tradition as it exists today was published in 1991 and is known by singers as The Denson Edition. This and other variants of the four-symbol tradition stem from an original source—Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King’s *The Sacred Harp* published in 1844—and use the same four-shaped system. Others still, such as *Harmonia Sacre* from the Conservative Mennonite tradition and *The Christian Harmony*, use a seven-

symbol system. However, for the purpose of this project, references to Sacred Harp and shape note singing will refer to the tradition that makes use of the Denson edition of *The Sacred Harp* book (1991) unless otherwise stated. The shape note tradition, as it exists today, is tied strongly to *The Sacred Harp*, the oblong hymnal around which singers gather. Singers and historians alike will wax poetic about the fact that in the years leading up to the civil war it was one of only two books you were almost guaranteed to find in southern households—the other was The Bible.

The shape note tradition is indebted in equal parts to singing schools and camp-meeting revivals of the late 1700s and early 1800s. The former were developed to teach the youth of New England to read music. The schools formed in an attempt to bring congregational song into line with notated music books and the musical standards of educated clergy and musicians. (Steel 2010, 39) They normally lasted about two weeks. During this time the basic rudiments of reading and performing music were taught. Songs were rehearsed with the notes first, part by part, until they were mastered, then the words were attempted. This is not dissimilar to the shape note tradition as it exists today—the shapes are sung first and then the words. For novices participating in these early singing schools it was important that each aspect of the musical system be externalized. This extended from the rendering of a particular tune with solmization, to the keeping of time in up and down beats with the hand. (Cobb 1989, 60) These singing school traditions have become a mainstay in shape note singing practice.

Camp-meeting revivals, on the other hand, were particularly important in establishing the Convention system that fuels the Sacred Harp diaspora today; the era of the camp-meeting, which began in Kentucky and Tennessee and quickly spread out

in all directions, dates from circa 1800. According to Shape Note singer and historian Buell E. Cobb, “The business of the revivals was the saving of lost souls [...] with preaching, praying, shouting, and singing.” (Cobb 1989, 79) Camp meetings, which often lasted all day, were great social gatherings and as much as they preached The Word they were full of secular traditions. As is the case today, the camp meetings were primarily non-denominational in nature encouraging religious practice and worship through community. (Ibid.)

As a book, *The Sacred Harp* has a somewhat convoluted history. The use of the four-shape “patent note system” dates back to singing schools of the early-1800s in texts such as William Little and William Smith's *The Easy Instructor* (1801). *The Sacred Harp* drew the bulk of its material from earlier tune books such as the popular *Southern Harmony* (William Walker, 1835) which also assimilated many of its songs from other sources. In *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*, author Buell E. Cobb discusses the result of B.F. White's thoughtful song selection in the first edition of *The Sacred Harp*:

The Sacred Harp is a composite of the American and English sacred melodies which had been popular among the shape-note hymnals over a fifty-year period, including a representative sampling of most of the prominent American authors: William Billings, Daniel Read, Timothy Swan, Oliver Holden, Stephen Jenks, Jeremiah Ingalls, Ananias Davisson, James P. Carrell, and William Moore. (Cobb 1989, 73)

Many singers today were not born into this tradition; they are enthusiasts introduced to the music as it exists in American folk culture. This form of introduction began in the

years during and following the folk revival in the 1960s and 70s. Today, it is a popular belief among singers that shape note music as it's sung from *The Sacred Harp* is not folk music. This notion stems from an insensitive relegation by an early scholar on the subject, George Pullen Jackson, that may have saved the tradition itself and as such, the revival of Shape Note music coincided with the revival of many other American musics. It was performed by groups in many northern folk festivals, and from there Shape Note groups toured through much of the northern United States and Canada.

Today Shape Note singing is rooted in the southern United States where it found a home in rural communities after the Better Music Movement banished it from the American North.³ In many places, it is sung just as it was then, in Baptist country churches—plain wooden structures with moveable pews that allow sound to resonate. When the singers arrive they arrange the pews in a square formation consisting of four sections: treble, alto, tenor, and bass. As each song ends, a new singer makes their way to the center of the 'hollow square', the name that has been given to the space between the pews.

The terminology used in Sacred Harp dates back to the aforementioned singing schools wherein teachers employed shaped note heads to teach their young students how to read music. The "leader" (everyone takes a turn doing this) directs the "class" in a "lesson" as they sing through one or two songs each time. In this tradition it is the tenor, not the treble, that sings the melody and both tenor and treble can be sung by

³ Led by Lowell Mason in the mid-1800s the better music movement advocated a more "scientific" style of sacred singing from the western classical tradition. This largely successful movement denounced the singing schools of the north and pushed such practices to the rural south.

anyone (up or down the octave depending on an individual's vocal range), whereas the bass part is usually, though not exclusively, sung by men and the alto part is usually, but not exclusively, sung by women. The "class" runs through the selected song once using only vocables that follow the 7-note scale, but these are sung as *fa*, *so*, *la*, *fa*, *so*, *la*, *mi*, *fa* with each being represented on the western staff as its own shape—*fa* is a triangle, *so* is a circle, *la* is a square and *mi*, the leading tone, is a diamond. (figure 1; Cobb, 1989)



Figure 1: A C-major scale written in the four-symbol shape note system.

Study Background

In 2012, I completed a Major Research Paper as a part of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Music at York University. That paper was an ethnographic exploration of why myself and others in the Toronto Shape Note Group choose to sing this archaic music and why we continue to uphold its traditional practice. It was ultimately an exercise in self-reflection. If, like me, the members of the Toronto Shape Note Group were *not* religious, how did they negotiate this contradiction? What drove these people to be museum curators of something that is temporally, socially, and geographically alien to who they are? Preliminary observation taught me that members of the Toronto group believed strongly in presenting the Sacred Harp tradition in its most "authentic" form when they gathered. Much of this "authenticity" is dictated

through the rudiments laid out in the front pages of the contemporary edition of *The Sacred Harp* (1991) and by members of the group whose appreciation for and participation in “authentic” Southern sings is imported from places like Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee back to Toronto. In my MRP, I attempted to further unpack these questions through the use of interviews and the inclusion of outside research sources. In the process, I discovered that it was a deep and long-standing respect for the tradition and its progenitors that seemed to fuel the Toronto Group’s need to uphold the tradition as it was practiced in the South. *The Sacred Harp’s* heavy religiosity and death-centric lyrics were often justified by “non-believers” through a historical imaginary best described as a connection to impoverished, rural singers of the past and a respect for the hardships they experienced. The fantasy of agrarian hardship and pioneer living as discussed by the Toronto members (including myself) at that time was not self-reflective or self-critical, but romanticized. Additionally, my project noted that many of the Toronto singers who self-identified as non-believers had been raised in religious households. The Toronto group is made up almost entirely of lapsed religious folk from Christian backgrounds. Shape note singing appeared to be a way to experience the community of church again without further religious commitment.

While such explorations did well to explain how secular singers such as myself felt at ease in this religious tradition, they did not fully explain how and why secular singers find joy and comradery singing with religious singers and vice versa. In particular, it has always really struck me that singers of disparate religious and political backgrounds are not only able to gather together to sing without conflict but that they also often manage to cultivate lasting friendships. Since the 2016 elections The United

States has become increasingly politically fractured. The same can be said for Canada where divisive politics seem often echo our neighbours to the south. Yet, friendships in the shape note community appeared to remain strong in spite of this. This was due in part to an unwritten rule that shape note singers should not discuss politics or religious beliefs when they gather but there was something more than that. My dissertation uses a combination of ethnographic interviews, entrainment theory as well as close participant observation during Toronto Shape Note gatherings to explore how entrainment increases feelings of affiliation among group members and how this sense of affiliation had crossed what today seem like hard-lined, socio-political boundaries. I then examine what happened to The Toronto Shape Note Group when the COVID-19 pandemic meant they could no longer sing together in person. I explore how the group pivoted to sing online and how a growing reliance on social media particularly Facebook, had led to a more public airing of grievances and conflict within the wider shape note singing diaspora.

This project aims to explore the ways in which a socially and politically disparate community of singers connects and is strengthened through singing and shared movement. Through observation and interviews with members of the Toronto Group, observation online via pandemic singings hosted on Zoom and social media pages I explore connection underpinned with entrainment and interpersonal synchrony theory in the sciences and philosophy. My project asks singers what makes a good and bad shape note singing and how much of that is reliant on synchrony. How do singers feel connected to fellow singers in the group and the wider diaspora in spite of social-

political difference? How have singers navigated the COVID-19 pandemic? Finally, how has the absence of musical synchrony impacted the group and the wider diaspora?

Methodology

This project explores interpersonal synchrony and entrainment using ethnographic, interview-based perceptions shared with me by members of the Toronto Group and observations of their interactions in-person, as well as via Zoom and social media.

While my project is entirely qualitative, it employs a robust body of quantitative research in the social sciences to explore interpersonal connection in the group as well as the disruption of that connection during a unique moment of isolation.

Originally, this dissertation was proposed as an ethnographic project supplemented by time-series data I would collect looking at both hand movement synchrony and sonic synchrony during and in-person singing. Unfortunately, when the world shut down in March 2020 I needed to pivot. My original research design shifted and became entirely ethnographic.

In his seminal book, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*, Bruno Nettl notes that ethnography is broadly defined as, “the science that deals with the ‘cultures’ of human groups,” (Nettl 2005, 233) but also notes that its meaning has shifted over time to accommodate more dynamic and interpretive approaches as culture is constantly shifting. This has been the nature of my own shifting and evolving project, completed over the course of a decade that also included a multi-year pandemic. With these challenges in mind, I chose to ground my work primarily in “dialogic ethnography,” which includes the incorporation of direct quotations from

interviewees incorporating their word-for-word perspectives on the musical group and musical culture that they are a part of. Within this project is the implicit understanding that although the perspectives of interviewees may have changed as time has passed and as culture has shifted around them, it is important to include their words in this research. Steven Feld's concept of "dialogic editing" and Luke Lassiter's "collaborative ethnography" combine here to highlight the importance of giving the Toronto Shape Note Singers a voice in this research project as the true cultural insiders.⁴ (Nettl, 242)

My decision to work with a community that I have been part of for well-over a decade has greatly benefitted this project and has had an impact on the quality of interviews that are included here. Working with a community long enough to be considered an insider has allowed me access to opinions, ideas, and stories that have shaped the direction of my work. In music studies, the shift towards ethnography from text-based research is particularly important in the observation of an embodied culture such as shape note singing. In the book, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley write, "There is much to gain by shifting the emphasis away from representation (text) toward experience." (Barz & Cooley 2008, 4) Fieldwork, is both an observational and experiential practice that allows ethnomusicologists to deeply engage with the lived practices of music-making (Ibid). By using dialogic ethnography in tandem with many

⁴ Steven Feld's "dialogic editing" refers to the process of collaboratively shaping ethnographic texts with participants through iterative dialogue and feedback. Luke Lassiter's "collaborative ethnography" similarly emphasizes co-authorship and shared authority between researchers and cultural insiders.

years personally spent as an active participant in the Toronto Group, this project moves beyond momentary snapshots to reflect a decade spent in this evolving musical culture.

My primary research was redesigned with a focus on long-form interviews between one and two hours in length with 13 members of the Toronto Shape Note Group. Interviewees were recruited starting in late 2019 when I asked for interview volunteers during the midway break of two of the Toronto group's monthly singings. The interviews took place between January and August of 2020. Six were conducted in person, five before the lockdown in March and one that summer outside. The rest were conducted over Zoom. Further data was collected via group observation at monthly gatherings, at home singings, at park singings and finally during singings conducted over Zoom. I also participated in the "adult emphasis" of Camp Fasola, a shape note singing camp in Alabama in 2014, 2015 and 2019. I have travelled to sing in the United States and attended community singings in Illinois, Michigan, New York and Alabama. I have been on the organizing committee of the Central Ontario All-Day Singing and Convention, co-chairing the event twice. This project is the culmination of over a decade of careful observation and consideration of a group I have been a member of since 2011.

In 2012, I explored how Toronto Group members, particularly those who were not religious, negotiating singing this esoteric, religious music. That exploration left me with more questions. I was particularly curious about a phenomenon singers referred to as "the spirit coming in" a feeling of shared euphoria in the group that religious singers understand to be God entering the room. That feeling is something that has been experienced by religious and non-religious singers alike. I have personally experienced

it numerous times. This phenomenon led me down a rabbit hole of research. Although my project only touches on that particular phenomenon, it does look at the disparate singing community. It explores how singers, the religious and the non, the socially progressive and the more conservative, sing this music together. In particular, it closely examines social bonds across these boundaries using an ethnography of Toronto singers and their perception of these connections.

This study closely followed all research ethics protocols as laid out by the Faculty of Graduate studies at York University. Both TD1: Thesis/Dissertation Research Proposal and TD2: Research Ethics Protocol Form for Graduate Student Thesis, Dissertation, or Pilot Project form were submitted and approved along with the required supplementary documents. These documents included the informed consent form that I created for the participants. This form explained the purpose of the project and outlined any potential risks or discomforts that could arise from the interview process. I informed interviewees of their right to withdraw their participation at any time and I also detailed how their data would be kept confidential.

I successfully completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS: CORE). This course is required by the university when one is working with human subjects. All necessary ethics documentation was completed and approved by the York Faculty of Graduate Studies before I began conducting research and interviews for this project.

Coding was an important part of this project and was used to both organize the content of the transcribed interviews as well as to derive any new insights that could be included in my research. This study employed both inductive and deductive approaches

in an aim to understand how interpersonal synchrony fostered pro-social behaviour, as well as a sense of kinship between singers from divergent socio-political backgrounds. Coding for this project focused on identifying themes related to the feelings of closeness and community felt by singers and the disruption of that closeness during the social isolation of the pandemic.

Each interview was recorded on a Zoom H5 Digital Multitrack Recorder either in person or remotely using the unrelated Zoom Meeting app during lockdowns. These interviews were then transcribed in their entirety and read over several times. After reading I worked to create a rough project outline. I then coded each interview using that early outline. Codes were created using this framework and then applied by hand on printed transcripts. In their article, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology" (2006), authors Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke highlight that the main approaches to ethnographic analysis can be either 'inductive' (data-driven) or theoretical (Braun & Clarke 2006, 12) and that, "your method of analysis should be driven by both your research question and your broader theoretical assumptions." (Ibid, 28) In this project, I used a combination of these methods. Themes that would come to guide the structure of the project were gleaned through the organic use of data from interviews (inductive) while I used my specific research topic and existing theories of entrainment and interpersonal synchrony to ground my approach (theoretical).

The coded quotations from the interviews were gathered and organized under broader themes from my outline and then compiled into a single, large, Word document that I could use to further analyze and draw out themes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) explanation of thematic analysis highlights the fact that a theme "captures something

important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set.” (Ibid, 10) I used patterns that I discovered through reading and keyword searches to further hone in on what I was going to write about. Eventually, I created a detailed outline drawn from this interview data and began to write the body chapters of this project.

I feel it is important to note that interviews conducted prior to mid-March 2020 did not address the pandemic or lockdown while those that took place later included additional questions about isolation, online singings, and a loss of community (please see Appendix: Pre-Pandemic Interview Questions and Pandemic-Related Interview Questions). While pivoting to include the pandemic was a challenging aspect of this project, it also helped provide a richer understanding of how the singers’ sense of community was effected by isolation.

Study Limitations

This project came up against a number of limitations in part because interview participation was voluntary and my overall sample size was small (13 people). It is possible that some unique observations and opinions were missed. In spite of its small size my interview sample represented over half the average number of folks that attend a given monthly singing. It represented nearly all of the group's long-term members and it included every Toronto group member who had been to Camp Fasola, as well as the majority of members who had travelled outside of Toronto to sing. The specific people interviewed and the long-form nature of these interviews (between one and two hours) meant the interview data that I gathered was well informed and representative of the

group. Furthermore, my personal membership in the group and the long-standing relationships I have cultivated with a majority of my interviewees meant I was able to record more free-flowing, candid, and emotionally open interviews. A limitation of the interviews was that they were conducted primarily cross-sectionally during a span of around eight months in the early days of the pandemic. This was done for practical reasons, so I could stay within the constraints of my research ethics timeline. As a result, my participant observation was more longitudinal and included a number of zoom singings and park singings over the course of the pandemic. It also included the early return to indoor, in-person singing via the monthly gatherings, which have now moved from Bloor Street United Church to a Quaker Church called Friends House in Toronto. My observations also included the first Central Ontario All Day singing following lockdown.

At the outset of this project, I had planned to conduct a quantitative time-series analysis of a singing but, when in-person singing stopped, this became impossible. While such an analysis may have strengthened my project, I have used supplemental research to show that interpersonal synchrony and entrainment in music can be observed by an ethnomusicologist via participant observation. The precise degree of that synchrony, which I had wished to analyze, is something else entirely, and I hope this is pursued in future research. In the case of my project, I looked at scientific research that primarily investigates how rhythmic synchrony increased pro-social behavior and affiliation. It does not look at the specific degree to which people were “synced”. While I suspect that the degree of synchrony plays a role in moments of shared euphoria experienced by singers sometimes referred to as “the spirit coming in,”

my research here is more concerned with general feelings of friendship and affiliation felt by singers across social, political and religious divides. This can be adequately explored qualitatively when supplemented with scientific studies from the fields of psychology and neuropsychology, which I have done in this dissertation.

When I was forced to pivot my research during the onset of the pandemic, I began to look at ways singers were continuing to connect via the internet. I also observed disconnection and conflict within the group via online forums such as Sacred Harp Singing Friends, a Facebook page that connects shape note singers worldwide. In Chapter Five, I note points of conflict highlighted in discussions on that web page as the diaspora began to confront broad social, religious and political conflicts. These debates were between singers outside of the Toronto group, many of whom I did not know in person and refers to these conflicts anecdotally. I do not use quotations, or screenshots from these conflicts, instead, I cover them in broad-strokes. While specific examples of conflict would have strengthened my research, it fell outside the scope of my ethics proposal. Furthermore, the main source of the conflict, Sacred Harp Friends Facebook page is a private group. I could have asked some of the folks to speak about their posts but in truth I did not feel comfortable doing so. I felt that by inserting myself in this way I might exacerbate the conflict.

Study Contributions

My research contributes to the larger body of work concerned with Sacred Harp and the wider shape note singing tradition. It contributes to and strengthens the research done on the history of shape note singing in Toronto and explores shape note singing during a unique moment in time, the global COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it

contributes to the growing but still extremely small body of ethnomusicological research that uses entrainment theory to explore social cohesion between musicians and within larger musical groups and communities.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One provides a broad introduction to entrainment theory. It introduces the origins of sacred harp singing and introduces the Toronto shape note singing group who will be the ethnographic focus of my project. This chapter outlines my methods of data collection including interviews and participant observation and explores my decision to exclude quantitative, data-driven analysis due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it outlines this project's methodology and limitations.

Chapter Two is a literature review. I have decided to separate this review into its own chapter because of the variety of disciplines I use to frame my research. The literature review will be divided into three distinct sections. The first discusses shape note literature, the second explores critical theory and the phenomenon of entrainment and its use in ethnomusicology so far, and the third explores recent scientific literature regarding rhythmic entrainment and prosocial behavior.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the history of the Toronto Shape Note Group from its early beginnings as a workshop at the Mariposa Folk Festival in the 1960s and the group's infancy at the Fiddler's Green Folk Club up to the present. This chapter also uses ethnography to explore why current members of the group choose to sing this music and what it means to them.

Chapter Four continues with an ethnographic exploration of the Toronto Shape Note Group focusing on the singers' perceptions of social and musical togetherness. This chapter provides a deeper, ethnographic examination of the ways singers in the Toronto group perceive interpersonal synchrony and affiliation within the group and across social and political divides.

Chapter Five marks a shift in my research caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter I explore the ways in which Toronto singers and the wider diaspora pivoted in the face of COVID restrictions and social distancing by using different technology including Zoom, Jamulus and JamKazzam, YouTube, and Facebook. This chapter also explores the benefits and drawbacks of moving online and the diaspora's complicated relationship with the social media platform Facebook.

Chapter Six concludes my dissertation by reviewing these results and offering further ways entrainment and ethnomusicology might be explored. It reflects on the limitations of a project that employs an entirely qualitative approach to entrainment and interpersonal synchrony and lays a path for future studies that may build upon this research.

Chapter Two – A Literature Review of Sacred Harp Ethnography, Interpersonal Synchrony and Entrainment in Critical Theory, the Sciences and Ethnomusicology

My research explores interpersonal synchrony and entrainment as a facilitator for both musical and social connection between Sacred Harp singers. This review of literature will first establish the long history of Sacred Harp and shape note-related research to which I will be contributing with my work. This will be followed by a literature review of the theoretical and scientific examinations of synchrony and entrainment that have most inspired the direction of my fieldwork and have served as the backbone for this project. Finally, this chapter explores the yet small body of research that incorporates interpersonal synchrony and entrainment within ethnomusicological scholarship.

Sacred Harp Ethnography

Early on in my exploration of Sacred Harp and shape note-related resources I came to conclude that the writings of Dr. George Pullen Jackson are considered by many scholars to be the necessary starting point for research concerning this tradition. Jackson helped pioneer American musicology through his study of religious “folk” musics. His book *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singings, And “Buckwheat Notes,”* published in 1933, was the first extensive study of shape note music. It was groundbreaking not only because it helped introduce this mysterious singing culture to America but also because Jackson traced shape note singing back to the early singing schools of New England. The book is based on extensive comparative tune book research and field recordings. Today, Jackson’s work is often criticized for categorizing the religious songs of *The Sacred*

Harp as “folk” music. However, without this particular characterization shape note music may not have enjoyed a resurgence through its inclusion in American folk festivals during and after the folk revival. Unfortunately, Jackson’s chapters also include a racist, now discredited, hypothesis that all black spirituals are “borrowed” from white spirituals, which does much to harm his credibility for the modern-day researcher.

As Jackson’s study of the “fasola folk” continued, he put together a smaller book that focused only on *The Sacred Harp. The Story of the Sacred Harp 1844-1944* (1944) uses colloquial writing, reads like a storybook and appears to be written not as a scholarly edition but rather as a means through which to introduce the “layman” (as he puts it) to Sacred Harp music.

Chapter One of the text discusses how Sacred Harp arose out of the Baptist religious tradition. Baptists rejected Psalm singing at first and over a few generations parishioners in the rural south lost their ability to sight-sing. Chapter Two discusses the introduction of singing schools in order to combat this problem. An early singing school book from 1802, *The Easy Instructor* (by William Little and William Smith), made use of the *fa-so-la* shape note system which is still used in shape note singing today. This introductory chapter also discusses the lineage of the original compiler of the *Sacred Harp* songbook, B.F. White, and includes an early account of the history of the three variations of this book that exist today (now known as White, Cooper, and Denson editions). (Jackson 1944, p. 18) Jackson also writes about the James edition of the *Sacred Harp*, which is no longer used by practitioners of the tradition. He also dismissively touches upon *The Colored Sacred Harp* hymnal and parallel segregated black singing tradition that existed at that time:

If imitation is the sincerest flattery, the Sacred Harp folk should be pleased with *The Colored Sacred Harp* [...] despite the fact that each tune is signed by a “composer,” I find many of them merely variants of the white Sacred Harp melodies. The white singers greet the singers of the Colored Sacred Harp and wish them success in their undertaking. (Ibid, p. 23)

Here Jackson appears to welcome black Sacred Harp singers to the tradition and at the same time accuses them of appropriating white hymns and affixing their names as composers. Unfortunately, these bigoted views are recurring themes in his work.

In Chapter Three, Jackson discusses why some people dislike the sound of Sacred Harp singing. Here, Jackson is taking the perspective of a casual listener, someone who does not necessarily understand music as he does. Jackson argues that Sacred Harp “[...] is not listener’s music. It’s singer’s music,” (Ibid, 25) and that the uneducated listener may think it’s “all minor,” (Ibid) when what they are actually hearing is modal, generally Dorian (as the sixth is often sung raised by a semitone when singing a minor tune, even if it’s not printed that way). Additionally, Jackson says:

The Natural minor tunes often omit the second as well as the sixth. And the major tunes often omit the fourth and the seventh. In such instances we have left, as actual tones employed in the tune, a five-tone scale in its different forms—forms which are very old in the music of Europe and America and are found in the music of primitive peoples the world over. (Ibid, 26)

Unfortunately, this is the extent to which Jackson analyzes the harmonic components of Sacred Harp. However, he does not miss the opportunity to invoke some casual

misogyny to describe shape note singing to the non-musical “layman,” arguing “Sacred Harp songs [...] impress such a hearer as strong, manly music. There is no effeminate ear-tickling in *The Sacred Harp Songs*.” (Ibid, 27)

Despite its widespread use in Sacred Harp literature, I do not think *The Story of The Sacred Harp* should be considered anything more than a jumping off point for someone introducing themselves to the tradition. It reads easily but is not scholarly; the 2010 reprint I have in my personal collection excludes citations. Even though much of Jackson’s research was original, many other books refer to his use of rare books in addition to his own fieldwork. Although there is no record of how he obtained the historical information documented within this book, it is still one of the most widely cited texts in Sacred Harp literature.

The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music, written in 1978 and revised in 1989 by Buell E. Cobb, is one of the most cited pieces of scholarly writing on the Sacred Harp tradition, and one that is typically cited in more recent scholarly works. Cobb offers a different and somewhat unique musicological and sociological perspective, specifically as it pertains to this area of music history. A trained musicologist from Alabama, Cobb grew up in this tradition and was recognized in the Sacred Harp community as a very talented treble singer. As such, this book is highly regarded among participants in the tradition. Cobb is well known for leading workshops at the yearly Sacred Harp camps (Camp Fasola) where he regales singers with stories from his younger days and a life spent in the tradition. Cobb is able to write from inside the tradition as a participant rather than strictly an observer, and his training as a musicologist gives him the background to create a scholarly account of this tradition. It is, however, an out of date

look at shape note singing as it exists today particularly with regards to a more recent resurgence of the tradition in the US, Canada, the UK and Europe. It's also worth noting that Cobb, a participant in this rich tradition, did little fieldwork of his own. Instead, he relied primarily on his memory and on the fieldwork of George Pullen Jackson that was carried out from the 1920s to the 1940s. Despite its shortcomings, Cobb's book is especially valuable as a comprehensive study of the tradition after its rebirth through the folk revival. His much more recent publication *Like Chords Around My Heart* (2014) is a beautifully written contribution to shape note history but is primarily a memoir, not a scholarly addition to the Sacred Harp canon.

Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898 by D. K. Wilgus was published in 1959 and offers the reader a guide to all the key pieces of scholarly research involving folksong that had been written since the turn of the last century. I found this book particularly important as a critical tool through which to view the works and influence of Dr. George Pullen Jackson. Wilgus points out that it is Jackson's research that fostered further musicological and folkloric study of *The Sacred Harp*. He references the fact that although Jackson's work can be criticized, "[His] Studies were analytical, historical, comparative, and functional. They furnish a background for future studies, particularly of individual songs." (Wilgus 1959, 179) Wilgus notes that Jackson became obsessed with connecting secular folk tunes to those in *The Sacred Harp* and shape note tradition which, he discovered, were often refurbished British, Irish or Scottish folk songs with the addition of a religious rather than secular text. Wilgus explains that songs which did not quite fit this model were analyzed by Jackson in a different way:

[He] began his tune comparisons by considering the first few notes of the tunes. Then he began to notice resemblances in “tonal vestment”⁵ among what he considered separate songs and applied the term “tune family” to these traits recognizable in apparently distinct tunes. (Wilgus 1959, 325)

Additionally, Wilgus highlights the way in which Jackson’s views on the white origin of African American spirituals serves to discredit some of his other work to the modern reader, noting that this is rather unfortunate as some of that material, especially those works regarding *The Sacred Harp* and “tune families”, is worthy of further study.

Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong (1997) by John Bealle is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive monographs written on the Sacred Harp tradition. It not only includes Bealle’s own fieldwork but also refers to almost every important scholarly book and article written about both the black and the white shape note traditions. It consists of four chapters and twelve appendices that include important raw data, such as Sacred Harp convention minutes, gathered by Bealle. I would like to focus on the first and last chapters as I feel both offer information not readily offered in other Shape Note resources. Chapter One, "Timothy Mason in Cincinnati: Music Reform on the Urban Frontier," starts at the beginning of the tradition with William Little and William Smith’s uniquely developed shape note system on which Sacred Harp is based and with their educational songbook *The Easy Instructor*. In this chapter, Bealle additionally addresses why Sacred Harp became synonymous with folk music rather than with congregational singing:

⁵ In this case, tonal vestment refers to the intention behind voicing and arrangement and its contribution to the tone colour and timbre of a piece of music.

It was not until the 1920s that George Pullen Jackson, largely because of his training in German Romanticism, rather instantly identified the rural shape note singing movement as “folk music.” (Bealle 1997, 4)

If George Pullen Jackson left an indelible mark on any aspect of Sacred Harp music it is undoubtedly through his designation of it as folk music. According to Bealle, Sacred Harp’s status as folksong has as much to do with its post-World War II expansion into new areas as any part of the so-called Sacred Harp revival. (Bealle 1997, p.5) This chapter also discusses the reason shape note singing was not widely adopted in America. He cites Timothy Mason, and *The Sacred Harp*’s publisher in Cincinnati, as the reason. Mason felt that shape notes or ‘patent’ notes were a system for the uneducated and fought against their adoption as a method for teaching. An August 1836 advertisement for *Mason’s Sacred Harp* in the *Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary* states:

The publishers announce a new edition of *Mason’s Sacred Harp* printed in round notes; the patent note system being a miserable device, a mere shift to clothe ignorance and laziness with the look of science. (Bealle 1997, 46)

In Chapter Four of the monograph, Bealle discusses the Sacred Harp Revival. He attributes this revival to many interesting cultural factors. Perhaps it was its designation as “folk music” by George Pullen Jackson that caused it to be included in various American folk festivals in the 1960s including “[...] the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island in 1964.[;] at the time, this festival was the most influential event for a nationwide folksong revival movement.” (Bealle 1997, p. 191) During this revival, which

coincided with the resurrection of many other American folk musics, prominent revival shape note groups including The Word of Mouth Chorus (Plainfield, Vermont), Norumbega Harmony (organized at Wellesley College, Boston) and the American Music Group (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) traveled the United States and Canada, bringing this tradition to the masses. The revival has since brought many newcomers to the tradition and, according to Bealle, has slightly changed the focus of Sacred Harp from that of religious gathering to that of social gathering:

Perhaps there were less tangible factors involved, too. In folk revival areas, a new attitude seemed to be emerging, one which focused more on the singers, on the social aspects of singing, and perhaps less on the music. (Bealle 1997, 217)

This “modern” take on the musical movement, particularly as it pertains to the revival of Sacred Harp in the mid and late 1960s, is a valuable consideration in my own research which explores the ways singing together promotes social cohesion among singers of divergent religious and political beliefs. It should also be noted that this book is the first that carefully considers and criticizes the work of George Pullen Jackson from a modern perspective. Bealle is careful to note, however, that Jackson’s work has significant historical value and, although off-putting at times to the modern reader, it should not be ignored.

Published in 2002, *Judge Jackson and The Colored Sacred Harp* by Joe Dan Boyd, focuses on the African American Sacred Harp singing tradition. It consists of two parts: the first portion of the work is taken from his original 1964 master’s thesis; the second half of the text is the more recently written “Epilogue” and includes additional research completed *after* his 1964 thesis through to 2000.

Boyd's book explores the parallel Black tradition of Sacred Harp singing and the tune book compiled by Judge J. Jackson that consisted of primarily Black-authored Sacred Harp songs called *The Colored Sacred Harp*. The text describes Judge Jackson, a Black man living in Alabama, who became a cultural leader and introduced Sacred Harp to his community. Judge Jackson is credited with having pieced together a new Sacred Harp book based loosely on The Cooper Revision he had grown up with. Like the white-authored Sacred Harp books that came before it, "*The Colored Sacred Harp* was a labor of love that [...] had to be sandwiched between breaks in the author's work schedule." (Boyd 2002, 36) Although Boyd began his research a few years after the passing of Judge Jackson, Jackson's widow offered the author scraps of papers on which Judge had been recording an autobiography of sorts; this proved to be invaluable to his research.

Aside from the incredibly insightful discussion of Judge Jackson and the Wiregrass community where Judge introduced Sacred Harp, Boyd also critically examines the reason Sacred Harp sources have all but ignored the Black tradition. He credits "...[George Pullen] Jackson's scholarship, which resulted in the tradition's 'white spiritual' designation." (Boyd 2002, 93).

The book's epilogue is perhaps even more interesting than the main portion of this work, and it is nearly as long. Boyd offers the reader unique insight into the cultural tensions that existed between the black and white traditions that had, up until this point, been brushed over in Sacred Harp scholarship. Boyd tells a story of his attempt to bring the two groups together in song for folk festivals in Washington and Montreal in the late 1960s. He highlights the skepticism of the white participants and the jealousy they

expressed when the black tradition garnered more attention. Black Sacred Harp leader Dewey Williams was the man to watch:

One thing everyone had to admit: It was when the black singers came on stage that Festival crowds started clapping their hands in rhythm, especially to Dewey's masterful call and response technique, coupled with his graceful movements. (Boyd 2002, 98)

Boyd observed that the hostility expressed between the two camps eventually all but melted away. White Sacred Harp leader Hugh McGraw told Boyd "he thought it was the most worthwhile thing he had ever done. He was still getting letters in September of 1970 from people who wanted him to know how much they had enjoyed the program." (Boyd 2002, 98) Although there is a happy ending in this instance, Boyd was the first to question Sacred Harp music's portrayal as a utopian and all-inclusive tradition which is important to reflect upon as the tradition today is now primarily white.

In the epilogue, Boyd discusses the research that has been recently completed by other scholars in the field, making it an excellent book from which to gather resources on the African American tradition. He includes a section on the other notable *Colored Sacred Harp* ethnographic contributor, Doris Dyen, and includes an in-depth discussion of her PhD dissertation entitled, *The Role of Shape-Note Singing in the Musical Culture of Black Communities in Southeast Alabama* (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977).

Both Boyd and Dyen address the reason songs in the *Colored Sacred Harp* were often credited to someone other than their original composer; it was apparently a compliment to the main composer of the song to have outside contributors. So highly

was this collaboration valued that sometimes a composer would ‘give’ a song or part of a song to someone else, either by attributing it to the other person, or by naming the song for the other person. (Ibid)

The Makers of the Sacred Harp, by David Warren Steel with Richard Hulan (published in 2010) is one of the newer scholarly books written on the tradition. It is quite dense and appears to be intended mainly as a reference tool for those wishing to study this genre of sacred music; it serves this purpose well but it lacks original field work and research. The first portion of the book, authored by David Warren Steel, is called “The Book” and discusses the most recent edition of *The Sacred Harp*—the Denson edition, published in 1991. The second portion, authored by Richard Hulan, is called “The Words”. The purpose of these sections is to discuss the origins of the prose in *The Sacred Harp*, an endeavor that had not yet been undertaken to the extent presented here. The remaining sections of the book act as important reference tools insofar as they include brief biographies of composers and notes on each song’s origin.

Kiri Miller’s *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp and American Pluralism* (2008) is also a more recent text detailing the tradition. The primary difference between the two is Miller’s fieldwork on the modern Shape Note tradition where she attended hundreds of conferences and collected interviews with other participants. Through her interviews with contemporary singers, she connects the present-day practice of shape note singing to the idea of the Sacred Harp community as a diaspora. Her book examines the history of shape note singing while thoughtfully documenting its modern-day existence and offering her predictions for its future. Her original fieldwork is incredibly important to the study of this music as it exists today in urban, northern communities. Such extensive

fieldwork has not been attempted since George Pullen Jackson completed his research on *The Sacred Harp* and white spirituals in the 1920s-40s. Miller's extensive work fills in large gaps and leaves the reader with a modern-day picture of the tradition. Additionally, she offers future shape note scholars a new and more appropriate starting point from which to begin their research.

Another recent scholarly work to focus on the lives of singers active in the Shape Note diaspora is by Laura Clawson. Her book *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!: Community, Spirituality, & Tradition Among Sacred Harp Singers* (2011) looks closely at four singings. Two take place annually in the North (Chicago, Illinois and Minneapolis, Minnesota) and two in the South (Sand Mountain, Alabama and Holly Springs, Georgia). Through interviews Clawson focuses on perceived notions of authenticity in the Shape Note tradition. Clawson also carefully explores the broad range of religious beliefs attached to this music with a similar focus. It had long been assumed that there is a cold war of sorts between religious singers of the South and non-believers of the North. Such assertions suggest that southerners do not like their religious gatherings being intruded upon by northern hobbyists. While this does hold some weight, Clawson determines that it is a falsehood among the majority of Southern singers. With my research, I hope to build on her observations that the Sacred Harp community is not fraught with social tension. Even in the present moment, when America is incredibly polarized politically, is there something inherent to the tradition itself that helps assuage some of this tension?

Nostalgia and Synchrony in Critical Theory

My project will be supported by various theoretical approaches that pertain to overarching reasons this tradition has been, and continues to be, embraced by a wide variety of people of divergent political and religious backgrounds. Such approaches will include revival and nostalgia theory as I examine the history of the Toronto singers. I will also rely heavily on various branches of critical theory related to synchrony and social cohesion including but not limited to: affect theory, groove theory, contagion, collective effervesce and flow.

My examination of Sacred Harp in Toronto will utilize Tamara Livingston's seminal article "Musical Revivals: Towards a General Theory" (1999). This theory provides a solid foundation from which to examine singers in Toronto who appear to wish to uphold "historical continuity and organic purity of the [...] practice" as "the most important component[s] for the formation of the aesthetic and ethical code." (Livingston 1999, 74)

In addition to theories of revival, I will also look at nostalgia theory and how *The Sacred Harp* book and tradition serve as vessels for metaphorical time travel among Toronto singers. In his *Nostalgia Critique* (1995) Stuart Tannock writes that, "By returning in text or vision, to these lost pasts, places and peoples, the nostalgic author asserts a sense of continuity over and above her sense of separation." (Tannock 1995, 458) This is especially true in secular revivalist communities like Toronto sacred harp singers where these separations (religious, geographic, communal, etc.) are prevalent. I will frame nostalgia theory further by using the work of Svetlana Boym and her book *The Future of Nostalgia*. Boym draws attention to a "global yearning for a community

with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world.” (Boym 2002, xiv)

Within the study of music and musical cultures, explanations of shared behavior and group connectivity are often strengthened through the use of critical theory. I have found that many of these writings have been helpful in my understanding of the social connectivity that I experience singing Sacred Harp music. In particular, various iterations of crowd and group theory, including but not limited to affect theory, contagion theory and the theory of collective effervescence, offer great support to my observations and arguments gleaned from ethnographic analysis which include both experiences of shared euphoria and heightened feelings of kinship among Sacred Harp group members. Not all of these resources refer directly to the phenomenon of entrainment, but many run parallel to this idea as they provide meaningful explanations for a loss of the individual in the group and for a shared group “mind”.

Gustav Le Bon wrote one of the seminal early works on the phenomenon of “Group Mind” inspired by the earlier group mind theories of Emil Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde, Le Bon further developed these theories in his 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Le Bon has a rather negative view suggesting that in the crowd the individual ceases to exist. He writes, “The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes.” (Le Bon 1895, 13) This is not in reference to any random gathering of people, but rather to groups assembled with a shared object or influence. This, for Le Bon, was the definition of a psychological crowd.

The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological crowd is the following: Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a collective mind which makes them feel, think and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation. (Le Bon 1895, 150)

This statement, while absolutist in nature, could be used to unpack some of the group phenomena happening in Sacred Harp singing. However, while it accounts for collective experiences and could explain the shared phenomenon of “The Spirit Coming In,” one need only watch or participate in a sing to note behaviours that remain unique to each individual singer.

Le Bon also discusses the idea of “impulsivity” in a crowd and talks about a crowd’s ability to shift quickly into a frenzied rage. He states, “A crowd is not merely impulsive and mobile. Like a savage, it is not prepared to admit that anything can come between its desire and the realization of its desire. It is less capable of understanding such an intervention, in consequence of the feeling of irresistible power given by its numerical strength.” (Le Bon, 22) He notes that a crowd cannot exist free from an authority. “As soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together, whether they be animals or men, they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief.” (Le Bon, 68) According to Le Bon, this is born out of a need to submit to religion,

The convictions of crowds assume those characteristics of blind submission, fierce intolerance and the need of violent propaganda which are inherent in the religious sentiment, and it is for this reason that it may be said that all their beliefs have a religious form. A hero acclaimed by a crowd is a veritable god for that crowd. (Le Bon, 44)

Le Bon's argument that crowds form a collective entity that will blindly submit to a leader describes crowds as fascistic in nature and it was for this reason that his theories were embraced by the likes of Mussolini and Hitler. While one could use some of his crowd theory to write about musical groups or audiences, they would need to willfully ignore the absolutist nature of his overall approach.

Another text that could be selectively applied to group phenomena in Sacred Harp singing is *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* by sociologist, educator, and moral philosopher Émile Durkheim. This book was written in 1912 and discusses a phenomenon that could be related to group entrainment in Sacred Harp music. Durkheim tackles what might now be seen as early entrainment theory but through a religious lens.

Durkheim examined crowd behavior noting that when immersed in a crowd united by a shared passion, people may experience emotions and behave in ways that would not be possible in isolation. (Durkheim 1912, 157) Durkheim coined the term "collective effervescence" to describe group behavior linked to the performance of religious rites and rituals. In describing the ceremonies of indigenous cultures in Australia he writes,

So here we have a collection of ceremonies intended solely to awaken certain ideas and feelings, to link the present to the past, the individual to the collectivity. In fact, not only do these ceremonies serve no other ends, but the faithful themselves ask nothing more of them. This is new proof that the psychic state of the assembled group is indeed the sole solid and stable basis for what we might call ritual mentality.” (Durkheim, 282)

Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence does not necessarily assume or rely upon religious belief to cause a collective feeling, “As for beliefs that attribute this or that physical efficacy to the rites, they are merely accessory and contingent, since such beliefs can be absent without changing anything essential in the rite.” (Durkheim, 282)

Durkheim refers to religious groups that practice rhythmic rites as “positive cults”.

Sacred Harp singing could be positioned as a “positive cult” in Durkheim’s sense of the term due to the euphoric feeling one can experience while singing. Even secular gatherings can take on these aspects of religious gatherings. Durkheim uses the example of festivals, for even if such a gathering is purely secular it, “...has certain features of religious ceremony, for it always has the effect of bringing individuals together, setting the masses in motion, and so inducing a state of effervescence, sometimes even delirium, that is not unrelated to the religious state. Man is transported outside himself, distracted from his ordinary occupations and preoccupations.”

(Durkheim, 285)

“Bodies in Sync: Interaction Ritual Theory Applied to Sacred Harp Singing” (Heider and Warner, 2010) explores shape note singing as a collective ritual using Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence. In the article the authors note that shape

note singers seem to have a strong sense that they are participating in something greater than the sum of its parts, larger than themselves. Effervescent feelings are often shared despite ideological and social differences within the community. My project expands upon these insights by exploring the ways that singing this particular music helps strengthen feelings of empathy, solidarity and community through observations of interpersonal synchrony and entrainment in the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group.

Nigel Thrift's theories on mass synchronization are also something that could be explored by ethnomusicologists examining the rhythmic connection between musicians. This could be easily applied to Sacred Harp singing. Thrift's seminal article "Pass It On: Towards a Political Economy of Propensity" published in *Emotion Space and Society* in 2008 riffs on Gabriel Tarde's theory of political economy to create an in-depth history of propensity which is, "understood jointly as both a tendency-cum-attraction and an innate inclination, that is, as a disposition to behave in a certain way which is only partially in control of the agent." (Thrift 2008, 2) Thrift's paper looks to understand how "imitative momentum within the markets is built, maintained and channeled..." (Thrift 5-6, 2008) Thrift notes that Tarde was interested in "...psychosocial processes of imitation, processes that were the result of mind working upon mind, of 'mental states acting upon each other,' and the way that these interspiritual states gradually evolved through minute changes without necessarily needing the push of any structure." (Thrift 2008, 4) Thrift examines what might be the missing portion of political economy, that being "...contagious spirits like confidence, fear, irrational exuberance, bad faith, corruption, a sense of fairness..." (Thrift 2008, 4) In particular, "irrational exuberance" could be born out of shape note singers' belief in the need for a kind of mimesis or imitation of

imagined singers and singings of the past and a want for connection to that history. Additionally, singers share or mimic the movements of others and this particularly deliberate but largely subconscious mimicry could account for shared feelings of exuberance within the tradition known as “The Spirit Coming In.” Mimesis in the tradition connects singers to the past while collectively entraining singers to one another in the present.

Another aspect of critical theory that runs parallel to and often intersects with entrainment is affect theory. Affect theory, particularly as it relates to interpersonal interaction and groups, can go a long way in explaining feelings of affiliation and friendship among group members. This is evidenced in the seminal book *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) by philosopher and psychoanalytic theorist Teresa Brennan. For Brennan, theories of mimesis and contagion did not go far enough or dig deeply enough to explain how people transmit and then share in emotional experience.

It is all very well to say that people in crowds or social groups can identify with one another, can rapidly produce a group or mob consciousness that overrides their individual reason or leaves them ridden with symptoms; but the fact tells us nothing about the means. It does not tell us how a social and psychological affect buries itself within or rests on the skin of an utterly corporeal body. (Brennan 2004, 3)

Brennan believed the transmission of affect occurred between individuals in part through the transmission of pheromones via olfaction.

Brennan notes that at the time of the book’s writing two forms of transmission of affect had been identified through scientific investigation, one where people become

alike and another whereby people become unlike. The type of transmission where people become alike, "...is a process whereby one person's or one group's nervous and hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another's. Neurologist's call this process entrainment, either chemical entrainment or electrical entrainment. Chemical entrainment works mainly by smell; that is to say, unconscious olfaction." (Brennan, 9)

Brennan argues that in discussing the transmission of emotion and connection in groups one cannot leave science out of it. Her explanation goes further in chapter three of her book entitled, "Transmission in Groups." In this chapter, Brennan unpacks a variety of other theories that have been used to explain transmission in crowd behavior often previously referred to as contagion. Here Brennan turns again to entrainment as a mechanism of affect transmission. Her discussion of entrainment of the nervous system could be used to support a musical theory of rhythmic entrainment in Sacred Harp singing. Brennan notes that, "Nervous entrainment⁶ may also depend on body movements and gestures, particularly through the imitation of rhythms (effected by sight, touch, and hearing)." (Brennan 2004, 70) The link between nervous entrainment and imitation of rhythm has recently been further unpacked in the field of neurology. Perhaps it is rhythmic imitation in combination with pheromone interaction that causes shared feelings of euphoria in Sacred Harp singing.

Tony Sampson's paper "Contagion Theory Beyond the Microbe" (2011) serves as an update on contagion theory as a means to better understand group behavior in the technological age. Sampson also uses Gabriel Tarde as a touchstone from which to develop this theory. He problematizes metaphorical discussions of contagion in social

⁶ Referring to the entrainment of the nervous system.

networks that only draw connections to biological or microbial contagion, such as a virus,

...the problem for communication theory is how to approach the many dimensions of the universal media virus. Intuitive as it may seem, its virality lacks substance. It is like a noise that contaminates the binary opposites of the established communication model without prejudice. In the age of networks senders and receivers and information and meaning are all susceptible to contagion. (Sampson 2011, 2)

For Sampson, the idea of microbial contagion, "...has offered a refreshing alternative to established communication theory insofar as the non-human microbe is reckoned to be synonymous with the network humans connect to. To be sure, it is the microbe that links up the individual nodes of the network transforming them into a collective social body. Yet, problematically the microbe may not go far enough in terms of grasping the virality of communication." (Ibid)

Sampson goes on to propose four interventions that are intended to "redirect theoretical attention away from the medical discourses that underpin microbial contagion theory." (Ibid, 3) They are:

1. Examining what spreads through social media. Fear is one of these things but there are other overlooked affects like love which "are equally catching." (Ibid)
2. Sampson's essay confronts "deterministic" thinking and "mechanistic interpretations of what spreads." (Ibid)
3. Sampson, "questions the validity of the network as an appropriate epidemiological diagram when evidently its standardization of space through

nodes and edges tends to freeze out the temporality of epidemic events and accidents.” (Ibid)

4. Sampson looks to the ways in which contemporary capitalism seeks to “exploit consumer mood and guide intention by targeting the mostly unconscious neurological absorption of human and non-human affective contagion.” (Ibid)

This rehashing and reshaping of “contagion” problematizes the theory and then modernizes it for our contemporary world. Sampson’s theory here looks mainly at how contagion spreads on the internet. Initially, one might not see how this connects to Sacred Harp. With Sacred Harp, one primarily thinks about the ways singing in a room with one another promotes feelings of fellowship but on the other hand the internet plays a large role in the promotion and subsequent proliferation of this tradition. Singers who have connected to one another via social media are still susceptible to fear-based contagion such as the alienation that can occur between singers who do not share the same moral or political beliefs. While social media initially served as an almost wholly positive way for singers to connect and keep in touch they now must navigate a more toxic environment that pits the left and the right, the religious and the secular against one another.

Within musicology and ethnomusicology one of the most heavily relied upon theoretical texts to discuss musical interconnectivity is the book *Music Grooves* (1994/2005) by Charles Keil and Steven Feld. The book is essentially an alternating dialogue between authors that, essay by essay, discusses different aspects of the experience of musical participation and musical mediation. (Keil and Feld, vii)

Chapter 3 of the book is an essay by Keil called, "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music." *Participation*, he says, "is the opposite of alienation from nature, from society, from the body, from labour and is therefore worth holding onto." (Keil 1995, 98) He describes "*discrepancies*" as "the phenomena that makes music a peculiarly powerful vehicle for participatory consciousness and action." (Ibid) For Keil, it is, "the little discrepancies between hands and feet within a jazz drummer's beat, between bass and drums, between rhythm section and soloist, that create the groove and invite us to participate." (Ibid)

It is in these temporal and sonic participatory discrepancies that the power of music lies. Keil asserts that, "Music to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be out of time and out of tune." (Keil, 96) What is interesting about this perspective is it denounces an imagined robotic "perfection" as a goal of music in favour of a more fallible, more human sonic experience. For Keil, this is what draws in the listener and creates grooves.

Keil suggests that musicologists might begin to study participatory discrepancies using the following series of queries:

1. Listen and look for participatory discrepancies in the process and texture of music and in its wider contexts.
2. Discuss all possible participatory discrepancies with a variety of experts.
3. How do your perceptions (query 1) and expert perceptions (query 2) match up?
4. What laboratory measurements are possible to further confirm matchups between your perceptions and expert perceptions or that shed light on areas of disagreement?

5. What do people “figure” and “collectively represent” to be going on in their music? How are the mysteries of perception kept mysterious? (Keil 1995, 101-104)

Question four calls for research that goes above and beyond the observational and the ethnographic. The need for this type of research, the merging and supporting of the ethnographic with a more objective scientific approach, is a valuable argument when theorizing about what makes music engaging and compelling and how such a thing might be measured empirically. Question five, however, serves to avoid an absolutist analysis of participatory discrepancies by asking the participants themselves what it is that makes their music unique and why.

As a singer of Sacred Harp music, I feel it is a coming together of these “processual and textual” participatory discrepancies that leads to an unconscious invitation to participate, and that invitation, the welcoming-in, is what leads singers to begin to temporally and rhythmically entrain to their fellow singers. Perhaps the participatory discrepancies unique to this music, those things which separate singers from one another, are the things that ultimately unify them.

Interpersonal Entrainment in the Sciences

There are several scientific articles that will help me establish a framework for empirical research on entrainment and Sacred Harp singing including “It’s All In The Timing”: Interpersonal Synchrony Increases Affiliation” (2009) by Michael J. Hove and Jan L. Risen uses three experiments to investigate the relationship of interpersonal synchrony on affiliation by having participants match finger movement with a moving

visual metronome. (Hove and Risen 2009, 949) They note that “despite the rich literature documenting synchrony... there is relatively little research examining the underlying mechanisms of interpersonal synchrony or the effects of being in sync... synchrony may promote self-other overlap in neural representation, with corresponding effects on affiliation.” (Ibid, 951)

Hove and Risen hypothesize that, “Whether stemming from direct neural overlap for self and other, and/or more indirect interpreted cues for a shared relationship, we contend that synchronous behaviors will promote more affiliation than matched behaviors alone (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1999, LaFrance, 198). That is, holding behavior constant we predict that synchrony, will boost affiliation.” (Ibid) They also note that previous research on the subject offers, “supportive, but inconclusive evidence for this claim.” (Ibid) The results of their experiments indicated that “affiliation increases after experiencing interpersonal coordination, rather than decreasing after a lack of coordination.” (Ibid, 956) The authors note that as far as they are aware, this is the first study to demonstrate a causal connection between synchrony and affiliation. (Ibid) I will use this research as a jumping-off point to support my own hypothesis that singing Sacred Harp music in a group increases affiliation among group members.

“Rhythmic Entrainment: Why Humans Want To, Fireflies Can’t Help It, Pet Birds Try, and Sea Lions Have To Be Bribed” (Wilson and Cook, 2016) takes a contrasting approach, examining rhythmic entrainment across species. It notes that while many animals are capable of synchrony, humans have a unique, seemingly intrinsic motivation to entrain. Wilson and Cook differentiate between entrainment that is spontaneous, entrainment that is learned, and entrainment that is motivated. Humans

entrain both spontaneously and in social contexts, and often experience pleasure from synchronous movement. For humans, entrainment is a social behavior that can be linked to feelings of affiliation and group cohesion. This supports my observations that Sacred Harp singing in groups is both a social and emotional experience, and the euphoria often described by singers is likely a reward for successful joint action.

Another article that will be important to my research was published in *The Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* called “The Rhythm of Joint Action: Synchrony Promotes Cooperative Ability” by Piercarlo Valdesolo, Jennifer Oujang and David DeSteno. They note that although previous evidence has suggested that “coordinated action enhances rapport and fosters cooperation, the possibility that it might also influence the ability to pursue joint goals has yet to be demonstrated.” (Valdesolo, Oujang and DeSteno 2010, 693) They speculate that, “moving together in time might hone the perceptual and motor skills necessary for success in collaborative endeavors.” (Ibid) The authors also note that there is a growing body of evidence that supports the role of coordination as a “social glue” (Ibid) and that it is therefore tempting “to conclude that the adaptive function of coordinated action lies solely in its ability to induce a collective spirit.” (Ibid) They hypothesize that “while synchrony may induce a collective spirit, it might also sharpen the individual skills necessary to translate that spirit into joint action.” (Ibid) My research on entrainment in shape note singing benefits greatly from the idea that synchrony not only increases social rapport but also may tune people into one another so that they may accomplish joint goals, not only as singers, but outside of this realm as well.

My dissertation hypothesizes that singing shape note music increases prosocial behavior towards fellow singers and that this behavior crosses socio-political boundaries in ways it might not otherwise. The crux of this hypothesis came out of a suggestion to look at the research of McMaster University's Laurel Trainor on interpersonal synchrony as a directive for prosocial behavior in infants. Of particular interest to me are two articles. The first, published in 2014, is entitled "Fourteen-month-old infants use interpersonal synchrony as a cue to direct helpfulness" by Laura K. Cirelli, Stephanie J. Wan, and Laurel J. Trainor. This research deals specifically with music and the experiment was developed, "to determine whether interpersonal synchrony acts as a cue for 14-month-olds to direct their prosocial behaviors to specific individuals with whom they have experienced synchronous movement." (Cirelli, Wan and Trainor 2014, 1) The results indicated that "synchronous bouncing acts as a social cue for directing prosociality." (Ibid) and has implications for how "musical engagement and rhythmic synchrony affect social behavior." (Ibid)

The second article by Trainor and Cirelli entitled "Rhythm and interpersonal synchrony in early social development" further tested this theory with toddlers and was inspired by adults who, having engaged in synchronous movement together, reported "liking each other better, remembering each other, trusting each other more, and are more likely to cooperate with each other compared to adults who engage in asynchronous movements." (Trainor and Cirelli 2015, 45) This paper reviews studies showing that by "14 months of age, infants who are bounced in synchrony with an adult subsequently show more altruistic behavior toward that adult in the form of handing back objects "accidentally" dropped by the adult compared to infants who are bounced

asynchronously with the adult” (Ibid) and that, while this helpfulness doesn’t extend to a neutral stranger it does extend to someone perceived to be a friend of the bounce partner.

Interpersonal Entrainment in Ethnomusicology

My project will take an interdisciplinary approach, looking to critical theory, psychology and neurology as jumping-off points for discussions of entrainment and interpersonal synchrony in the Sacred Harp. This approach to the understanding of interpersonal synchrony and its applications in musical research is somewhat new, or at least underused within the music academy. It was first called for by ethnomusicologists Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager and Udo Will in an article called “In Time With The Music: The concept of entrainment and its significance for ethnomusicology” published in *ESEM CounterPoint* in 2004. This article was the catalyst for my examination of interpersonal synchrony and entrainment in Sacred Harp singing. The goal of the article, according to the authors is, “To illuminate the significance of entrainment for various directions of music research and promote a nuanced understanding of the concept among ethnomusicologists.” (Clayton, Sager, Will 2004,1). The 41-page article begins with an overview of the concept of entrainment and its various applications. Particularly important to my project are the various ways in which human beings entrain to one another. The article outlines several applications in musical research including studies of metre, biomusicology, and music therapy. The article goes on to cite some of the few references to, and uses of, entrainment in ethnomusicology exploring “some of the more explicit connections with earlier ethnomusicological inquiry” (Ibid, 19) focusing on the

work of Alan Lomax, John Blacking, Charles Keil and Stephen Feld. Despite connections to these important scholars the authors note that there has, to date, been “very little detailed work and virtually no empirical studies in ethnomusicology on entrainment.” (Ibid, 20) They write that an entrainment model suggests that we look at engagement with music not simply as a process of encoding and decoding information but of embodied interaction and “tuning-in” to musical stimuli. (Ibid, 20-21) Perhaps most importantly, “Entrainment in musicking implies a profound association between different humans at a physiological level and a shared propensity at a biological level.” (Ibid, 21) While this article takes time to explain entrainment it also notes that ethnomusicologists should not need to spend too much time demonstrating its existence. It instead encourages researchers to ask questions like, “What is special about music entrainment?” and “How do processes of musical entrainment vary individually with culture?” (Ibid) The authors believe that entrainment research within ethnomusicology must rely on the successful integration of “musical, cognitive, and cultural theory, thereby allowing a broader description of how musical experience, while individually unique, is always social.” (Ibid, 22) “Through exploring the phenomenon of entrainment, ethnomusicologists may now be able to “better understand how musical sound serves as an interface that connect selves—viscerally and cognitively—to society.” (Ibid)

Clayton, Sager and Will identify four modes of data collection available to ethnomusicologists. They are as follows:

1. Ethnographic investigation and introspection
2. Musical sound

3. Visible physical behavior (gesture)
4. Physiological processes (heart rate, respiration, brain waves, etc) (Ibid, 23)

There are a few observable ways that singers entrain to one another in Sacred Harp. Firstly, there is the act of singing itself. This is evidenced most notably in the strong use of vocal accent that is typical of the genre. Secondly, the thing that sets Sacred Harp singing apart from other forms of music is the “beating” of the notes. Singers, facing inward to the center of the hollow square, follow a leader by beating time with their dominant hand in two or three beats. In common and compound time this is evidenced with a down and up motion of the arm for each bar. In triple time, time is beat in three using down-down-up motions. The singers, particularly those in the first row of the hollow square, are meant to follow the leader by mimicking their arm gestures and beating time in the same way. A final observable mode of entrainment involves dynamics. While dynamics are very rarely included in *The Sacred Harp* some natural dynamic movement comes with the melodic rise and fall of a given piece, notably within songs that are the best known and best liked by a particular singing group.

Although the aforementioned article was the initial catalyst for my research on interpersonal synchrony and entrainment in Sacred Harp singing, I should note that its use of scientific terminology and methods means that it is not easily accessible to a person coming at this research from a music background. In 2012, one of the article’s contributors, ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton, helped to rectify this with an updated and more succinct version of entrainment theory and the potential for its use in ethnomusicology with the article “What is Entrainment? Definitions and applications in

musical research,” published by the *Empirical Musicology Review*. The article carefully highlights research concerning entrainment in human behavior noting that mutual attention is “a key factor in human and social entrainment.” (Clayton 2012, 50)

Clayton points out that music entrainment can be grouped into three main categories. First, *Intra-individual entrainment* occurs within the individual and can relate to neuronal oscillators and our perception of rhythm. It can also relate to “the coordination between body parts.” (Ibid). Second, is *Inter-individual entrainment* or group entrainment which examines coordinated action between members of a musical group. (Ibid) It is here that I focus the bulk of my research. Finally, there is *Inter-group coordination*, something Clayton highlights as being rare in Western music culture. (Ibid) An example of this would be two musical groups, for example marching bands, playing in hearing range of one another and unintentionally aligning temporally.

Another important aspect of this paper is the careful acknowledgement that “Different rhythms can entrain not only in unison but also in hierarchical or polyrhythmic relationships.” (Ibid) A study of interpersonal synchrony in music must make note of this complexity. It is also here where scientific studies that examine entrainment and joint-action fall a bit short and do not do enough to address more complex interpersonal rhythmic interlocking that happens when people play music together.

The final section of this article offers a possible approach to the empirical study of musical entrainment. Clayton calls this method ‘stroboscopic’ and it is “designed for the investigation of entrainment between quasi-periodic rhythms.” (Ibid 52) This method involves the following:

- A) Identification of quasi-periodic rhythms and extraction of time series data
- B) Calculation of relative phase relationships from point of time series
- C) Investigation of entrainment using this relative phase data, employing visual and statistical measures (Ibid 52)

Although the article lays out how to do this, the mathematical methods are still relatively impenetrable for those of us approaching this method without adequate training in using a dataset to create time series analyses. Also, the method laid out here can only compare two oscillators at a time making it difficult to examine larger ensembles, groups or even an individual coordinating multiple limbs (the most obvious example here would be a drummer but it is clear that musicking is a multi-oscillatory process). Finally, Clayton points out that an integral aspect of any musical entrainment analysis is not the analysis itself so much as it is a combination of analysis and ethnographic work. Ethnomusicologists must figure out how to relate entrainment dynamics “to information about the intentions, experiences and discourses of the people involved.” (Ibid 54)

It appears that these articles were the impetus for a project that was set up to examine synchrony in music performance called the Interpersonal Entrainment in Music Performances (IEMP) project out of Durham University in the UK. Led by Prof. Martin Clayton, the IEMP project took place from 2016-2018 with contributions from “a network of over 20 researchers from across the globe with backgrounds in musicology, computing/engineering, psychology, and mathematics.” (Music and Science Lab 2019) Other research that led up to this large multi-year undertaking at Durham includes the published collection entitled *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*. (2013) I

will conclude this review by highlighting two chapters from this collection that have informed the methodological approach to this project. These chapters show two distinct approaches to bringing entrainment theory and analysis into the field while coupling them with more conventional ethnographic inquiry.

The first article, "Social Co-Regulation and Communication in North Indian Duo Performances," by Nikki Moran examines "spontaneous, nonverbal behavior of North Indian duo musicians in performance." (Moran 2013, 1) The chapter argues that "much could be learned about the process of musical communication by observing the interpersonal behavior of performing musicians, and furthermore, that the results of such pragmatic investigations of musical communication can offer insights to our understanding of everyday human interaction." (Ibid 1-2) This chapter is particularly important because it focuses on the social functions of musical action noting that ethnomusicologists have "long considered questions of meaning and communication by examining social and embodied aspects of musical practice." (Ibid 2)

Using recorded video and audio Moran's observations were designed with the premise that, "individual musicians behave in highly responsive ways at an interpersonal, social level in order to manage and regulate their continuing musical performance in a joint matter." (Ibid 7) Such "looking" behavior is integral within the Sacred Harp tradition. It is one of the key ways the *class*, the name for the group of singers, follows the direction of the *leader*. Moran's study examines looking behavior and couples these observations with ethnography noting that "while an event of musical communication relies on musicians' ability to co-perform the musical narrative, these accounts of social interaction are a reminder that, in performance, this communication

takes place within a micro social context through responsive, embodied behavior.” (Ibid 19-20)

The article notes that a necessary shift in musicology might be needed to decentralize the performer/audience duality or the expert/layman duality in pursuit of research related more to the social potential between performers and within groups. (Ibid 21) My project aims to take this exploration a step further as I use ethnographic interviews to explore interpersonal synchrony, entrainment, and community cohesiveness in Sacred Harp singing.

Finally, Mark Doffman’s chapter, “Groove: Temporality, Awareness and the Feeling of Entrainment in Jazz Performance” aims to “clarify the nature of groove through a detailed examination of a jazz trio’s performance of a standard tune, triangulating quantitative performance data with the commentaries of the participating players.” (Doffman 2013, 1) The project records temporal data of real performance using multi-tracking audio and video analysis.

Doffman also breaks down the various theoretical definitions of “groove” that have served as the basis of many ethnomusicological research projects. He notes that groove has been described in a variety of ways such as a “feeling” of playing that musicians use to describe a sense of musical togetherness. (Ibid 2-3) Doffman’s project shows that this “feeling” can be demonstrated using time-series data in comparison with the experiences of the performers being studied. For example, this particular study notes that the rhythm section in a trio of piano, bass and drums expressed a feeling of closeness to or affinity for one another. That emotional closeness seemed to correspond to time-series data that demonstrated a consistent phase angle of close to

zero degrees meaning they were playing in a very coordinated fashion. This as opposed to the piano player who pushed and pulled the tune and was out of phase by an average of approximately 8 degrees in either direction. (Ibid 9)

Doffman also examines the push and pull of groove and how that relates to performance noting that groove "...is itself considerably expressive." (Doffman 15) To my knowledge, his work is the first to explore a more empirical understanding of this nebulous musical concept. Groove theory is something that musicology and ethnomusicology has relied upon heavily and it is a concept that has left the field reliant on theoretical definitions and anecdotal or ethnographic evidence. Theoretical approaches to what is often described by musicians as a "feeling" or the idea of "locking-in" tend to lean heavily on Feld and Keil's important writing on groove and participatory discrepancies as a foundation. Doffman's work offers an alternative approach.

It should be noted that the theories and methods laid out in this article were only tested through the recording of a single performance of a single jazz standard and, as such, require much further research. With that said, this study has hinted at the fact that "temporal data... seemed to serve as an index of the sociality of the group; where the timing profile between players was tighter in the rhythm section, so the social relationships appeared correspondingly stronger." (Ibid 17) Doffman makes it very clear that he is not suggesting a causal relationship between closely synchronized performance and personal affinity but rather noting that it is possible "well-coordinated body moves have some effect on sociality and vice versa" and that the musicians' description of ways of being in time with one another "supports the notion of the

importance of coordination timing in our social lives.” (Ibid) As I embark on my own research examining the relationship, if any, between temporality and sociality within the Toronto Shape Note community I will remember that these ethnographic studies help contribute to larger ideas and bodies of research that move the field of music closer to an empirical understanding of the role that musiking plays in social and societal cohesion.

In a more recent article, “Interpersonal Entrainment in Music Performance: Theory, Method, and Model” (Clayton et al., 2020), the authors build upon the original call for entrainment theory in ethnographic and ethnomusicological research. In this paper, they deepen their discussion of entrainment, highlighting an important distinction between sensorimotor synchronization and coordination in music. Sensorimotor synchronization refers to the largely automatic alignment of musical action, such as rhythm and pitch, over short time-scales. By contrast, coordination encompasses longer-term structural alignment that requires conscious negotiation and control among participants. The distinction between these two concepts has particular relevance in Sacred Harp research, where singers strive to maintain rhythmic synchrony while managing group dynamics in the hollow square.

This chapter has explored the existing literature relating to Sacred Harp ethnography, interpersonal synchrony, and entrainment and has highlighted the importance of this tripartite approach in understanding the social dynamics of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group. I review existing literature on community music making and examine studies on collective musical embodiment drawing both from ethnomusicology and the social sciences. Chapter three will explore the history of

shape note singing in Ontario, Canada and will introduce the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group through an historical examination of its formation in the 1970s to the present day. It will also begin to ethnographically examine what has attracted socially and politically disparate Toronto-based participants to this esoteric, religious music.

Chapter Three – Shape Note Singing in Toronto

This chapter explores the history of shape note singing in the city of Toronto, the creation of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group and offers an ethnographic introduction to current members of the group upon which I will be focusing my research. The Toronto Shape Note Singers carry forward a tradition that existed in Ontario well over 200 years ago. In its earliest incarnation, Shape Note music had a presence in Upper Canada just as it did in the singing schools of New England. These parallel traditions were formed to facilitate the musical education of parishioners and streamline the singing styles of new immigrants. When the singing schools of Ontario (then Upper Canada) fell out of favour, so did the four-shape system as a pedagogical tool. My research suggests it wasn't formally sung again in Ontario for almost 100 years before making its way north through the ongoing folk movement and a Toronto music club called Fiddler's Green in 1974. A few months after forming, on Sunday June 23rd in 1974, this group of young Sacred Harp enthusiasts would hold a workshop to promote and teach this music at The Mariposa Folk Festival on Toronto Island. The Toronto Sacred Harp Singers would continue to promote their group in this way for the next five years.

After its founding in 1974 the group's membership shifted, becoming far more formalized under the leadership of a group of self-described Charismatic Catholics in the late 1970s. Newly imposed "rules and regulations" were instated, alienating the founding members of the Fiddler's Green Group and causing a lull in new membership

that would lead to the group's demise towards the end of the 1980s. In 2000, Ian Smiley would resurrect the group with knowledge of the tradition gleaned through his membership in The Village Harmony Camp in New England and would begin a group based out of the University of Toronto. Pleasance and Chuck Crawford, two transplanted Americans and longtime practitioners of the tradition, would take charge shortly thereafter, forming The Toronto Shape Note Group, the modern incarnation of Shape Note gatherings in Toronto and the focus of this project.

Singing Schools in Southern Ontario

The earliest examples of singing schools in and around Toronto can be traced back to the beginning of the 1800s in Sharon, Upper Canada (Kallmann, 1992). Although very little has been written about singing school history in Canada it is clear the Canadian schools mimicked the singing school movement that, at the time, was beginning to fade in the United States in favour of a simpler and more homophonic sounding church music (Ibid).

In 1983, Dorothy Farquarson published what is so far the only comprehensive study of the singing school phenomenon in Canada. Her interest in the subject was piqued by the discovery of a handwritten notebook from 1813 belonging to a 'Judith Humphrey' at the Eva Brook Donly Museum in Simcoe, Ontario. The book featured lettered notation unlike anything she had ever seen before (Farquarson 1983, 1). She later learned this odd musical writing used the same solfège system of later four-shape notation (*fa, sol, la, mi*) but placed the letters themselves on the staff (*f's, s's, l's and m*) rather than shaped note heads (Ibid, 46). Farquarson eventually connected this little

book to a singing school movement once rooted in Upper Canada, thus beginning her five-year journey to uncover it.

The significance of Farquarson's discovery was not that music had played a minor role in Canadian worship, but rather that it had existed solely as an aural tradition reliant on the knowledge and memory of the Precentor and practiced through a call-and-response system known as "lining-out." Meanwhile, Canadian congregations swelled with immigrants. After the American Revolution, many refugees who remained loyal to the king crossed over into Nova Scotia and other parts of Canada. Shortly thereafter, Mennonites and other German religious sects arrived in Upper Canada seeking low-priced land and a place where they might have freedom of religion. Immigrants from the British Isles arrived too, leaving behind famine and poor crops and in search of new land (Farquarson 1983, 10). Small country churches began to fill with worshipers who carried with them distinct styles of psalm singing developed through aural transmission in their native lands. In these churches, the presentation of music relied entirely on the knowledge and memory of the 'Precentor' who possessed a words-only hymnal and would lead the congregation in song from memory. Because this style of psalm singing was reliant on memory, only four or five tunes were ever sung and usually in a common metre (Farquarson 1983, 13). In her book, Farquarson lays out exactly what this might have sounded like:

[...] the singing was slow, naturally some wanted to try their wings and chase away boredom. They graced notes, added extra notes and slurred to the main note. Apparently, this is very beautiful if all worshippers have come from the same geographical area and graced the same way. Worshippers of many faiths

from diverse areas came to worship at probably the only service for miles around. They sincerely sang as they always had been accustomed but it was a free-for-all! (Farquarson 1983, 14)

Singing Schools were introduced as a means by which to unify singing styles and teach music literacy. By the early nineteenth century, the movement was taking hold in Upper Canada and, just as in America, it was born out of the needs of the church but not as part of it. Classes were held outside of weekly worship and often took place in the winter when the men and women of Upper Canada were free from the toils of the land. In time these educational gatherings came to serve more of a social purpose than a religious one. Singing Schools were a place where unmarried young men and women could meet and socialize without usual supervision while maintaining a mandate to, “improve congregational singing by teaching people to read music” (Ibid, 14).

The teachers themselves were likely self-taught and possessed a very minimal music education. They would write out songs for their pupils that borrowed from published tune-books. The more ambitious might go as far as to compile tune-books themselves, gathering music from other well-known hymnals and including with them their own original compositions. According to Farquarson these men, “[...] were among our first Canadian composers, collectors and recorders of religious folk-song” (Ibid, 15).

One such book, *The Colonial Harmonist*, compiled by Mark Burnham and published in Port Hope, Ontario in 1832 is the earliest tune-book from Upper Canada for which any record has been found (Farquarson 1983, 34). Another such book is *The Sacred Harmony* compiled by Alexander Davidson and first published in 1838, with subsequent editions published in 1845, 1848, 1851 and 1858 (Ibid, 38). A version of the

1948 edition is the only Canadian book yet discovered that made use of the four-shape patent note system used in *The Easy Instructor* and *The Sacred Harp* (Ibid, 40).

In his seminal study of Sacred Harp singing, ethnomusicologist and early shape-note scholar George Pullen Jackson noted that the shaped notation used in these books, “[...] soon became highly significant as an easily learned musical alphabet for the singer of simple songs, [and] developed in time an even greater influence in separating from urban singing, folk-singing from art-singing” (Jackson 1933, 10). While Shape Note publications gained prominence in America, it is unclear whether they did so in Canada; to date only one Shape Note version of *The Sacred Harmony* has been uncovered. Found in Hamilton, its history can be traced back to the present owner’s grandparents who used the book at a singing school in Palermo, Upper Canada where there was a settlement of Methodists (Farquarson 1983, 40). It seems likely that this Shape Note gathering, in and around 1850, was one of the first occurrences of the four-shape system being used as a pedagogical tool in Canada. In previous research, I discussed the ways current singers in the Toronto group feel the music of *The Sacred Harp* connects them to American singers of the South. However, Farquarson’s research suggests, through Canada’s own *Sacred Harmony* history, contemporary practitioners should also be mindful of the lives of singing school singers from their own country so many years ago.

Just as in the U.S., Canada had its own Better Music Movement to contend with. This is evidenced in the preface of *The Canadian Church Harmonist* (1864), a book mandated to reset folk alterations of the past and, “correct an evil (loudly and justly complained of), namely, the alteration by musical meddlers, of many of our old, well-

known tunes” (*Harmonist* 1864, 90). Compilers of the book were referring, in large part, to *The Sacred Harmony*, a book which had been published in many editions and had gained widespread use throughout Upper Canada, “*The Sacred Harmony* [...] has done good service to the churches of Canada; but, for obvious reasons, has been found inadequate fully to meet the wants of the Church and the public generally” (Ibid).

Compilers of this new and superior hymnal also claimed to have corrected the “errors” in such books through the reintroduction of “proper” chord structure and polyphony:

An attempt has been made to exclude everything of a monotonous, imbecile character; and to embody grave, touching, and enrapturing tunes, to enkindle devotion, and cause the spirit of the Christian to glow with piety (Ibid).

Just as with *The Sacred Harp* and The Singing School Movement in New England, years of folk-inspired harmonies passed on aurally and then affixed in this written music were now looked down upon. In the years to follow these musical practices would be systematically corrected by the elites of The Better Music Movement through the introduction of new tune-books. In the United States, however, the old tradition and hymnals would find a new home in the southern United States—in Canada they would disappear altogether.

Fiddler’s Green and the Mariposa Folk Festival

In the decades following the widespread eradication of *The Sacred Harmony* from Canadian music traditions, it is possible there were groups of singers who gathered informally to sing shape note music—transplants from the southern United States, perhaps, coming together with friends in their home to bring the songs of *The Sacred*

Harp to life. Through interviews with the present-day members of The Toronto Shape Note Group and through my own primary research, I have only uncovered a handful of formally organized groups that existed in the city prior to the present-day group. They first appeared in 1974, in the years following the North American folk revival of the late 1950s and 1960s at a time that saw the resurrection of many styles of roots-based musics. Although many Shape Note singers today will vehemently oppose the notion that the music they sing is “folk music”, it travelled the folk circuit by way of groups like The Word of Mouth Chorus (1973-1984) as southerners attempted to resurrect what was at the time considered to be a dying tradition.

Although it is unclear exactly why or how a group of Torontonians folk-enthusiasts began singing from *The Sacred Harp*, I believe it can be traced to the Fiddler’s Green Folk Club in 1974. Located at 130 Eglinton Avenue East (Yonge and Eglinton), Fiddler’s Green was a well-known community space where local folk musicians could gather to rehearse. In addition, weekly performances were held in the evenings (Tuesdays and Fridays) and Fiddler’s Green existed as a venue where the “folkies” of Toronto could hear a wide range of music for a dollar admission (*Mariposa News* 1974). The Sacred Harp Group, as they were then known, was a collective of mostly young musicians and singers who would gather at 2:30 pm on the second and last Sunday of each month to sing together in the traditional style (*Ibid*). According to an early newsletter published by the Mariposa Folk Festival, the group was founded a few months before it would be featured as a performance group at the festival held on Toronto Island in 1974. In the same newsletter, Sacred Harp Group member Marilyn Koop details the brief history of

the Toronto group (still only months old), encouraging new membership and explaining the pedagogical benefits of singing Shape Note music (figure 2):

sacred harp

Sacred Harp singing has quite a long and interesting history. More than four hundred years ago William Shakespeare made a reference to sacred music sung with four notes.

This style of music has its roots in the Southern U.S. of A., and is otherwise known (at least where I come from) as shaped-note singing. And for a very obvious reason. The notes used, Fa, Sol, La and Mi, each have their own shape and the singers learn to sing the correct note by recognizing its shape. For people with no training in music theory (like the writer), it's a pleasant and logical method of learning to read music.

It's beautiful music, sung in four parts, both male and female voices being

heard in each part.

We started a group here in Toronto a couple of months before Mariposa '74, and we helped present a session in Sacred Harp singing at the festival on Sunday morning. Well, we enjoyed the singing so much that we decided to hold them on a regular basis throughout the year as another one of Mariposa's in-year projects. If you'd like to become a part of the Sacred Harp singing group, come to Fiddlers Green (in Toronto, at Yonge and Eglinton) at 2:30 p.m. on second and last Sundays of each month. Call the Mariposa Office (922-4871) for more information.

Marilyn Koop

Figure 2: An introduction to Sacred Harp singing in Toronto and an invitation to join the bi-weekly singing at Fiddlers Green in Toronto, *Mariposa News*, 1974.

Between 1974 and 1978, The Sacred Harp Group appeared at The Mariposa Folk Festival four times (Mariposa Programs 1974-76, 1978). Susan Slottow, and more recently Susan Spencer, are the only members of the present Toronto Shape Note Group who also sang with the Fiddler's Green group. When I interviewed Toronto singer Susan Slottow for my Masters' project in August 2011, she spoke about their Sunday morning "performances" which I confirmed through archived Mariposa Programs to have occurred in the very first slot on the Sunday morning in 1974, 1975, and 1976 before moving to the 5:30pm slot on the Sunday of 1978, the last year they appeared there. Susan Slottow isn't clear on whether she joined the group after seeing them

perform at Mariposa or if she was a member of that first group in 1974. Both she and Susan Spencer have been singing this music in a formalized capacity longer than any other member. Unlike many present members of the group, including group leaders Pleasance and Chuck Crawford, Slottow has shied away from an approach to the tradition that includes travelling to American Conventions. She remains content with attending the Toronto sings once a month and the Central Ontario Convention in August but nothing more.

The choir singing out of Fiddler's Green ran their hour at The Mariposa Folk Festival as a participatory performance and workshop that allowed festival goers (at least those up early enough to see the performance) to try their hand at singing Sacred Harp music (figure 3). It was a way in which to encourage membership and mimicked the participatory performances being held by groups in the United States at a time when there was fear the tradition might die out in the south. Groups like The Sacred Harp Singers of Fiddler's Green helped to reinvigorate shape note singing in Canada by reintroducing it as a hobbyist movement that could be embraced by secular music communities in Toronto and elsewhere.



Figure 3: The Sacred Harp Singing Group performing at Mariposa in 1976. From the Mariposa Folk Festival Archives, York University.

The Charismatic Catholics (late 70s- mid 1980s)

The second incarnation of the present-day Toronto Shape Note Group occurred when a group of self-described Charismatic Catholics joined Susan Slottow's group in the late 1970s and "took over", infusing the once secular gathering with extra-musical religious aspects such as prayer. This a sore spot with Slottow. When I spoke with her for my Masters' research she stated the following about this version of the Toronto Group:

They were not an outgrowth, they were usurpers--they usurped the group. [They] came in as a group, as a blob with a whole other idea of how to do things, and they had rules and regulations. It had to be this way and that way, and they had a whole structural idea of how things had to be. Those of us who'd come from the

sort of free flowing, freeform group, much more like what we have today, were horrified. This is not fun, we do not want to start our meetings with a prayer (Interview with the author; 23-08-2011).

Although she continued singing with The Sacred Harp Group for few years after these changes began, it eventually became too much and she made her exit. The “Charismatic Catholics” are primarily connected to the Toronto group today through Pleasance and Chuck Crawford, who joined after Susan left and stayed on until it ended around 1980 approximately five years later. Both Chuck and Pleasance hypothesized that, by the time they had joined, the new leaders of the group had eased up on the religious “rules” they had first imposed realizing they had alienated original members of the group and were not encouraging new membership.

The Ian Smiley Group (2000)

The present-day group was started in 2000 by an American Village Harmony alumni named Ian Smiley while at University of Toronto. Pleasance and Chuck Crawford were members of this new group from its outset. Unfortunately, Ian was unable to run the group for long and returned to the United States after a few years, leaving the group to the Crawfords.

The Toronto Shape Note Singing Group (The Crawford Group 2000-present)

Pleasance Crawford is the soft-spoken and highly respected leader of the present-day Toronto Shape Note Group. She is not only the main administrative person but also acts as amateur historian and teaching instructor. Both Pleasance and her husband Chuck

are extremely well read when it comes to the history of the tradition; their home is full of every important Shape Note book and its subsequent editions. In addition, the couple owns a large collection of academic writing on the subject as well as countless recordings on CD, cassette, and vinyl. It seems they are, in their own way, song collectors, having amassed numerous rare recordings.

The Crawfords have always been involved in music. As a couple, they would often introduce music to one another and sing together. When I asked how they first heard of Shape Note singing, Chuck responded:

[...] I played in bluegrass bands, still do. Somebody I know was from the South. When he came to visit, he talked about this student who was doing these singings. We had heard about gospel meetings but this was something different and he went with the student and he bought a book and he showed us the book. And that got me interested (Interview with Chuck Crawford; 23-08-2011).

Chuck, and then Pleasance, became interested in learning more about this style of hymn singing. Between 1966 and 1968 the two lived together in Alabama, a state now widely considered a Shape Note “Mecca” where northern enthusiasts flock for the chance to participate in an “authentic southern sing”. In the late 1960s, the Crawfords would have loved to participate in such a sing but felt unwelcome because of the intense racism prevalent there. Pleasance explained:

We lived in Tuscaloosa and we would see notices of rural sings in the Tuscaloosa paper. We drove by and saw the sign but because we were down there, up to no good, we wouldn't have dared set foot in one of those. We were white northerners down there. Chuck was teaching at a predominantly black

school. These were pretty racist people in those days (Interview with the author; 23-08-2011).

Instead, they purchased an early edition of *The Sacred Harp* and sang together with Chuck's family. According to Pleasance the two had no concept of how to sing it, choosing to ignore the shapes and just read the music and sing the words as they would any four-part choral piece. Chuck now claims he can only read music if it is assigned the shapes. Pleasance, on the other hand, has a strong understanding of theory and harmony, particularly when it comes to shape note music.

The two eventually started singing shape note music formally and were introduced to its traditions. This introduction came primarily through the Charismatic Catholics after the couple moved to Canada. After the collapse of that group, as far as the Crawfords knew, there was a lull in Sacred Harp sings in Toronto. (Pleasance and Chuck are the first to admit that there could very well have been other groups singing shape note music at the time but they were unaware of any.) It wasn't until the formation of the Toronto Shape Note Singers in 2000 by Ian Smiley, the earliest incarnation of the present-day Toronto group, that they would begin to sing exclusively from *The Sacred Harp* in a more formalized manner.

A few years later when Ian Smiley moved back to the United States, the Crawfords, now shape note experts in their own right, took over the group. They were not the only group in Toronto singing shape note music but they were the only group who sang it exclusively. Additionally, they included other aspects of the tradition in their meetings; a consistent closing song to end the evening (in this case "Christian's Farewell") and the changing of song leader with every song selection were two

examples of this. Under Pleasance's leadership, the group created a website, established an email list, and maintained a regular sing date (the third Wednesday of every month). In addition, her leadership has promoted inclusivity through her willingness to pause, welcome, and orient new members to what can often feel like a fast paced and confusing two-hour choral session.

The membership of the present-day group is very much informed by the past and tied to personal narratives of discovery. Many came to it as fans of other traditional southern music or choral singing; they just dug a little deeper. Some were blindsided by it when they heard it in a film, or on the radio, or in a live performance. One common experience all the interviewed group members shared was the profound impact of that first listening.

The Monthly Singing in Toronto

An ad placed in the Events section of *Now Magazine's* website in 2016 read as follows: "Come and sing shape note music from the Sacred Harp w/ Toronto Shape Note Group, 7:30-9:30 pm. Pwya. In The Music Room."⁷ Sometime in 2019 the phrasing shifted along with the timing in an effort to be more transparent about the egalitarian nature of shape note singing, to welcome any and all wishing to participate. The timings also changed to a 7pm start to accommodate a half hour "singing school" before the sing itself. The goal of this short instructional period was to help introduce new singers to the conventions of the shape note singing such as reading shapes and to allow time for questions from new-comers. This was established in response to complaints that the

⁷ In this case "Pwya" means "Pay what you're able".

group was intimidating and not welcoming enough to newcomers who would show up. The half-hour singing school was also an opportunity to help demystify more challenging aspects of the tradition like leading and pitching and to raise the overall skill, comfort and cohesiveness of the group as a whole. “Shape note music singing. 7pm. No experience necessary. Songbooks available to borrow, Q&A to follow. Pwyc. Enter through parking lot on Huron.”⁸

Those entering Bloor Street United from the Huron entrance wind their way up a small set of steps to the Music Room, a rectangular multi-purpose room often used by community groups at a cost of \$50 for two hours.⁹ The room itself is a dulling mint green and a series of stackable chairs are set out in the hollow square formation. For new singers, one-pagers set out on a table in the vestibule explain the tradition itself as well as offer information for those wishing to attend the now two-year-old Central Ontario Singing Convention at the end of August.¹⁰ Inside the door to the Music room one will likely find a large Ikea rolling cart full of “loaners”, the copies of *The Sacred Harp* that new singers may borrow for the duration of the sing and can opt to buy at the end for \$25 if they decide that they would like a copy of their own. Then a newcomer can take their seat. As with many other sings, the Toronto Group has oriented itself to have the Tenor section closest to the door and Toronto singers greeting strangers will often encourage newcomers to sit in the Tenor section so they can familiarize themselves

⁸ Here, “Pwyc” means “Pay what you can”.

⁹ In 2019 Bloor Street United Church was marked for redevelopment. Post pandemic restrictions the Toronto singers have moved their monthly gathering to Friends House, a Quaker meeting house located at 60 Lowther Ave.

¹⁰ Prior to 2017 the Toronto Group hosted The Central Ontario All-Day Singing, a single day of singing on the Saturday of the same weekend.

with the melody. Perhaps another reason is to allow newcomers an easy exit should they decide this is “not for them” or need to leave before the evening is concluded.

Before the pandemic, the group would gather here on the third Wednesday of every month. They have gathered the third Wednesday with few exceptions for the group’s entire 20-year history. In fact, when informed that Bloor Street United was slated to become another casualty of Toronto’s condo market a seeming inability to keep the third Wednesday in an otherwise perfect new venue, Friends House on Lowther Ave, led the group to collectively question whether-or-not obtaining the venue was worth switching the date.

The group itself consists of a mix of ages with the majority of members over fifty and a few younger members in their twenties and thirties. The group is also a mix of a variety of religious backgrounds with various members I interviewed self-identifying as Christian, Jewish and Bahá-í. The group is overwhelmingly white. In fact, these monthly sings are often made up entirely of Caucasian people. Encouraging BIPOC membership was one of the reasons for trying to make the practice sings themselves more inviting. So far it doesn’t appear to be working. At any given monthly sing, the singers usually number somewhere between 15 and 30 but tend to average around 20. This number was higher prior to the pandemic, peaking at an average of around 30 singers per monthly singing in 2019. The larger gatherings could partly be credited to the group’s attempts at outreach, performing in various settings including but not limited to The Art Gallery of Ontario’s “First Thursday” Party in April of 2015 and as a part of MAW: A Community Celebration of the Vocal Arts at the Burdock. Post pandemic, the number

has lowered once again. This is due to a number of factors including health and mobility issues among older group members and general concern about singing indoors.

Home Singings in Toronto

In addition to the monthly singings, members of the group will often gather at people's homes for a three-hour block of time to sing from *The Sacred Harp* as well as from other books such as *The Northern Harmony* a tune book compiled by the director of the Vermont based Village Harmony, Larry Gordon; *The Shenandoah Harmony*, a tune book that concentrates primarily on early 19th century music from the Shenandoah Valley; and occasionally *The Christian Harmony* a seven-shape tune book first compiled by William Walker around 1866. This often occurs on the first Sunday of the month starting at 3pm although the time is more flexible. A few years ago (2019), an additional home sing from *The Sacred Harp*, hosted by Anne and Tom Evers, was scheduled on every fifth Wednesday of the month *when* a fifth Wednesday occurs. These additional sings have further strengthened the group by offering members further opportunities to practice things like sight singing in a smaller, more informal setting.

The Musical Backgrounds of Toronto Singers

The members of the Toronto group that I interviewed for this project come from a variety of musical and religious backgrounds. Many of the Toronto singers' first musical memories are connected to the church in some way. For Andrew Louis, a group member in his 30s, the church and music were inextricably linked in his childhood and adolescence:

I grew up in a church where music was a really big part of it . . . because it was kind of like a fundamentalist evangelical church right? . . . It's the only way that you're really supposed to do music. Like we were told not to listen to rock music or anything like that . . . [It] was almost the only allowed musical expression in some ways other than classical music. So, in that sense I guess my musical world was very circumscribed by religion . . . [A]lso because my parents were so serious about religion and their beliefs they sent me to a school that was run by the church . . . A big part of it and like even in kindergarten we were doing like just singing together. (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020)

Other singers have early musical memories linked to church choirs as well although they were not necessarily the primary source of their musical introductions. Chris Taylor, a teacher, grew up in a musical household and has early memories of singing along to Raffi and Dennis Lee in the car with his parents. His early musical background included the church but was slightly more varied:

But growing up, yeah, I was in a choir as well, I went to an Anglican or an Episcopalian high school down in Texas, and sang in the choir there. Played violin, and eventually I learned a little bit of guitar . . . So that was my early musical training as well, it was mostly informal stuff. I briefly joined a heavy metal band and sang in that, not very well. Because I think I was always a little bit better at more gospel kind of music or blues music where I would sing something that's more bass or baritone. A lot of popular music from then is tenor, high tenor. Which I don't sing. When I sing tenor with shape note, Sacred Harp, I can do the

high tenor stuff, but I am baritone, by nature. (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Kim Kendrick is the founder and director of an Orff ensemble for young people at St. Mary Magdalene in Toronto. She is also a classically trained former opera singer and grandmother who credits her early experiences singing in church choirs as her reason for pursuing vocal music as a career:

I started playing the piano, I guess, when I was about nine. And I did study the piano to a high Level, grade 10 when I decided that I was going to put all my energy into singing, I started taking singing lessons when I was 16, I guess. I identified that that's my main instrument, voice, sang in choirs from the age of nine, junior choir at church. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

Other singers in the group were introduced to vocal music through their families, through school, or through secular choirs.

Frank Griggs, a singer in his early forties and one of the most experienced Shape Note singers in the group, spent years in the Village Harmony in Vermont where he grew up. Frank's father was a country musician who played piano professionally before he was born. Frank started playing piano at the age of six and credits his interest in the instrument primarily to watching his father play. Singing was something he connected with at a very young age:

I always really liked singing . . . We had little choir concerts in elementary school, I always enjoyed those. We did some musicals in elementary school, I always did those. So yeah it was just singing. I always liked singing to myself. . .

I'm an only child so I would go out in the woods by myself and I would sing songs from Disney movies or whatever. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Artist and OCAD professor Nicole Collins also has positive early memories of singing informally as a child. Her earliest musical memories center around performing for adults when she was five or six years old:

I'd go to people's houses with my parents, like visiting, and I'd sing local pop songs while somebody played the piano, as a little, little kid, just naturally. I just loved singing. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

One thing that all the singers that I have interviewed in the Toronto Group clearly had in common was a shared love of music instilled at an early age. For some of the singers, and for myself, singing represented an enjoyable, physical release in the otherwise monotonous and sometimes unstimulating environments of church and school. Singers in the Toronto Group have primarily happy early singing memories that involve either the positive reinforcement of adults, sometimes for the first time, or an early moment of self-discovery.

First Hearing, First Singing

The singers that I interviewed for this project heard Sacred Harp for the first time in a variety of different ways. The first and perhaps most prevalent way involved an introduction through media. This happened in several ways including through recordings, through film or, more recently, by way of YouTube or Wikipedia and general internet research. I discovered this music almost completely by accident while listening through the box set *Goodbye, Babylon* (Dust-to-Digital 2003). The fourth song on the

first CD was an Alan Lomax field recording created for the Library of Congress in 1942, The Alabama Sacred Harp Singers singing the *Sacred Harp* song “Present Joys”. The fugue, the “untrained” vocal tone, the alien sounding syllables, and the strident coming-together of the singing voices caught me off guard. Other singers in the Toronto group describe a similarly blindsiding experience. Susan Spencer, describes coming across the song “Wondrous Love” with her husband in the late 60s:

. . . When my now-ex-husband, my husband and I came to Canada from the States draft dodging in 1968, we went into the Toronto Folklore Center, which was on Avenue Road at the time. In the back was a record playing, it was, I think, *Southern Harmony*, it was one of the Sacred Harp records. We looked at each other and said, "What's that?" (Interview with the author; 20-02-2020)

Naomi Duguid, a food writer and photographer, grew up performing in choirs. Shortly before discovering Sacred Harp she had decided that she wanted to make a conscious effort to bring singing back into her life. The first time she heard Sacred Harp was at a party on a farm in Grey County:

The barn had fallen down, but there was a silo . . . this big cement round thing. Anyway, it was left standing at this place. And I heard this music coming out of the silo. And so I went through the crack and there were these people standing . . . with books and I guess there were about eight of them. And so I stood next to somebody I knew and she was singing tenor and they were singing something like “Africa”, I mean, whatever. And, "Can I?" "Oh of course." And so there it was, and basically that was the start of me discovering shape note as

something that was available for me to do. But it was the sound coming out of that silo. (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

Some members of the Toronto Group first heard Sacred Harp in the 2003 film *Cold Mountain*. Jennifer Davies remembers seeing the movie because of her father and being curious about the origins of this music:

. . .My father's a Civil War buff, he's interested in everything related to the Civil War. Even though he's Canadian. And so I hated everything about that movie, it's a terrible movie. But I loved the music! . . . I was also interested in that shape note scene, where they're in the church and everybody's got their arms going in rhythm and singing some really interesting music in that church scene. (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Kiri Miller, Brown University professor and author of a seminal ethnographic work on Sacred Harp singing entitled *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* (2008), spoke with ethnomusicologist and shape note singer Tim Erikson, a music advisor on *Cold Mountain*, as well as with some of the other singers who were recorded for the movie. Miller questioned why singers chose to participate in the film and subsequent performance at the Oscars. She noted that many singers thought their inclusion might “serve to promote Sacred Harp traditional practice and strengthen the diaspora community in the long run.” (Miller 2008, 177) Anecdotally, they were correct. The movie boosted participation in the tradition. Two people in the Toronto group that I interviewed first heard and then sought out Sacred Harp after seeing this film. Today, when new people arrive at a singing for the first time and call one of the film’s featured

tunes “Idumea” or “Going Home” the assumption of some is that they first heard Sacred Harp through *Cold Mountain*.

Jennifer Davies’ husband Chris Taylor was reminded of Sacred Harp by way of *Cold Mountain* but had already come across it as a young person growing up in Texas. Early on he was not excited enough by it to pursue participating in the tradition:

I don't know if it was something that just got mentioned in passing when I was a teenager, or if it was because I'm one of those people who spends hours on the internet doing research about things, or I don't know? I'd heard of it, I'd listened to bits and went, "Oh, that sounds cool!" Put it on the shelf. (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Lloy Cook first heard Sacred Harp in a radio story in the 90s, likely on the CBC. While the music piqued her interest, she didn’t follow up on it until one day when it was reintroduced to her by a singer in Toronto’s Echo Choir, the community choir she participates in:

One day I was talking to Susan Slottow, who's also in Echo, and she mentioned that she sang. And I said, "Oh, can I come? I'm curious." And I've been coming ever since. I wasn't glued to it instantly, but I really liked it.

(Interview with the author; 16-04-2020)

Many singers indicated to me that Sacred Harp is something they find fun to sing but hard to listen to. In my interviews many singers were careful to note that Sacred Harp is a participatory practice that does not separate performer and observer. If you are in the room with other shape note singers that is likely because you yourself are singing. When I first started singing with the Toronto group I learned that the

participatory aspect of the tradition was connected to religion. Sacred Harp is traditionally not thought of as “entertainment” but rather a tool of worship and a way to collectively communicate with God. The live sound of Sacred Harp, the often-flat vocal tone, the all-out lack of dynamic range, the focus on exaggerated accent in service of a sonic goal is what many singers enjoy. That feeling of being in the room is something that is difficult to translate to recording. For many members of the Toronto Group, shape note recordings are often used pedagogically, to learn or to practice a new song outside the fast-paced environment of a singing.

The aversion to field recordings and amateur videos of this music has its exceptions in the Toronto group. Andrew Louis is a group member who really enjoys listening to shape note recordings. Andrew first heard shape note during an internet research binge primarily involving Wikipedia and YouTube. Andrew is also a software engineer and has undertaken a unique project in his spare time that asks the question: “Can I digitize a whole life?” When I interviewed Andrew in January of 2020 he was able to use this project to outline the exact digital trajectory of his discovery of Sacred Harp music starting in 2009. He began by researching the Carter Family which led him to shape note music more generally and then to the website of the Toronto Shape Note Group and to YouTube where he first heard the Sacred Harp song “New Britain,” a tune that most people know as “Amazing Grace”. This familiar song from his religious upbringing really resonated with him and sent him further down a digital rabbit hole. He described his first hearing as follows:

. . . I landed on “New Britain” and for me that was like the magical moment because growing up the song meant a lot to me. . . and then to hear it in such a

beautiful mournful kind of way was kind of good . . . So hearing the beautiful harmonies . . . and then just the idea of people making music in an unpretentious, un-performative way, I think it was just like “this is what I want to be doing.” (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020)

Andrew describes connecting with the music on a gut level, searching it out and listening to more and more of it over the coming days while also sharing it with friends and family.

Basically, this is the next several days of listening. And also, I just started sending it to everybody. This is an email I sent to my mom, this is a message I sent to someone else . . . I was almost high on this discovery. So, another email to a friend, I was trying to get everybody to come with me to the singing. And then, it happened again in 2015 except this time I actually did come to a singing. (Ibid)

The singers I interviewed also discussed their first time singing Sacred Harp. For Frank Griggs, his introduction to Sacred Harp happened when he was handed the music for the song “Russia” as part of a choir at The Governor’s Institute in Vermont. He first heard Sacred Harp while singing it himself. A larger sonic understanding of the music came later that week:

. . . The very first shape note song that I sang was “Russia” in that world folk class. But then, that week I was there, Village Harmony came and performed a concert . . . And they performed sort of a mixed set of shape note and Balkan music and maybe some South African music or some Georgian music or something. And that was where I first kind of heard ... Well it was the first time I

heard all of those things and I really, really loved the concert a lot and I wanted to do it. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Toronto singers found their way to shape note in a variety of different ways. Sometimes they were brought to Wednesday night singing by a friend and sometimes they found their way there through the ad in *NOW*. Over the last 10 years however, most singers new to the tradition have found their way through internet searches that have led them to torontoshapenotegroup.org, the Toronto Shape Note Group's website. That is how I first learned about the group and that is what led me to attend my first sing in 2010.

Negotiating the Religious Texts

Watching the group's evolution over the years it's evident that those of us who came to this group through independent research are more likely to stick around. Similarly, singers like Frank who found their way to Sacred Harp through folk-music communities were already armed with the understanding that this music was often sung in a secular context. By contrast, singers who described bringing friends for the first time without context noted that the religious words could be incredibly upsetting to those negotiating previous trauma related to being raised in a strict religious household. Nicole Collins describes a time she forgot to fully explain Sacred Harp's religiosity to friends she invited to sing:

I went to Montreal to sing, so I invited my Montreal friends to come, and I didn't realize that this one woman, I didn't know her that well, had been raised in a Pentecostal church and had a very bad experience and had left and had a lot

of trauma around Christianity, essentially. I don't think I was clear enough that shape note singing was Christian, and she came and had to leave immediately because it was like triggering, like totally triggering for her. I apologized and it was all okay. So I, even now, when I talk, people say, "Oh, you do this thing?" And I'm like, "Yeah," and if they asked for more info, I talk about the fact that if you're going to come, you've got to know that this is the language and that, for me, I'm able to reconcile ... and reconcile is not the right word, but I think of it as poetry and I try not to let it ... it doesn't bother me, I guess that's what I'm trying to say. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Like Nicole, I recall inviting a friend from my Masters' program with an interest in vocal music to come and sing with me. She had been brought up in a strict religious environment and was immediately put off by the words. Lyrics are a major sticking point for participants and more than anything else seem to be the reason people are put off by the tradition when they arrive at the Toronto sings. In my master's research, I explored how singers in the Toronto group, particularly those who identified themselves as having "lapsed" religious backgrounds, negotiated the hyper-religious texts. The answers were split. Some singers paid far more attention to the music itself than to the words, privileging the sound over the lyrical content to the point that they claimed to barely hear the words at all. Others put the religious texts into a historical context noting that for a Southern singer a hundred and fifty years ago faith in God and an afterlife supported them through the hardships and drudgery of everyday life.

Another similarity between singers in the Toronto group is that the majority have some previous neutral or positive connection to Christianity. Singers in Toronto are, by

majority, either practicing Christians or, like me, grew up with relatively benign versions of Christianity and have since left the church. When I asked Naomi Duguid how she negotiates the religious texts she explained that, like me, her lapsed-religious background did not feel like a barrier to entry but rather a way in:

I didn't have a religious family, but we went to Anglican church and I sang in the choir at church, I guess . . . The language is gorgeous, I've always been able to enjoy the language, and I have the language of prayers and stuff in my head . . . I'm grateful that the religious tradition has given rise to this beauty that I can participate in without being excluded in the same way as I'm grateful that it's produced works of art or any other thing that I can participate in. And so basically the religion for me is the thing that has made this happen and it's not keeping me out. So that's all. I just look at it as a medium, just like any other medium.

(Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

In singing this music and the religious words many Toronto singers also appear to feel somewhat connected to white Southern singers of the past, imbuing this music with a sense of understanding for what it must have meant to early singers at a time when life expectancy was far shorter and infant mortality was high. In this way, *The Sacred Harp* book and tradition often serve as vessels for time travel. In his book *Nostalgia Critique* (1995) Stuart Tannock writes, "By returning in text or vision, to these lost pasts, places and peoples, the nostalgic author asserts a sense of continuity over and about her sense of separation." (Tannock 1995, 458) This is especially true in secular revivalist communities like Toronto where these separations (religious, geographic, communal, etc.) are numerous.

Additionally, many singers introduced to this music in secular folk settings like Fiddler's Green or The Village Harmony appear to have an easier time initially accessing the tradition from a secular mindset. Although shape note singers will tell you that Sacred Harp is *not* folk music, the act of initially viewing or performing it alongside other folk musics does allow for a different initial understanding of the tradition. This understanding appears to exist outside of the religious framework that is created when this music is sung with little to no context in a church setting.

Others in the Toronto Group access these songs through a religious framework as practicing Christians. Kim Kendrick looks at Sacred Harp singing through a devout religious lens:

I love my church, I have a very Orthodox practice, I'm what is called an Anglo-Catholic, a devote Anglo-Catholic. So I say the Holy Rosary, I observe a Holy Lent right now, I go to mass as often as I can, I genuflect, I cross myself. I mean, I observe all of that. I believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and I believe in the Virgin birth, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, I believe all of that. If I didn't, I wouldn't go, I think that that's all quite true. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

For other singers, the Toronto Group *is* their religious practice. It is a place to engage with the language of Christianity without the pressure or baggage surrounding a more formal practice which might conflict with their morals or general belief system. For Andrew Louis it was a way to connect to songs that meant so much to him in his childhood when he “had a personal relationship with Jesus”:

I could almost investigate those feelings again without having to navigate all the social pressure of having to pretend to be religious. I can't just go to church, because I feel like a hypocrite. Or certain people from my family would think, "Oh, Andrew's coming back to church." Then I'd have to navigate that feeling. This was just a way of interacting with that without having to navigate the cultural expectations. (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020)

Chris Taylor explained why he and his wife Jennifer Davies left formal religion behind and why the shape note community in Toronto is an important religious surrogate:

One of the things I appreciate about the Toronto community that, the folks who are, I think there was one fellow who was wearing a yarmulke, he's Jewish, I mean that's great. There's another couple of folks who are not religious at all and they've made that pretty clear. I like the fact that we have a fairly large queer community in our singing group. It's one of the reasons why we left the Anglican church, was over the disputes about gay marriage, and it was like, having that community that's been de-churched, come together through something that is religious in its nature by the type of words that are in the book, but that's maybe not why they're there, they just want the community. And that's okay too.

(Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Written Rules and Regulations

The Sacred Harp singing tradition is more than just the music from *The Sacred Harp* it is a practice with both written rudiments and a generally accepted, though not always observed, code of conduct.

Between pages 13 and 25 in the 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp* the rudiments of the tradition are laid out in detail. These rudiments are based on “previous editions of *The Sacred Harp* by Paine Denson (*Original Sacred Harp, Denson Revision, 1936*), Joe S. James (*Original Sacred Harp, 1911*), and B.F. White and E. J. King (*Sacred Harp, 1844*), except where these are incomplete or where they conflict with actual practice.” (Sacred Harp 1991, 13)

These few pages outline almost everything a new singer needs to know to not only sing the music but to also participate in the tradition from the building blocks of musical notation and sight singing and Sacred Harp’s unique solfege. In addition to an Introduction the chapter headings in the rudiments section of the book include II Rhythmics, III Melodics, IV Keys, V Dynamics, VI Mechanics of Singing, VII Meter, VIII Harmony and Composition, IX Musical Forms, and X Singing Exercises. The Rudiments end on page 25 with Chapter XI, Organization and Conduct of Singings and Conventions. (Ibid, 25)

While the front of the book is a rich starting point for anyone new to Sacred Harp, singers who have participated in the tradition for a while or who have attended Camp Fasola, a summer camp for learning and singing Sacred Harp sponsored by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, will note that there are a few notable “unwritten” rules that many singers feel help the tradition to thrive.

Unwritten Rules and Social Norms

A set of unwritten rules have been incorporated into the tradition. In most cases they appear to have developed primarily to encourage the cohesiveness of the singing

group. Ignoring such rules could lead to a shift in energy or loss of momentum in a sing or, perhaps more worryingly for some, could cause a rift through the outward demonstration of social or political leanings not universally shared.

None of these rules are set in stone but are generally considered to be important. Some relate to the momentum of a sing and not overstaying your welcome when it's your turn in the center of the hollow square. At an all-day singing or in a convention setting one should listen carefully for their name to be called by the Arranger indicating they are next to lead after the present leader. Once called in this way they should quickly select a song that has not been called (or been "used") that day and should position themselves for easy access at a corner aisle so they may enter the square quickly when the previous song is completed. A good Arranger (the person at an all day, convention or special singing who selects the order of singers) will do their best to call singers with an eye to where they are seated so they don't have to squeeze by one another.

When entering the square the singers should indicate the page number they wish to sing from and whether the tune is on the top or the bottom of that page, if applicable. They should also communicate to the keyer whether they need a pitch or if they would like to key the tune themselves. They can communicate which verses they wish to sing either before starting the song or as they go by indicating which verse to sing with the fingers on the hand that is beating time. It is considered impolite or inconsiderate to not limit the amount of verses sung, particularly at large singings with lots of potential leaders. For example, the song "Idumea," a favourite song of many Toronto group members, is usually sung rather slowly and has four verses. Singing the song in its

entirety could mean that other singers do not get a chance to lead. Furthermore, some singers in the Toronto Group would argue that the song can become tiresome and can suck the enthusiasm out of the room if it goes on for too long.

When the keyer sounds the chord the class then holds their starting notes. As the leader it is considered good form to start the song before the chord dies out. If, after, singing through the shapes either the leader or the keyer feels that the song has been pitched too high or too low they may take that opportunity to re-pitch the song. It is considered rude for other singers in the group to offer their opinions on the pitch no matter how “off” they might consider it to be.

It is important that the leader face the tenor section and sing the tenor part even if they normally sit in another section. If they are not going to sing the tenor line they should let the tenors know upon entering the square if possible.

Politics and Religion

Another extra-musical rule that makes this tradition unique is the understanding that one should not talk about religion or politics at a singing. Many of the singers that I interviewed who knew of this “unwritten rule” have travelled fairly extensively to sing or learned the rule at Camp Fasola. There appears to be a united understanding that this helps maintain the cohesiveness of the group but also helps encourage the survival of the tradition itself. Frank Griggs compared this to the politicized nature of certain church groups and religious services:

I mean, if you look at certain churches, churches have been so politicized.

You have pastors telling you who to vote for, literally. [Sacred Harp] is something

that is spiritual that is a very wide array of beliefs and values all sort of under this umbrella and intentionally so, for the sake of the tradition existing. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

I asked Frank what he thought of the idea that singers are actively discouraged from discussing politics and religion in the context of attending singings. Frank is politically progressive and is also gay. He has attended Camp Fasola in Alabama many times and feels that keeping politics and religion out of a sing is important.

Yeah and I think that's amazing. And I think it seems like sort of a more pure spiritual practice in that sense to me because of that, the diversity of value systems and points of view. . . . But again, beyond that I don't want to give it sort of any added weight or significance but I think it is something that's special about this tradition Yeah so I don't know I'm sure still people have opinions but they know better than to No one would ever say anything. I mean I don't know. I've honestly never been made to feel uncomfortable about that by anyone at a singing. No one's ever been anything but polite to me. Even people who I know are very conservative, I actually *know* are conservative. I still have totally cordial interactions with them at singings. And I'm probably not going to get invited over to their family dinner or whatever but I don't need to. That's fine Yeah I don't think it's really impacted my experience very much. And in a way I actually appreciate the access to those people. It's kind of interesting to be able to have access to people that I probably really fundamentally disagree with about almost everything and actually be able to have an interaction and be able to have contact. I don't know. I don't want to put too much on that. I don't want to say it's

the answer to world peace or anything but I'm grateful to sort of have. . . To be able to at least touch it kind of peripherally I think that's a good thing for my general, I don't know, balance. (Ibid)

The idea of access to people with different political or social belief systems was something other singers in the Toronto group also identified as being important to them. Susan Slottow's perspective is that the community is really only connected through a shared love of this peculiar music:

We do like this music. But it's a very special kind of music. It's interesting that we, this disparate group of people all like this extraordinarily unique music and sing it. Not only like it. We don't listen to it to relax in an evening, we sing it . . . I think the spiritual dimension things are always open to me personally, but I'm not remotely religious. I'm not sure I'm even a spiritualist, but I think I'm always aware when I look at a plant that it's part of a certain spirit and I respond to them. (Interview with the author; 26-02-2020)

In this context I also asked singers how they were able to negotiate that difference. How they were able to sing with people whose views conflict not only with their social and religious values but also whose views might actively oppose deeply held ethics and morals.

Many of the people I interviewed expressed that it was one of the things they liked most about that tradition. That people can gather together and make music together with an understanding that although they might have a different world view they ultimately all share love of this music. For many, the Toronto Group offers a kind of "church" community without any religious commitment. There is room for religious and

spiritual contemplation while at the same time the way the group ultimately connects and bonds is through a shared appreciation of this strange music and through the act of performance itself. It is also understood that in order for the music to be performed it needs voices and that some of those voices will not share your world view:

I think a crucial thing about that is the thing could not happen without all of the people. So we have to. We have to be in the same room with those people because there's actually a lot of them. And there's a lot of people with other viewpoints. And if everyone refused to sing together because of whatever I mean I guess you could probably still have singings but they would be much smaller. Some would probably disappear altogether certainly. (Frank Griggs, Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

While the Toronto group is made up primarily of people who are not regular church goers and many who self-identify as “non-believers,” religious singers also recognize the importance of Sacred Harp’s inclusion of people with conflicting views.

. . . I love the fact that nobody has to identify as, so here are the people who believe in God and here are the people who don't and no, there are no, it is really a true... it's a true democracy in there. If there are, there may be cradle Catholics, there may be serious Catholics there, I don't know about that but I know when the Americans come up, there will be some people whose faith group officially is very opposed to gay rights, gender fluidity; they are and yet that never, ever comes up. That all leaves the room, everybody comes into that space and the only thing that matters is the beauty of that sound and it doesn't even matter. I'm sure there are also people who struggle with the text; I don't

have any struggles with the text really, but I'm sure there must be people to struggle with the text. Rarely, does it come up, one or two pieces are so glaringly inappropriate for modern times, and yet that's also sorted out pretty easily. I mean, it's really quite extraordinary. I'm very proud as a musician of the fact that this can happen in a musical activity. Where else in the world could this happen?

(Ibid)

The unwritten rules around religion and politics appears to be shifting slowly in the pandemic, as singings and shape note gatherings have moved largely online. BIPOC singers have more recently, publically discussed that while social and political beliefs may not be openly talked about at a singing, microaggressions can still make them known. Singing is not a neutral experience for everyone and this ethnographic examination of the Toronto group, a group made up of almost entirely white-passing people, does not closely examine the experiences of BIPOC singers. This privilege around whiteness as a sort of invisibility cloak that masks difference is something I will discuss in my chapter about the pandemic and the increased role of social media. The following chapters look at the ways in which Toronto singers are able to connect to one another physiologically through interpersonal synchrony. Leaving politics and religion at the door allows for the opportunity to sing together, build connection and strengthen community.

Travelling to Sing

For many singers in the Toronto group travelling to sing is an important part of their practice. It is an opportunity to expand their singing community by connecting with the

greater shape note singing diaspora. For singers in Toronto this generally means travelling to the United States, particularly to states close to Toronto with active Sacred Harp communities like Michigan or New York. Many singers seek out all-day singings or conventions and consider the larger sound produced at these gatherings to be superior to the smaller Toronto monthly sings. Other Toronto singers venture further afield and have even travelled as far as Europe to sing. For Lloy Cook, travel and Sacred Harp singing have gone hand in hand as a retirement activity that she really enjoys:

I was really keen to travel. I traveled a lot in the first couple years after I retired. And I made a point of going to all these conventions. And I'd stayed with some people I'd met, they'd put me up . . . I went to Hamburg and to Oslo and to Uppsala and to Poland, of course, and Scotland, and places in England. It was great. And I knew people. (Interview with the author; 16-04-2020)

I remember being told by singer Gillian Inksetter, a Toronto Group member who recently moved to British Columbia, that it was important for Toronto singers to travel to nearby conventions because the conventions are a place to promote our own singings. I learned that this was particularly important when I first co-chaired the Central Ontario All-Day Sing in 2015 with Frank Griggs. That year at Gillian's behest I travelled to singings in New York, Michigan, Illinois and Alabama in addition to attending the Adult session of Camp Fasola for the second time.

Camp Fasola

Beginning in 2003 Camp Fasola has played an integral role in transmitting the Sacred Harp tradition. Since 2008 two sessions have been held each summer in Alabama, an

Adult session in June and a Youth Session in July. Additionally, Camp Fasola Europe has been held in Poland every other year since 2012. In 2020, the Adult and Youth sessions were set to be combined in Huntsville, Alabama but were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

I attended the adult session of Camp Fasola in June of 2014, 2015 and 2019. For me, camp was a fruitful place to learn but was also a vacation of sorts. Camp McDowell, where the adult session has been set for the last number of years, is an episcopal camp in Bankhead National Forest about an hour Northwest of Birmingham. The five-day, four-night camp consists primarily of lessons, electives, opportunities for recreation like hiking, canoeing or swimming, and a class singing each evening led by one of the lodges. Before 2014, Toronto group members Pleasance and Chuck Crawford and Gillian Inksetter were the only Toronto singers who had attended camp. Since then, a total of twelve singers in the Toronto Group have been to camp at least once with most choosing to attend the “Adult Emphasis” session in June. Many opt to drive to camp as a group over two days, often stopping at the Hopewell Singing in Oneonta, Alabama or the Aldridge Memorial Singing in nearby Fayette County, Alabama on the way and staying for at least a day of singing at the National Sacred Harp Convention in Birmingham directly after. Those preferring not to carpool will usually fly into Alabama and either rent a car or get picked up from there.

Camp mornings begin with a rudiments class at 9am. Campers self-select into either Beginner, Basics or Intermediate classes and generally stay in that class for the three days they are held. These classes focus primarily on the “Rudiments” at the front of the book at three different levels for singers with different backgrounds. Other

important workshops include the leading workshops, a keying workshop and Team Tunesmiths, a shape note composition class done in groups. Historical workshops are offered, focusing on things like the background of composers in the Sacred Harp and the examination of their compositions. There are classes that look at the words in the book as well.

For many, camp is the place where particularly important tenants of Sacred Harp singing that are not necessarily in the Rudiments of the book are communicated. Those tenants are later transmitted to groups around the country and abroad by the newly educated singers returning to their communities. In Toronto, camp has been fundamental to the understanding of the importance of accent in the tradition, of proper leading style and has provided many singers with a sense of history concerning why things developed in a particular way. Camp also reinforces an understanding of what is considered to be proper Sacred Harp Etiquette. In 2014, I attended Buell Cobb's elective workshop entitled *Thoughts on Sacred Harp Etiquette*. Cobb is one of Sacred Harp's most prolific and best respected ethnographers and storytellers. At the beginning of his lesson he quoted page 212 of *The Sacred Harp*, the song "Sharon", and read the words penned by Isaac Watts,

Each in his proper station move,

And each fulfill his part,

With sympathizing heart,

In all the cares of life and love. (The Sacred Harp 1991, 212)

In Cobb's view the interlocking pieces of a Sacred Harp singing, the singers themselves, are there to serve the singing itself first and foremost. In my estimation,

interpersonal synchrony and a shared love of this music is what unites the group. That unification, each singer working together to serve the song and the singing itself, often leads to the most enjoyable singings. Each voice contributes to this “joyful noise” and doing something that could interrupt this in some way is to assert oneself as an individual, something that inherently goes against the coming-together of voices to serve a shared goal, “. . . Each in his proper station move, And each fulfil his part”. At Cobb’s session on etiquette the minutes taker noted,

[Buell] advised that politics or religion have no place at a singing. It is inappropriate for someone to come in and ask singers to sign a petition or ask you to raise your hand if you are saved. Some slogans are not appropriate, be careful what is on your t-shirt. (figure 4; *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing 2014-2015*, 187)

In closing Cobb notes that this lesson was not to be “over-learned.” In other words, one should not take this unwritten rule as gospel and everyone should accept that there is a lot of diversity in Sacred Harp.



Figure 4: Buell Cobb leads a workshop at Camp Fasola Adult Emphasis, Camp McDowell, 2015. Photograph by the author.

Toronto singers who attended camp expressed that it gave them a newfound appreciation of the tradition and particularly the Rudiments at the front of the book. Frank Griggs has attended almost every Adult emphasis camp since 2014 and noted that he feels the primary purpose of camp is to teach the rudiments properly.

I feel like my learning about the tradition was such a long process. I feel like I was just doing it. I was sort of just doing it for a really long time with a very base level of knowledge and then I didn't really acquire a lot more knowledge about it until I went to Camp Fasola probably. Really. I mean that was probably when I really got a lot more knowledge about the tradition though I had been participating in the tradition for I guess like 15 years before I actually went to Camp. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Camp's roll as a knowledge transmitter and unifier has meant that the strength of singings around the world have increased and the ubiquity of Sacred Harp performance has been preserved. In Toronto, it has meant the overall confidence of the group has gone up and that the "rules" of the practice, written and unwritten, have been upheld.

The Central Ontario All-Day Singing and Convention

For the past sixteen years, beginning on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday in August, the Toronto Sacred Harp Singing Group has hosted a larger singing. Between 2003 and 2017 this was in the form of an "All-Day" singing; a single day of singing that takes place from around 9am until 3pm. In 2018, it was collectively decided that the group was strong enough to make a leap to the convention model, increasing the length of the singing from one day to two (a full weekend) and by including a singing school on the Friday evening before the convention.

All-Day Singings and Conventions require a great deal of planning. It is important to be gracious hosts, to provide food and accommodation for those travelling, and to create a welcome space for all singers. In the spring, a committee is established by the group, largely through volunteer-based meetings that occur before or after the Wednesday evening singing or as planned by the chair or co-chairs of the Convention. Since joining the group in 2011, I have had a few roles on these Committees including being on the Food Committee, being the Treasurer and serving as the Co-chair of the 12th and 13th Annual All-Day Singings at the Detweiler Meeting House.

Over time, as the membership of the group has shifted, newer members have pointed out ways the group could be more welcoming to all singers. Four important

things were identified and became priorities for the group. First, the group decided that accessibility was important, noting that the singing itself as well as the washrooms at the singing should be physically accessible. Second, but also related to accessibility, the group determined that there should be a gender-neutral washroom available. In a late discussion, it was suggested by a singer that we find a way to indicate that certain songs will not be sung if called. In *The Sacred Harp*, there are a few songs that are notably nationalist, racist or misogynistic. A notice was written and placed around both venues for arriving singers to read that indicated the inclusive nature of the sing and also indicated that those particular songs would not be sung if called. Finally, singer Chris Taylor noted in 2018 that we should include a land acknowledgment before each day of singing (figure 4). In some ways one might argue that these actions go against the idea of no politics or religion but, as members of the group pointed out, it was in a way a political decision to exclude them as well. By leaving things the way they'd always been we would not be properly acknowledging the diversity of the group. I think this is what Buell meant by taking care not to "overlearn the lesson".



Figure 4: Chris Taylor leads a song at the Second Annual Central Ontario Sacred Harp Convention at Friends House in Toronto. Photo by Tom Evers used with permission, 2019.

Shape note singing in Ontario has a long history connected to singing schools that is similar but separate from the development of *The Sacred Harp* book and tradition in the United States. The earliest singing in Toronto came out of the folk revival and has manifested most recently as Toronto's current group, The Toronto Shape Note Singers.

This chapter has traced the history and development of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group through an exploration of the history of Shape Note singing in Ontario. I introduced the membership of the modern version of the Toronto group and their socio-political and cultural makeup. Through interviews I looked at the varied reasons why

singers enjoy participating in this esoteric tradition including how it impacts their perceptions of community. Chapter Four will delve more deeply into an ethnographic analysis of members' perceptions of musical and social togetherness. It will also reintroduce the concept of entrainment and interpersonal synchrony as mechanisms for understanding social cohesion and pro-social behavior between these community music makers.

Chapter Four – Perceptions of Musical and Social Togetherness in the Toronto Group

This chapter continues with an ethnographic exploration of the Toronto Shape Note Group focusing on the singers' perceptions of social and musical togetherness. By musical togetherness I'm referring largely to connection during the moment of performance but also to some of the singers' performative strategies that serve to enmesh a particular pair or group of singers. These strategies include accent, breath, dynamics, tone, and beating time. Social togetherness, on the other hand, refers to the social bonds created and solidified through the act of singing this music together.

Entrainment theory is the overarching way I will be approaching this discussion of musical and social synchrony. As mentioned in earlier chapters, entrainment is the process by which two or more independent oscillators interact with each other. (Clayton 2012, 49) For such periodic or quasi-periodic interaction to occur some form of coupling must take place and the oscillators must be independent of one another in the sense of being "self-sustaining" (Ibid). Entrainment can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. In music, an example of symmetrical entrainment would be two performers playing a piece of music together. In this case, two independent oscillators exert mutual influence that allows for coupling to occur, keeping each performer in time with one another. On the other hand, asymmetrical entrainment involves one independent oscillator entraining to another over which it has no influence. In the biological sciences, circadian rhythm is perhaps the most prominent example of asymmetrical entrainment. Another example would be, we have no influence over the sunrise and the sunset and yet our bodily systems entrain to "sun-time". In music, there are many examples of asymmetrical

entrainment such as playing in time with a metronome or performing to a backing track. Asymmetrical entrainment even exists in the simple act of listening to recorded music and tapping one's foot. In these cases, we can see that, although both the listener and the recording could be considered independent oscillators, one is periodically fixed (in this case the recording or the metronome) and the other entrains to that, hence the entrainment is asymmetrical.

In Martin Clayton's article "What is Entrainment? Definitions and applications in musical research" he asserts the ways in which one should explore entrainment in musicians:

If we are concerned with entrainment between musicians, we might identify the moment an individual strikes a drum-head or taps a foot as the focal point of a quasi-periodic movement, and based on this choice we may study the relative pairing. If two such events occur at precisely the same time then the rhythms are in phase (relative phase 0°), if one occurs precisely midway between the other they are anti-phase (relative phase 180°). (Clayton 2012, 50)

Clayton also notes that two oscillators do not need to be precisely in phase with one another to be entrained. Rather, "the evidence for entrainment will be (a) a stabilization of the relative phase relationship, and (b) the reassertion of this stability following a perturbation." (Ibid) When discussing entrainment as a more general phenomenon that happens within music, I believe that it is something one can *assume* is happening in a given musical performance. Entrainment is largely observable as a general state of performance in musical groups. Therefore, I feel it is possible to refer to

entrainment in the form of interpersonal synchrony between musicians as a given rather than something one should seek to prove or disprove in music studies.

Entrainment is fundamental to nearly all musical processes and therefore it is possible to refer to it without the inclusion of an empirical study. In the case of shape note singing one can presume entrainment as a general state of performance. On the other hand, empirical research could serve to shed light on the nature of entrainment in specific performance settings looking at the level of precision with which two musicians are entrained, and whether or not discrepancies contribute to feelings of satisfaction or of frustration while singing. Mark Doffman's chapter in the collection *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, entitled "Groove: Temporality, Awareness and the Feeling of Entrainment in Jazz Performance" combines an empirical examination of timing data taken from the live performance of a jazz trio and combines it with the individual reflections of the three musicians taken from a post-performance interview. Doffman notes that between the pianist, drummer, and bassist, the bassist and drummer were the most consistently aligned temporarily while the pianist often pushed and pulled the beat. Through his interview of the three musicians Doffman noted that "the temporal data therefore seemed to serve as an index of the sociality of the group; where the timing profile between the players was tighter (in the rhythm section), so the social relationship appeared to be stronger." (Doffman 2013, 17) Doffman is also sure to note that this does not suggest a causal link but rather that "well-coordinated body moves have some effect on sociality and vice versa." (Ibid)

This chapter will use interviews with members of the Toronto Shape Note Group to explore their members' perceptions of social and musical togetherness in shape note

singing. Through my own observations as a member of the group I have noted that although the Toronto Group is made up of disparate people who often do not share much in common with one another other than this peculiar hobby, they are able to sing together, and entrain to one another, mostly with success. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, the rudiments of Sacred Harp, such as beating time and accent, privilege temporal alignment. This made me think about whether some of the unlikely friendships that form within the tradition might be encouraged through the act of singing together.

Studies within neurology and social psychology have also explored the links between interpersonal synchrony and pro-social behavior. Early on in my research exploring entrainment I was pointed in the direction of an article from the Music and the Mind lab at McMaster University entitled “Fourteen-month-old infants use interpersonal synchrony as a cue to direct helpfulness.” (Cirelli, Trainor and Wan 2014). This experiment looked at whether 14-month-olds would be more likely to direct helpfulness or pro-social behaviour towards someone who had bounced synchronously along to music with them as opposed to asynchronously. This study also involved a neutral stranger sitting in the same room. The neutral stranger was used to help determine whether synchronous bouncing was a cue to direct helpfulness toward the bounding adult or whether it was instead a social prime, increasing prosocial behavior in general (which would include the neutral stranger). The results indicated that “infants were significantly more likely to help an experimenter following synchronous versus asynchronous movements with the person” and that “this manipulation did not affect infant’s behavior towards a neutral stranger.” (Ibid)

A more recent study published in *Social Psychology* entitled “Singing Promotes Cooperation in a Diverse Group of Children” builds upon the Cirelli study and others like it. This study notes that “several theorists have proposed that music functions as a social tool that enables groups to develop and preserve bonds, ultimately leading to cooperative behaviours within the group” (Good 2016, 340) but looks to singing as “the most pervasive and accessible form of music [that] lends itself well to performance by large groups and can be accomplished without formal training.” (Ibid) The experiment included a racially and economically diverse group of students from a YMCA camp in Toronto where they participated in group singing, group art or competitive games. Following their participation in one of these three activities they were asked to play a prisoner’s dilemma game to measure cooperation. The experiment found that the children who participated in group singing were more cooperative than those who engaged in group art or competitive games.

It is clear that interpersonal synchrony is an important aspect of our lives and is a social cue that might help meld distinctions between self and other. It has also been widely hypothesized that group music making and interpersonal synchrony have an evolutionary link and encourages members of a group to cooperate as a means of survival. Through my interviews I have noted that the members of the Toronto Shape Note Group will often anecdotally discuss the feelings of togetherness that occur when singing and will often attribute this togetherness through discussions of temporal alignment.

This chapter uses interviews to explore how the Toronto singers perceive both social and musical togetherness as well as how they negotiate social, political and religious difference in the tradition.

Singing Ideals

Many of the questions I posed to the Toronto singers explored their understanding of what they felt made for an ideal shape note singing experience. In every interview I conducted I found that a noted positive singing experience by an individual was connected to the quality of performance by the group as a whole. When referring to the group, singers brought up three key attributes of an ideal singing experience: attentiveness, alignment, and connection. All three things are related and interconnected. Each one builds on the other to create a concentric set of ideals culminating in *the* ideal singing experience.

Singers referred a great deal to the overall attentiveness of the group. Is everyone paying attention? Are they being considerate of one another? Are they tuned-in to one another in a way that denotes mutual respect and a common goal? In my interview with Naomi Duguid she spoke about attentiveness and order as one of the most important aspects of a singing:

A good sing is when there's order, when it's orderly because then we're just, it's a united purpose. That's a good thing. And then when there's a variety of picks¹¹ and when there's some good humor... When there's a feeling that everyone's tuned in basically. So those small things that we talk about in the

¹¹ By “variety of pick” Duguid is referring to contrasting song selections.

teaching, somebody said, "So have your number ready and have your..." And all of that stuff. When people really are not doing that, when they're just... It's irritating and you think, well, why am I irritated? Well, because actually the deal is that we are all in this together. So you do your bit... (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

In most singings, particularly in larger settings with more people, it is important to pay attention. Distraction within the group can lead to disjointed performance, incorrect verses being sung, someone not realizing it's their turn to lead a song, frequent requests to have the song number repeated and a generally disconnected group. Paying attention is important but just as important is the feeling that the whole or the majority of the group is engaged in the activity of singing like you are. Attentiveness also affects the energy and pacing in a room. Frank Griggs referenced the idea of sustained energy when speaking about what he considers contributes to an ideal singing.

... it's about a sort of continuous unbroken energy that lasts just as long as possible. The longer it lasts the better the singing really. The earlier it starts, the longer it lasts without being broken. I mean that would be the mark of a really good singing to me... and I think all sorts of things help with that. I think having a keyer who can key fairly quickly. I think singing with accent helps with that. I think not having too many slow songs in a row, having confident leaders that can kind of draw energy out of the tenor section helps with that. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Frank's reference of musical aspects of shape note singing like accent denotes the importance of alignment in a positive singing experience. When the singers that I

interviewed referred to alignment they did so in a few ways. Many considered the feeling of being on the same page as the rest of the group in general to be important to the quality of a sing. More specifically, singers spoke of musical aspects of a sing that would contribute to temporal alignment in performance.

This temporal alignment is aided with certain shape note singing conventions. Accent, as Frank mentioned, is considered to be very important to the practice. Watching the leader and beating time together is also important. In this case, it appears that singers feel that temporal alignment is one of the most important aspects of a sing. For Jen Davies, when a temporal connection is established, other things start to line up as an indicator of singing quality:

I know a singing is going really well when I am focused, and I usually sing alto, so I'm aligned with the other altos, and then we're aligned with the rest of the group. Sometimes I notice we're even breathing together! (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020).

The alignment of breath can move a singing toward a feeling of what French sociologist Émile Durkheim called “collective effervescence.” In his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) Durkheim discusses the social aspects of religion and views crowd dynamics as a form of collective consciousness. He notes that, “Within a crowd moved by a common passion, we become susceptible to feelings and actions of which we are incapable on our own. And when the crowd is dissolved, when we find ourselves alone again and fall back to our usual level, we can then measure how far we were raised above ourselves.” (Durkheim 157, 1912) Singers in the Toronto group, whether religious or not, often speak about the positive emotional aspects of a

singing in a similar way. Nicole Collins noted that feelings of alignment with other singers can lead to strong feelings of connection:

... Generally, I think what's good is when people are in sync, when people connect up, when people are paying attention. I love nothing better than to coat-tail on a really good singer. That is my idea of joy. There's a woman from Michigan who comes to our All-Day singing, an alto singer. Oh my God, she's a good singer [...] I love nothing better than to be next to her because, first of all, she knows all the songs inside and out. I'm a decent sight reader, but not a great one. I can sing something I don't even know, if I'm next to somebody who really knows what they're doing because I'm a good mimic. I can follow along just that titch behind, you know? And then so I feel connected to that person. I love that kind of thing. I have to say I have actually served that role for newer singers, too. On songs that I know really well, if I'm sitting next to somebody who's relatively new and they're struggling a little bit, then they can follow me. It's not... follow is not the right word, because it's a very, it's so close, it's so connected. So, yeah. What makes a good singing? Feeling connected with the singers around you. I mean all of the parts, and everybody is singing at pretty much the same volume. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Ultimately, it is a sense of connection that follows feelings of attentiveness and alignment. These qualities are what I have found to be the most important determinants of a quality singing among Toronto group members.

Pacing

Pacing is another temporal aspect important to the group. In a shape note singing convention or an all-day singing the person most in-charge of pacing is the arranger. The arranger or arranging committee calls leaders to the center of the square between songs and informs the following leader to prepare: “*Leader X* will be followed by *Leader Y*.” Most Toronto group members noted that energy in a room can be lessened if too much time passes between leaders. Additionally, too much time can pass if the new leader does not have their song ready to go or if they are too slow to get to the center of the square because they have not seated themselves on an aisle. The very best Arrangers know many of the singers at a given sing and have an understanding of what style of song they tend to lead (major tunes, minor tunes, fugging tunes, anthems, plain tunes, etc), their general skill level as a leader, and whether or not they will choose a song that will flow with the previous song selections. For example, an Arranger might note that the energy in the room is dragging (perhaps if too many slow, minor songs have been lead in a row) and might select a skilled leader to go next with an understanding that they will likely have also noted lagging energy and will select a song to help counteract that (like a major tune or a fugging tune, perhaps). The arranger also has a responsibility to give everyone who wants to lead a chance to do so.

Singers in the Toronto group spoke of their own personal feelings of responsibility when it comes to selecting a song, particularly in a convention setting where the attentions and energies of the larger group can sometimes be difficult to coordinate. Chuck Crawford spoke about the responsibility to select a song that holds

the group's attention and enthusiasm, even within the smaller monthly practice sing in Toronto:

...A lot of times the enthusiasm from one song can carry on to the next, assuming that the next song somehow fits the mood, and if the previous one was successful then this one is, is similar enough that it will be too [...] And I know when we're just going around choosing tunes, I usually feel I want to pick something that somehow matches the previous one in some way. (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020)

Other singers likened song selection in their shape note practice to deejaying. Frank Griggs noted that, "It's like deejaying in so many ways because it is personal taste but it's also reading the room." (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020) Nicole Collins also references the importance of song selection and how she prepares for her turn to lead a song.

You're deejaying... and that's the challenge that I give myself. I pick at least three major songs and three minor songs... I'm not really strategic about it. I actually do it the minute I sit down in the chair, which is totally scary. I could do it the day before, but I don't. Because I also think part of it is being in the moment. I try and choose something that will work with the flow. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Unideal Singing Conditions

In addition to asking singers to speak about the things that contribute to more ideal singing conditions I also asked what they have found will throw them off at a sing. I was

curious to learn what things consistently distracted or annoyed singers, if these were common complaints shared between singers and finally, if these things interfered with temporal alignment.

It turns out that the external factors that can impact a shape note singing are numerous. When I asked about what negatively impacts the quality of a singing the most common, although not universal, response from the Toronto singers I interviewed had to do with singers who intentionally or unintentionally used a different vocal tone or texture or sang parts incorrectly at high volume. For some singers, singing next to a very loud singer, especially if they are not singing the part correctly, impedes enjoyment. Andrew Louis spoke with me about this,

...Sometimes when there's someone new and they're loud and they sit next to me that just saps my energy a little bit. Not that I'm judging them, but that is just taking away my ability to ... I can't hear the group anymore, I can only hear that one person. It's not that I'm judging them, it's just that my brain will only register someone who is off the chord. It's only a problem if they're sitting directly next to me, or behind me, or whatever... It's not a problem because I hate or because I say, "Oh, they're not very good." It's a problem because I stop being able to hear the group. And then it becomes an individualized response. I'm an individual, I'm interacting with this one individual, you just can't ... It takes away from that feeling of being heard (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020).

Other singers expressed that distinct vocal texture can have an impact on their engagement at a shape note singing. There's a sense among the Toronto group that the egalitarian nature of the endeavor should be reflected in one's awareness of the

way they are singing. A few singers mentioned that the use of a vibrato, when contrasted with the traditional flat singing tone of shape note, can be distracting. This, again, seems to only be problematic when the offending singer is loud. Most singers I interviewed understood that many shape note singers use vibrato and that a flat tone is not easy to reproduce, particularly as singers age.

For Susan Slottow, an extremely affected voice, particularly one that includes hints of a put-on southern accent, can also be distracting. She calls this “super stylish shape note” and it is a singing style that seems to aim to mimic singers in the Southern United States. “That happens and they think they are doing it quote unquote right. My whole thing is there is no right.” (Interview with the author; 26-02-2020)

Another thing that can impact the quality of a singing is a lack of confidence either from the leader of a tune, a section of singers or, as often happens, the group as a whole. These things can lead to what is known in the Sacred Harp community as a “train wreck”. A train wreck can be the result of a number of different things including but not limited to the leading of a challenging tune that is too difficult for a given group to sight read, a group that is not paying attention to the leader, an unconfident leading style that may include the incorrect beating of notes coupled with a weak, inattentive front bench.¹² A train wreck is just as it sounds, a full-on derailment of a tune which usually results in having to start over. There are also varying degrees to which a tune is successful that generally relates to how locked-in and in-sync the group is as a whole.

¹² The front bench refers to those singers that sit in the front row of each singing section. It is particularly important that they pay close attention and follow or assist the leader as necessary. This is especially important in the case of the front bench tenors whom the leader faces. Traditionally, the front bench tenors assist in leading the group if the leader indicates they need assistance.

This can be affected by the overall confidence of the leader or the group. Such moments are interspersed within most if not all practice sings and conventions hosted by the Toronto group. In entrainment terms, lack of confidence can create a marked perturbation of the overall flow of a given sing but one that does not necessarily affect a singer's overall enjoyment. Charles Crawford talked about what occasionally happens if the leader is lacking confidence either in their choice of song or with leading in general.

... if the leader is uncertain and the other people aren't able to push the song along, if people are just worried about how the leader is going to do or what he's doing, then a particular tune is not successful. But it doesn't necessarily affect the [sing] that much (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020).

Joking or taking too much time between songs was also identified by singers in the group as something that could affect their overall enjoyment of a sing. Not being prepared with your song selection to ensure a steady flow between leaders could affect the energy of the group, particularly in a larger convention setting where people are waiting for their turn. In general, taking too much time in the square, either by being unprepared or by leading more verses than might be considered acceptable can occasionally be frowned upon. Taking up too much space or time goes against the egalitarian nature of Sacred Harp as a whole.

The keyer or pitcher, the person who decides what relative key the tune will be sung in and sings the notes of the starting chord prior to the start of each piece can also sometimes affect the perceived quality of a singing. In general, it is expected that the keyers will be quick to locate each piece in the book when the number is called and then will be quick to pitch the song. This is considered to be especially important in All-

day singings and Conventions where the goal is to get through as many leaders as possible. Singers in the Toronto group also expressed that their enjoyment of a given sing can be impacted if they feel the songs are being pitched too high or too low.

Finally, fatigue plays a considerable role in the overall enjoyment of a sing. This can be felt on a personal level if a singer becomes fatigued but also on a group level, when you get the sense that the whole class has become tired. Chuck Crawford described group-fatigue in shape note singing this way:

...Certainly a Convention, a two-day singing, the end of the weekend, that tail-end, you can feel it falling off. Well, people leave early, I mean if they've got to travel they'll leave early. But you do feel that it's kind of dragging a bit. And then if it's the summer and it's really hot and uncomfortable, then you can feel it's hard to keep things going late in the day (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020).

In my own experience, fatigue can impact one's enjoyment even at Toronto's smaller practice singings, the majority of which take place at 7pm on the third Wednesday of the month. Keeping my energy level up at evening singings sometimes proved challenging. This was also sometimes true for older folks in the Toronto group and those with health conditions.

Naomi Duguid and I frequently sat next to each other in the treble section and have commiserated about feelings of fatigue. There is a high cognitive requirement of shape note that is challenging to fulfil when you're tired. Duguid noted that:

You can be physically, fully attentive, it's when your brain is no longer ruling. When [it's] set to the side and your whole self is there. So, when you and I are tired, you've said this sometimes, "I'm so tired I can't concentrate" ...It's really

hard. I think that's where we've done too much brain work and we can't unify ourselves anymore and so we can't get hold of that thing that we know is there to be inhabited, but we just can't do it. Because that's what we're striving for without knowing it. (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

Accessibility has become more of a concern in Toronto as the singers have aged and diversified. Recently, the group has doubled down on their efforts to make the yearly Convention accessible, hosting it in accessible venues, placing accessibility and diversity statements around the room, using gender neutral washrooms and reciting a land acknowledgement at the two separate locations where the Convention takes place.¹³ These are things that were not considered even four or five years ago. With that being said, the Music Room at Bloor Street United Church where the Toronto singers host their monthly Wednesday practice sings is not fully accessible. Singers with health conditions are sometimes unable to attend week to week. This is something that the group is looking to change now that Bloor Street United has been slated for condo development. Before the pandemic the group was in the process of securing a room at the accessible Friends House where they host day one of the Singing Convention. This is something considered to be increasingly important as singers in the group age.

Similarly, the room itself can have an impact on the quality of a sing. It can be problematic if it is uncomfortably hot or cold for example. Acoustics also play a big role in enjoyment as well, with most singers having a preference for square or rectangular

¹³ Day one of the Central Ontario Convention takes place at Friends House located at 60 Lowther Street in Toronto and day two is hosted at Detweiler Meetinghouse, 3445 Roseville Road in Ayr, Ontario, just outside of Cambridge.

rooms with lower ceilings. Toronto group members who have also travelled to Alabama to sing agree that The Aldridge Memorial Sing at the Pleasant Hill Church in Fayette Alabama is in an ideal acoustic space for Sacred Harp.¹⁴ The building has a simple rectangular structure with low ceilings, tile floors and wooden siding. Many acoustic spaces simply do not work for shape note singing. Toronto singers sometimes cite the time they were invited to sing as a part of the First Thursdays party at the AGO in Toronto. The room was square but the gallery space had such high ceilings that sound travelled upward and the group could not hear one another. This made it very challenging to stay together and caused some singers, myself included, to strain their voice. For similar reasons outdoor sings, which have increased in prevalence during the pandemic, can be challenging. An unsupportive acoustic space often requires more concentration from a singer. It can also cause the singer to project more in an effort to be heard which can lead to vocal strain or fatigue.

Personal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are the final thing that Toronto singers mentioned can affect the quality of a sing, particularly within a smaller practice sing where singers know each other better. Some singers identified this as being a large determinant of their enjoyment while others noted that one of the great things about singing this particular music is that you can enjoy yourself without necessarily knowing anyone. Conflict has arisen in the Toronto group on occasion. One singer spoke about a time another singer

¹⁴ This sing takes place right before the adult emphasis of Camp Fasola begins. Many road-tripping Toronto singers heading to camp will stop at this sing.

offered to lead the song she called in a practice sing on her behalf, something that often happens at the monthly sing in Toronto if a singer wishes to select a song but doesn't feel comfortable leading it. In this case, the singer who selected the song was invited to join the leader in the center of the square to practice leading the tune. During the course of the song the leader attempted to physically guide her arm without her consent which resulted in a very definitive, "Don't touch me". Conflict can also arise when certain songs in the book are called, as a general rule the Toronto group will no longer call songs that marginalize particular communities or identities such as 78 Stafford, 115 Edmonds, 160t War Department and 211 Whitestown. On a smaller scale, feelings of being criticized by other singers or being given advice when you have not asked for it can cause offence and make one's singing experience less enjoyable. Each factor that negatively impacts a singing also has a clear impact on the achievement of temporal alignment. This extends to a singer's experience of personal alienation which impacts their ability to "lock-in" to the music.

How Do They Know When a Sing is Going Well?

I found that the singers I interviewed were able to discuss, at length, both the musical and extra-musical elements that could negatively impact their singing experiences. On the other hand, the baseline for singing enjoyment among the people I interviewed was simply an absence of these negative elements. So, when I asked singers the question "How do you know a sing is going well?" their answers were far less concrete. They instead described how they felt when a singing was going well, often referring to their emotional and physical states. In many cases their descriptions of enjoyment seemed to

mark an absence of intense concentration that is often required of the tradition due to its reliance on sight-singing. Chris Taylor described these contrasting singing experiences as follows:

...When things aren't going as well... I'm having to sort of cognitively pay more attention to it, and it doesn't feel quite as natural but when it's going well, the feeling is that you're just doing it. You're not having to think about it.

(Interview with the author 05-04-2020)

The idea that there is a self-sustaining energy or momentum that materializes when a sing is going well was a common theme throughout my interviews. This was described by different singers in different ways. For example, Susan Slottow referred to positive singing experience as a river.

For me I just feel like the music is flowing through me and I'm part of it.

The river is flowing down. That's really it. That's not a whole lot of words. But, I'm part of this great movement of music. (Interview with the author; 26-02-2020)

Many singers I interviewed described a sense of effortlessness when a singing is going well. The feeling arises that their joint action propels the music in a way that makes everything feel easy. These group states can be related to song familiarity and song preference. Often larger singings, such as the Central Ontario Sacred Harp Conference, have prolonged periods of sustained energy. This could be in part due to the heightened enthusiasm for the event but is also likely related to the skill of the visiting singers. A critical mass of tune-knowledge and sight-singing ability coupled with the formality of the event, the regular pacing of one song after another, does allow for sustained momentum. More experienced singers create a sort of current that will bring

the less experienced along for the ride. This supports one of my earliest observations as a newcomer to the tradition over ten years ago: In general, things feel easier and your perceived skill as a sight-singer feels greater if you sit next to a strong singer or within a strong section or group. It is possible, through a combination of sight-singing and pitch mimicry, to feel like you are having a better sing than you would were you relying on your sight-reading skills alone.

This state of prolonged, sustained energy is harder to achieve at the monthly Toronto practice sings which are more likely to be derailed by a challenging or unfamiliar tune. Feelings of momentum and prolonged synchrony are more likely to occur in the Toronto group when familiar songs (sometimes referred to as ‘chestnuts’) are called in succession.

I think there's certain songs though, because we all know them so well, that we can kind of, like you said, concentrate on just singing instead of having to think it through? Like Bridgewater, or 300 or 178, there's songs that we kind of all know. Especially by that point we've got that clicking down, where we're like, "Okay, we're all kind of in sync now." ...And then we can just launch into it and go. (Chris Taylor, interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

The Words

Lyrics can also contribute to the overall singing experience. During my Master's research some singers told me that the lyrics played a secondary role to the music itself. That was how, as self-described “non-believers,” they were able to sing this music's highly religious words. For others though, their interpretation of the words

contributed to their feelings during a given sing. For them, the text is very much tied to a place in history where the specter of death was ever-present. For many Toronto singers, the poetry of the book is tied through an unbroken thread of practice to Southern Sacred Harp singers over 150 years ago. It is often through this lens that singers interpret the religious words. Two singers that I interviewed made specific reference to the song “Idumea” (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 47b). The words, written by Charles Wesley in 1763, appear to express doubt in the face of death.

*And am I born to die?
To lay this body down!
And must my trembling spirit fly
Into a world unknown?*

*A land of deepest shade,
Unpierced by human thought;
The dreary regions of the dead,
Where all things are forgot!*

*Soon as from earth I go,
What will become of me?
Eternal happiness or woe
Must then my portion be!*

*Waked by the trumpet around,
I from my grave shall rise;
And see the Judge with glory crowned,
And see the flaming sky!*

Idumea is an example of a “chestnut” that is sung at most Toronto Sacred Harp gatherings. Singers interpret the words in different ways and extract meaning from them accordingly. Nicole Collins told me that for a long time she would find herself getting emotional or being in tears after singing “Idumea”.

...not of sadness but of awe because there's something awesome about those words, and especially the last part where it says, "and see the flaming skies." It's got this almost scary kind of quality to it, right? But also, it's kind of like a fearless look at death, right? Am I born to die? To lay this body down."

(Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Many singers reflect on their own loss through the words of the book, even if they are not religious. The words serve as a tool through which to think about and even process their own loss, free from organized religion. When I asked how singing a song like "Idumea" makes her feel Nicole reflected on the loss of her family.

It's not religious. I think for me it's about like... Well first of all, I think I've talked a little bit about it, but mortality has been with me. I've had an extreme relationship with mortality since I was an infant because my older brother died when I was little. Then my dad died and my other brother. Everybody died. My whole practice as an artist and as a human has been coming to terms with mortality, accepting it. I've been forced to accept it. It's like it's not even like a conversation, it's a thing... But thinking about the idea of an afterlife or what happens to this energy when our body is no longer energized. Right? That interests me tremendously... (Ibid)

When discussing Sacred Harp lyrics, Pleasance Crawford spoke more to the duality between the extraction of meaning by singers and a more literal interpretation of the text by religious singers. In her experience many of the religious singers "...know the liturgy, they know what it's all about. Obviously, the songs are meaningful to them and it's a completely different way to me." (Interview with the author 06-04-2020). One religious

singer in Toronto, Kim Kendrick, looks at a song like *Idumea* a little differently than the non-Christian singers in the group.

I know on the surface it sounds as if it's doubt, but I think I see it and when I sing it I feel it as I know that I will triumph over death because Jesus Christ triumphed over death so I don't have to be afraid of it. On the surface, people are dropping dead all around me but I know in the end... death is not triumphant over me, I will ultimately be triumphant over death. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

The Music

In many cases, song choice plays a role in the enjoyment of a sing. As mentioned, Toronto has a number of songs that are frequently called, many on a monthly basis. Some examples of these songs include “*Idumea*” (47b), “*Wood Street*” (504), “*David’s Lamentation*” (268), “*Africa*” (178), “*China* (163b), “*Russia*” (107), “*Wonderous Love*” (159) and “*Bridgewater*” (276). “*Christian’s Farewell*” (347) is the most frequently called song by the group as it is traditionally used as the closing song for the third Wednesday night gatherings. When I interviewed Pleasance Crawford for my major research paper back in 2011 she noted that the group has gotten progressively more adventurous with their song selections over time.

I think in the early days, back closer to 2000, the selections were much more limited. But as people learned more songs and ventured out, the possibilities grew [...] We always encourage anyone to just open a book and call

a song. It truly has happened that it's a song we've never sung before and we get through it (Miller 2011, 89-90).

Since joining the group in 2010 I have noticed this trend continue as more members of the group travel to Camp Fasola and to various Conferences in the United States. The makeup of the group has also shifted slightly since that time, with new members joining the group as they have discovered the tradition or moved to Toronto. This has given the group a bit more confidence to attempt challenging and less familiar pieces. In addition, a few of the more experienced singers in the group decided to host a singing school every third Wednesday taking place at 7pm, 30 minutes before the sing. Spearheaded by Gillian Inksetter (who has since moved to British Columbia) and Frank Griggs, the aim of this singing school was to focus on the fundamentals of the tradition such as leading and sight-singing and to answer any questions singers might have. These thirty minutes were also important because they offered an opportunity to welcome newcomers and explain how a sing works. This is something that a few of us had discussed was lacking in the monthly gatherings and was a way to be more welcoming as a group. These are the things that have contributed to the group's ever-expanding repertoire of "chestnuts" and have heightened the perceived quality of the singings in the past ten years.

Feelings of Euphoria and "The Spirit Coming In"

Something that really fascinated me when I started singing in the Toronto group nearly 15 years ago was what I perceived to be a shared feeling of euphoria that would sometimes happen at certain points during the Wednesday sing. I presumed it was

shared because when it happened it appeared evident on the faces of many other singers, something you could see in large smiles, enthusiastic arm movements and occasionally even tears. Within the tradition, this shared feeling is often colloquially called “The Spirit Coming In” a religious reference to the idea that when singers appear to collectively experience this elevated feeling it is because God has entered the room. In my Master’s thesis, I briefly discussed this phenomenon noting that it appeared to be a collective experience that would happen, perhaps not with every singer in the room, but with those who were caught up in a particular song. This feeling was not something that happened along religious lines either. It wasn’t something that “believers” experienced and “non-believers” did not, although the explanations for it differed along those lines. In most cases, however, it was understood to have a spiritual component. If it wasn’t “God” perhaps it represented some intangible force not yet understood. I believe that the answer to the mystery of shared euphoric experience in shape note singing can be explained another way entirely; through the evolutionary need for synchrony of movement and prosocial behavior. Sustained euphoria is the reward for successful joint action. In this section of the chapter I will include singers’ accounts and explanations of this feeling. I will then discuss historical explanations for this theory used in critical theory and those that have been applied to musical analysis in the past as well as more current, scientific hypotheses found in psychology and neurology with major implications in the study of music.

I asked singers to describe this heightened good feeling that can happen in a sing. Only one singer I interviewed felt they had not experienced it but everyone else

believed they had and were able to describe both the physical experience and their thoughts on what might be causing it to occur.

And sometimes when we're singing, if we have one of those wonderful moments where the harmony is working well and everybody knows it, and it just sounds wonderful, I just feel literally uplifted, slightly lighter, a little bit higher, and that just feels fabulous. The thing is, it isn't the purpose of the act, it's not why we're there and doing that, but every now and then it kind of happens, there's something special that happens. (Susan Spencer; Interview with the author; 20-02-2020)

The feeling that the phenomenon is something that spontaneously occurs, perhaps without explanation, was echoed by Lloy Cook who told me, "it just happens. I don't think it's a question of where, or more, or anything. It just, it's a gift when it happens. It's glorious." (Interview with the author; 16-04-2020)

Singers also often self-reflected on how these moments affect them physically.

Biologically, I notice that my breathing gets a little bit more easy... and there's certainly a lot more physiological feedback. I noticed when I'm in the center calling and it feels like we're all on, I notice Pleasance and other people paying attention more and making eye contact more... (Chris Taylor; Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Explanations

In addition to asking singers about what they think physically happens when they are feeling this way, I also asked them for their own theories on when and why this euphoric

feeling might be occurring. Their answers varied. Some thought what was happening was being caused by observable factors within the sing such as shared facial expressions, smiles and eye contact. Lloy Cook told me what she has observed in the room in these moments.

I'm sure that there is more animation and more eye contact and more smiling and more relaxed faces... I think of it more as a feeling, a kinesthetic thing, rather than a visual. (Interview with the author; 16-04-202)

A few singers talked about the experience as being the feeling of tuning in to or connecting with the world around them on a deeper level. Naomi Duguid described the feeling as "connecting to the universe,"

That's how I would think of it. Then it's a moment of ecstasy and we share it. There's times when we finish one song and I think, "whoa" ... it makes me teary. Because it's good. It's a release, right? (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

Naomi was not the only person I interviewed to mention that these elevated feelings of euphoria were likely a sign of connecting to the universe. Susan Spencer's explanation for the phenomenon was similar,

I have this sense that all of the universe is, somehow there's a musical element to it. I couldn't possibly explain it or back it up, but the movement of planets and stars and the way that the universe goes, not just in terms of the large heavenly bodies, but also just in terms of molecules and all of that, there has to be some musical element in that that we don't perceive as human beings, but we might intuit something about that. (Interview with the author; 20-02-2020)

This idea of connecting to a sort of divine or almost magical force was a common through-line in the group. For many of the group members I interviewed, singing this music might not be a religious experience but it was a spiritual one. This feeling of shared euphoria could very well have an explanation but that explanation does not detract from the feeling of shared connection that can happen in these moments and how much that feeling means to many singers. Nicole Collins noted that it was possible to feel this way even in a song you aren't very familiar with or maybe haven't even sung before. The feeling is more related to the singing environment and the performance of the group as a whole.

...it's not just the song, it's also the way we sing it. It's also that connection. If everybody's connected, if all the elements are right, I will definitely feel a kind of surge of emotion. Sometimes it makes me cry, but when I cry, it's almost like a reaction to feeling, to intense feeling. It's not so much sadness because it can be also joyful too that I'll get emotional. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Although the Toronto group is not very religious, singer Kim Kendrick is someone who frames this experience through her religious beliefs,

So, when you're resonating this is why music is, of course, the highest art and singing the highest form of music and the most pure form of music. We resonate and if we resonate, especially in a large group of people and especially if we resonate to music that comes from the heart and that text was written by true believers, then all of those things come together. Whether people realize that or not, they will have that experience. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

As previously mentioned, Emil Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) was an early text that explored euphoria linked to religious ritual. Durkheim coined the term "collective effervescence," the idea that when a community or a society comes together in joint action it often results in a shared "effervescence" that serves to further unify the group. Joint action that leads to "effervescence" does not necessarily need to occur in a religious context. Early crowd theory such as the work of Gustave Le Bon regarded the crowd as a force able to engulf and transmute individuality in favour of a shared group mind (Le Bon, 1895). In her book *The Transmission of Affect* published posthumously in 2004, philosopher Teresa Brennan uses the theory of chemical and neural entrainment as a catalyst for her exploration of group affect. Chemical entrainment, she notes, works unconsciously by way of pheromones in the air that are detected via olfaction, "One detects pheromones by touch or smell, but smell is more common. To smell pheromones is also in a sense to consume them. But the point here is that no direct physical contact is necessary for a transmission to take place." (Brennan 2004, 69) Brennan notes that in addition to chemical entrainment, the transmission of group affect might be occurring through "electrical" or nervous entrainment which is "effected by touch, sight or sound". (Ibid, 70) Brennan was one of the first to theorize that nervous entrainment and the communication of a shared affect in a group might also depend on "body movements and gestures, particularly through the imitation of rhythms." (Ibid). She writes,

Rhythm is a tool in the expression of agency, just as words are. It can literally convey the tone of an utterance, and, in this sense, it does unify word and affect. Rhythm also has a unifying, regulating role in the affective exchanges

of two or more people. The rhythmic aspects of behavior at a gathering are critical in both establishing and enhancing a sense of collective purpose and understanding. (Ibid)

These feelings, as described by Sacred Harp singers in the Toronto group, could have an evolutionary connection as a tool through which to promote cooperation, a sense of affiliation and prosocial behavior in groups (Bispham 2006; Cirelli 2016). It is particularly fascinating to explore these connections within Sacred Harp because the members of the community often come from very different, sometimes oppositional political and religious backgrounds. The next section of this chapter explores the differences within the global Sacred Harp community at large and the Toronto group in particular through the ethnographic lens of the Toronto singers.

Negotiating Difference and Fostering Togetherness

Sacred Harp singing is a unique form of collective music making unlike more common musical groups such as a band or a choir. It is an international community composed of people of a variety of ages from a wide religious and political spectrum. This makes gatherings of shape note singers somewhat of a social anomaly. The community comes together in the enjoyment of the shape note singing practice but beyond that their differences are vast. In setting out on this project I wondered how singers negotiated this difference. How could they sing with people with different and sometimes even opposing social, religious and political beliefs? How has this singing community been fostered and continued to grow? Finally, is shape note singing a facilitator of what I call unlikely friendships; relationships that cross social, religious and political bounds?

In my interviews the Toronto singers noted that shape note singing as a musical practice is unique in a number of ways. Susan Slottow noted that shape note is different from a choir, "...because we don't rehearse. We're not trying to get our music in sync with each other. It's not part of the shape note experience, actually. We're singing parts. We're all singing the same song but nobody is dictating how we sing." (Interview with the author; 26-02-2020) Andrew Louis pointed out that the physical act of singing in shape note differs from other vocal music practice noting, "How many places in the world can you just yell, basically, in a room with other people?" (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020) Andrew also pointed that there is a self-conscious aspect to singing in other non-shape-note contexts,

...we're supposed to be cool and reserved and not earnest about anything. Here you can just come for two hours and just sing together, and not have to be so much of an individual, you just sing with other people. I think all these things were suppressed that I was able to express in this group. (Ibid)

Frank Griggs also noted that shape note singing differs from other organized music practices like a choir or band,

[I]f you have a band, the band members have probably chosen to be in a band together because they have similar musical taste, maybe they're already friends, they probably have some stuff in common already. Where at Sacred Harp it's like the only thing we all have in common is that we love this music. But it's sort of like having a band made up of really different people... it's more like bridging a gap of people who have literally nothing in common at all except for

this one thing, this one very specific kind of niche interest. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Shape note singings' varied demographic makes it a unique activity through which to foster connection and kinship despite political, social, and religious difference.

Unlikely Bonds

Sacred Harp is a unique musical activity that brings singers together around a shared love of the music. Over time, shape note singing was subsumed into the folk music community at large beginning with the inclusion of recordings of The Alabama Sacred Harp Singers in Harry Smith's *The Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952). *The Anthology of American Folk Music* had an inordinate influence on the folk revival of the 1950s, 1960s and 70s leading to a revival of Sacred Harp Singing. The diegetic use of the music in the civil war film *Cold Mountain* (2003) continued to foster interest in Sacred Harp. Its popularity spread from the southern United States north to New York, Massachusetts and eventually Southern Ontario. Shape note singing has also gained popularity overseas through the formation of groups in the UK and Europe and more recently even in Australia and Japan.

In North America, the folk revival and shape note music's increased popularity brought this music out of a fully religious realm and into a secular folk music realm. I have heard the phrase "Sacred Harp is not folk music" many times in my nearly 15 years of singing in Toronto. It is instead referred to as a living tradition with each revision of *The Sacred Harp* (the most recent being in 1991) containing new tunes from composers in the community, written in the traditional style. The tune book is currently

being revised and composers have been invited to submit their compositions. The heart of The Sacred Harp tradition is still the South and sometimes the political and religious differences between singers travelling to the South to sing and local singers in the community can be stark. During the Trump era, there were a few singers from Toronto who, at least at first, refused to cross the border to attend a sing. The chasm between the religious and secular and the conservative and progressive sometimes seemed too wide to cross.

Sacred Harp singing is unique in that it is a pastime that brings together political and religious communities that normally exist in silos. A singer might not have much in common with the person they are sitting next to in the tenor section but the act of singing together, physically synchronizing and entraining to one another can cause feeling of affiliation and pro-social behavior. Even though two singers from different political and religious backgrounds might not be friends, singing this music together serves as a uniting force. As the Toronto singers noted in interviews, it is not like a band (a group of localized, normally likeminded folks, coming together to play music of a particular genre), nor is it like a choir which is often a group from a similar community and often similar demographic practicing performing music together. Singers in the Toronto group who have travelled to the United States to sing were quick to note that friendships can and do form with people who they differ from socially, religiously and politically.

I asked Pleasance Crawford if she has friendships in the shape note community outside the Toronto group. “Oh, absolutely. They’re not necessarily close friendships but

there's a strong bond with the music. Oh, absolutely. And even with people that I only see once a year." (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020)

Pleasance and her husband Charles (Chuck) Crawford first came across shape note singing when they moved to Alabama for Chuck's teaching job in the sixties before the tradition had spread back to northern communities in the United States and Canada. They had a copy of the Sacred Harp and would occasionally come across advertisements for local singings. Despite their curiosity both Chuck and Pleasance felt they would not have been welcome at a sing as they were not religious and Chuck was teaching at a primarily Black college at the time. Today, the social, political and religious differences are still there but singings have become more open and welcoming. There seems to be an understanding that the contingent of singers and singing communities in the North and abroad, born out of the folk revival, help keep the tradition alive. The music is what comes first,

...I mean the music was important enough, and I've always thought that was... I mean you could tell that the people, they all like to sing. They're not in it to further their career or to sell insurance or something like that. They love to sing, and that's generally something you can talk about. But we've told the story, when we were living in Alabama and we knew something about singings, and we saw signs about it, but we didn't follow up because we thought we wouldn't be welcome. And some of the ones we've met, when we tell this to people in the South, they say, "You were probably right." And I know there are political differences that have come up sometimes when people make jokes, but

generally people back off. It doesn't become a big thing. (Charles Crawford; Interview with the author; 06-04-2020)

The divide that exists between people with different political views feels particularly stark today but many feel the unwritten rule that politics and religion should not be discussed is important to the survival of this tradition. Singing with people who have different political and religious beliefs, people who you wouldn't otherwise come into contact with, is for some singers one of the privileges of participating in the broader shape note singing diaspora. Frank Griggs talked to me a bit about his experiences singing in the South. Frank normally sings tenor and spoke about sitting next to a treble singer from a shape note singing family at the Aldridge Memorial Singing.

...It is very fun to sing next to him on the corner. And I don't know what his politics are, would probably never ask. But it's very fun and I would always want to seek out that experience of singing next to him personally as a thing. So that's definitely ...I feel like, I don't even know if he'd remember my name. I mean we've met a number of times but that experience to me is very memorable. It's like a sense memory for me. I would seek it out again and again. If I could go back I would want to sit in that spot with him right there. And that's, I feel like a connection that we have, even though we literally don't know each other at all.

(Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Shape note singing allows for connection between people who may only have the enjoyment of this esoteric music in common. The enjoyment that comes from singing with someone fosters a sense of closeness and a feeling of kinship that might not otherwise develop. As Toronto singer Andrew Louis put it, "You can feel pretty close to

someone that you sing with. You kind of skip a lot of the dance of getting to know someone, because you've made yourself vulnerable in a way that is important, I think.”

(Interview with the author; 28-01-2020)

Connecting Through the Music

Most of the group members I interviewed in the Toronto group agreed that singing music with someone allows for a feeling of closeness you might not otherwise have with a person. This closeness can allow for greater access to interpersonal empathy. As someone who identifies as non-religious and progressive, singing in the South has connected me to people I might disagree with on a number of fundamental levels. The difference is that when you meet and talk to and sing with someone as opposed to conversing with them semi-anonymously in an online community, humanity is still there and it is easier to access empathy. This is true in the Toronto group where political and religious differences are evident and even within the larger shape note community where differences are more vast.

Many members of the Toronto group had stories about singing with people in the larger shape note diaspora who they would not have met or interacted with otherwise. Nicole Collins and I spoke about this at length. Two of her closest friends in the larger community embody that difference. The first is one of the few Black Sacred Harp singers in the South who is both a teacher at camp and has travelled to Toronto to lead the singing school at our convention. He is also a trans man from Birmingham, Alabama. The second close singing friendship that has developed is with a singer from an Anabaptist community in Pennsylvania who adheres to the tradition of plain dress.

Nicole spoke about them getting to know each other through the billeting tradition and singing next to one another.

I've been singing next to her where I've definitely had that where it's just been like, "Oh my God, this is so much fun and also so meaningful." It just has this joyful thing. So, whenever we get a chance to sit next to each other, and I know she feels the same way... I mean, maybe not maybe the same way, but I know she feels something because we... seek each other out, to sit next to each other when we can. It's so sweet. It's one of the sweetest things. How would I even know [her] if it weren't for the way that the Sacred Harp singings are set up? ... We would not have come into contact with each other except that she drove herself up to Ontario for our convention. Like imagine. I think I met her before in the States, and then she came up here and then she stayed with me, the whole billeting tradition, hosting tradition, which is so terrific, and we got to know each other better still. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

A Toronto singer who travelled to Alabama also noted that on a larger scale they feel that singing next to someone with a different background could work to open the mind of that person. She thought that perhaps singing next to Southern conservative singers in "Trump's America" could open them up to different perspectives. We spoke a bit about the possibility that someone singing next to her might have a wildly different background given the political climate in the United States.

I think, now we're going to get into some really loopy stuff, but I actually think that on some level, because of that connection, I am changing them. Not me personally, but I believe that they can be changed. Well, first of all, I guess

it's fair to say that if they're sitting there and they're coming out to shape note, they're being drawn to it and, even if they're Trump voters, they're probably Trump light voters. Do you know what I mean? It's not terribly likely, I don't think, that there are folks who are singing who are hardcore racists or white supremacists. I don't think white supremacists tend to go to that. I could be wrong. I could be way, way wrong. Am I implicated in their white supremacy because I sit next to them and sing with them? No. Is there an outside chance that the softening that happens when we're in that space and the spirit comes in could bring them to a better place? Yeah, I think so. I really do. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

Science points to what she refers to as a “softening” happening both ways. Singing next to each other and entraining to one another allows one to feel a sense of affiliation towards their fellow singer. Shape note singing's unwritten rule that largely leaves politics and religion out of the discussion likely means no profound shifts can take place but conversations can and do happen outside of “the square” in social contexts. It is also important to note that although the majority of shape note singers are Christian, cis, heteronormative and white where politics and religious beliefs remain largely invisible, there are also queer, trans and BIPOC singers who travel to sing.

Negotiating Difference

Most of the Toronto singers that I have interviewed, particularly those who have had the opportunity to travel to the South to sing, have come to appreciate and even embrace the opportunity to sing with folks with a different set of shared beliefs than the folks at

home. This is partly because the tension that might exist in contexts where overt expressions of religion is allowed is tempered somewhat within a shape note context. Nevertheless, most singers I interviewed had a story or two about this “unwritten rule” being broken and the discomfort it caused. Chuck Crawford talked about a time when a singer took an opportunity to proselytize.

I can remember someone, I guess it was a prayer, or maybe it was just an introducer picking a song, but it became a kind of sermon about something in the song and he made some comment about, “Some of you, just because you sing this stuff, isn't going to keep you from going to hell.” (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020)

Although experiences like this are rare, a few people referenced an elective class they attended at Camp Fasola in 2017, run by a prominent guest elder who is very respected in the shape note community.¹⁵ I attended his elective class twice before 2017 and recall really enjoying it. It was a lovely combination of his stories of singing as a child coupled with musings on the words in the book. In 2017, the majority of singers from Toronto who attended the singing walked out after what they described as a racist tangent on immigration alongside a reading of the words to “Whitestown” (*The Sacred Harp* 1991, 211). “Whitestown” is a song that is deeply problematic and almost never sung. As the name might imply, it is a blatant example of white supremacy remaining in the book. The words, written by Isaac Watts in 1719 are as follows:

*Where nothing dwelt but beast of prey,
Or men as fierce and wild as they,*

¹⁵ This occurred at the “Adult Emphasis” week of Camp Fasola. “Kids Camp” happens a few weeks later.

*He bids th'opressed and poor repair
And build them towns and cities there*

*They sow the fields, and trees they plant
Whose yearly fruit supplies their want
Their race grows up from fruitful stock
Their wealth increases with their flock. (Ibid)*

Some blamed what happened in the elective class on old age and others felt it was a result of hate and division that had been brought to the surface by the Trump government. In the *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings* from that day the person taking notes wrote the following. “[He] read the text of 211 with reflections on its application to the history of America.” (*Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings 2017-2018*, 192) Since then this person has not been asked to host an elective at camp.

I think about the divides that exist in the community a lot, perhaps because I have spent so much time writing about the Toronto Group and have travelled a fair amount to sing in the United States. Critically unpacking the ways I have justified travelling to sing in the South and my participation in the, almost entirely white-presenting, Toronto group has allowed me to look closer at what I’ve chosen to selectively ignore about the tradition. By default I am afforded a sense of belonging and safety as a cis het, white woman. Even if I feel like a social, political and religious outsider, I travel with an immense amount of privilege in these spaces. The shape note tradition’s unwritten rules about keeping politics and religion to oneself primarily benefits white, cis het people who can travel in these spaces without wearing any “difference” on their sleeve. The things that make me different that could cause any conflict are entirely invisible in this context. Over the last few years queer and racialized singers have

begun to come forward to talk about the issues with micro-aggressions they have experienced while singing this music, something I will spend a bit more time discussing in the following chapter. For singers in the Toronto group there are mixed views on singing with people with different social, political, and religious beliefs. In general, singers say a willingness to overlook these differences is necessary for the future of the tradition and that singing this music is not a political or religious act one way or another. Frank Griggs spoke about the politicizing of certain churches in the United States noting the stark difference between those churches and shape note singing:

I don't think [shape note singing] has political consequence. But it doesn't have to. It's not a political thing. It's just something else. It's a hobby, it's a spiritual pursuit... I think it seems like sort of a more pure spiritual practice in that sense to me because of that, the diversity of value systems and points of view. And it is attractive to me. Like I like that about it. But again, beyond that I don't want to give it sort of any added weight or significance but I think it is something that's special about this tradition. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Religion might have been a hurdle for “non-believers” who wanted to learn about this music in the past but a few Toronto singers noted that it is no longer an issue for them. Chuck Crawford spoke about participating in singings in the south with his wife Pleasance,

I generally don't talk to a lot of people, but the ones that we've met frequently enough to remember, I really don't know anything about their politics exactly. But their religion is pretty clear. But it's not a sticking point for them. I mean it was in the past for some of them. But what was the sticking point was

that we weren't believers, and they couldn't understand singing it and not believing it. (Interview with the author; 06-04-2020)

Nicole Collins told me that singing with people who are religious is one of the things she really appreciates about the tradition.

I like the fact that we actually sing with people who are religious. I would like to say that. I appreciate their presence and their feeling of sacredness in it. I'm very, I hope, very respectful of it because I think people should be able to come there and sing and not feel like... "Oh, it's all just folk singing." (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

I also like the fact that I sing with people who have different political and religious beliefs and enjoy participating in an activity that reaches beyond my own small circle of like-minded friends. In an increasingly divided political climate, there is something about coming together to sing despite religious and political difference that feels important. Naomi Duguid spoke with me about the feeling of "softening" towards one another through the act of singing and trying to not be reminded of how different you might actually be because it could impede the connection you feel for one another.

The second thing, which is how we keep connection, or how we feel connection with people, even though we are from other parts of the political planet. That's a question. And I think I was so aware of it at camp, of course, and that's where sometimes the possibility of the religion, of the language, in the words, because it means such different things to the people who are on the other part of the political spectrum, the words risk ... I mean, I have to sometimes, I had to at camp, sometimes not think about the words, because they had such weight

for some of the people I was singing with. And if I thought about that weight, it would make me feel like I ... not that I didn't belong, but it would remind me of the distance. And I didn't want to be reminded of the distance, I wanted to feel together with the people I was singing with... You know, you just sort of like, I'm keeping it at bay, to not be reminded of our difference. Because I don't want to be reminded of our difference... So, with this sort of a passionate Southern Baptist, true believer style of singing, and you can't necessarily tell, but sometimes you can tell. And when you can tell, when that's front and center, that's what this is about for that person, then for them it's not about shape note, it's about the belief first. (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

Within the Toronto group the no politics or religion rule is not so hard and fast. There is an understanding that the majority (though not all) Toronto singers fall left of center on the political spectrum and most singers are “non-believers” although many still consider shape note to have an important spiritual component for them. Also, in general singers in the Toronto group know one another better and many have cultivated friendships with one another. I can recall a singer calling a song in memory of Jack Layton the leader of Canada’s New Democrats shortly after he passed away of cancer in 2011. Before the pandemic, thoughtful conversations were happening about how to be more inclusive and create a space where people of different backgrounds would feel safe to attend the monthly sing in Toronto and the Central Ontario Convention.

Unlikely Friendships in the Toronto Group

While deep friendships might be less likely to form between travelling singers and locals there are many unlikely friendships that exist within the Toronto group. This is particularly true with intergenerational friendship. Thanks to shape note singing I have a few good friends in their fifties, sixties and seventies. Other singers in the Toronto group who are also in their 30s have had the same experience. Andrew Louis told me he thought that shape note singing was a distinctive place to interact with people older than you, "It's like hanging out with people I wouldn't otherwise hang out with, that's the really nice part of it. Hanging out with Tony, who is in his 80s, I think it's great. It's so ... Where else am I hanging out with 80-year-olds?" (Interview with the author; 28-01-2020) Frank Griggs also noted that in work, school and socially we are often siloed with people of a similar age. The Toronto Group offers a unique opportunity for friendship.

Shape note, has given me access to people who are in their 60s, some of whom I've become very close friends with... it's just been an amazing opportunity for sharing of personal experiences, perspectives with people who ... I just would not even have access to probably without this shared interest. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Naomi Duguid, a singer in her early 70s, spoke about the privilege of meeting different people that has been afforded to us through this shared hobby.

At shape note, there's different worlds crossing. What's really fun has been to discover, to have friendships, because it widens out all our worlds. That we know Frank, that we know Kathleen, that this is a lovely gift. But they're all people that we've become, I mean, you've become friends with, I've become

friends with, because actually we share a lot. We have come from different places, different generations, different milieu, but in fact we have a lot in common. (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

Vulnerability

In exploring the role interpersonal synchrony plays in musical and social aspects of this tradition I had not considered that through interpersonal synchrony and entrainment we become more vulnerable to an exchange of affect. A heightened sense of vulnerability during Sacred Harp sings was felt and described by members of the Toronto group without my prompting. Five of the singers I interviewed brought up the concept of “vulnerability,” and the idea that the act of singing in this manner could elicit an involuntary and often shared, emotional response.

For many Sacred Harp hobbyists, sharing their singing voice in a public space is something quite intimate and shape note singing has provided a safe outlet for judgement-free vocal expression. Andrew Louis was the first person I interviewed for this project and was the first person to bring this up. The vulnerability in shape note singing is something that connects you to your fellow singer, “When you’re singing you are kind of exposing your weaknesses, or your... I don’t know. Being in a group, suddenly it’s comfortable to talk to someone because you’ve shared something through singing.” (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020).

This is not to say that singers are not worried about being judged, but rather that the observation of and participation in shared vulnerability is a pillar of the tradition and could contribute to feeling of affiliation across social, political and religious lines. The

opportunity for this kind of unbounded vocal expression in a group is unique to shape note singing. Susan Slottow, who was singing this music in the 1970s at Fiddler's Green in Toronto spoke of the inherent freedom in the tradition,

But what I do think is once you've accepted the basic shape note ethos which is all is good, that it gives you a certain sense, believe it or not, of self-worth. If you can access that, it's available to you. That whatever you do is good. Whatever you do is in fact good enough and completely valued in and of itself no matter what it is you're doing singing-wise. Because when you sing it's always becoming naked. Exposing yourself in a way. I don't feel that way about it now, but most people do and I did once upon a time. Now I don't worry about much. And if you can accept the knowledge, people don't always do it easily, that your participation in this group is valued. That's very empowering. I hate to use this language. But still, it is. And so, you have worth and self-worth right then and there, right by being there. (Interview with the author; 26-02-2020)

Naomi Duguid felt similarly, noting that shape note was a respite from a world full of judgement,

Think about the judgmentalism out there, the, "Are you thin enough? Are you strong enough? Are you smart enough? Are you on time?" All of those things, they're gone... This is a freedom from the judgementalist mindset of the larger, intrusive world." (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

There is a sense among these singers that their individual contributions to a particular singing are not related to the quality of their voice or their ability to sight sing or their overall skill. In fact, whatever they are able to bring to a singing is "good enough." In the

larger Sacred Harp context this extends to folks visiting singings from out of town. Frank Griggs noted that, conversely, it takes a certain amount of vulnerability to welcome people that are different from you into your space.

...Especially in the Sacred Harp context, I really believe that the hosts of the singing are very happy that you're there and I think that's related to... the singing is nothing without every voice in the room... And I think that it's a spirit of openness, hospitality, and ultimately I think vulnerability. You are... showing vulnerability in welcoming people that are different from you into your space. And sharing something that you have a deep love for that you know they also have a deep love for. It's like a vulnerable exchange even if you don't even speak to the person. Even if you just see them across the room, I think there's some amount of vulnerability there. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

For the past number of years, after writing my Masters' thesis and attending camp I found myself feeling more emotionally open. Once the tradition was demystified for me, I felt much more at ease with just being there as a form of self-care or as a way to engage with people without the pressure of conversation. I think that in letting myself feel vulnerable around the singers in the Toronto group I was able to form closer connections with them. This was something facilitated by singing and by the experience of a "collective effervescence" of sorts. Over the years I've occasionally been struck by how emotionally open people would allow themselves to be at our local singing. It is not uncommon, at least in Toronto, for folks to become misty-eyed or even to cry while singing. The vulnerability in sharing your voice, coupled with the poetry of the book that so often refers openly to grief, pain, and death might act as a gateway to other

interpersonal vulnerability; vulnerability that allows for more free-flowing emotional expression, particularly when it comes to sadness in everyday life. I have occasionally found myself crying with other singers after a particularly sad song, knowing that someone in the group had lost a loved one, that another was dealing with a cancer scare, that others were struggling with a chronic illness, another with an ill child, another with the recent loss of a beloved pet, another with a divorce. I often let shape note singing with the Toronto group help exercise some of my own pain and frustration as a person figuring out how to navigate the world with a new disability. Nicole Collins talked about crying at shape note gatherings, something that, for many of us, happens fairly often.

We're actually way more sensitive than we allow ourselves to be, I think.

And so, like for example, going to a shape note singing is a place where you can just like be raw, you know, you can kind of go and be a sponge and, and also if you cry, it's okay. Like nobody's going to judge you. (Interview with the author; 22-02-2020)

That is not to say shape note is a solution to these problems but rather, for many singers, it's a place where you can sing as loud as you like and you can smile and you can cry as "the spirit moves you" with a mutual vulnerability, in an emotional exchange free of judgement.

The impact of this music on the people I interviewed is vast and can be examined using theories of interpersonal synchrony and entrainment. The perceived quality of a sing is connected to how together the class feels. That connectedness, caused by the act of singing this music with focus and beating time can lead to increased feeling of

altruism and affiliation even across social, religious and political divides. The openness and vulnerability facilitated through the act of singing together further fosters this connection despite difference and offers singers a consistent social and emotional outlet for unbridled vocal expression, free from judgement.

This Chapter has explored the ways the members of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group both perceive and experience the many layers of synchrony and affiliation that exist during a shape note sing. Through insights provided in interviews I analyze the ways in which musical synchrony can transcend socio-political difference and foster community. Chapter Five represents a hard pivot in this project, and introduces the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the group's ability to maintain these connections after their singing practice is forced online.

Chapter Five – Destabilizing Interpersonal Synchrony

This chapter marks the beginning of a pivot in my research into interpersonal synchrony and entrainment within the Toronto shape note singing community and towards a body of original research that, in the end, is entirely ethnographic. At the outset of this project I had hoped to support my ethnographic research with a supplemental quantitative study. This chapter was going to focus on a time-series analysis, that is, an exploration of whether the close synchrony associated with this type of music increases prosocial feelings and group cohesion with a focus on the Toronto singers. I planned to use Mark Doffman's study "Groove: Temporality, Awareness and the Feeling of Entrainment in Jazz Performance" from the collection *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance* (2013) as a model.

As I first discussed in this project's literature review, Doffman employed a time-series analysis to study a jazz trio. He used it to explain the interpersonal dynamics within the group noting that the piano player, who continually pushed and pulled the melody, did not have as strong a relationship as the bassist and drummer who were more consistently "in sync". (Doffman 2013, 9) This, of course, appears at face value to be a simplified, even unsatisfactory explanation of why there was tension with the piano player in that particular trio. The author recognizes that this study of a single jazz trio is not enough to prove his hypothesis definitively and instead uses his work to call on ethnomusicologists to use this methodology in more robust studies. I had hoped I would be one of those folks. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic had other plans for this

project as it did for live music in general. So instead, this chapter will lean into an in-depth ethnographic look at what happened when the Toronto shape note singers could no longer gather together in person and how that left the group feeling musically and socially out-of-sync.

Much has been written about the pandemic's effect on in-person, collaborative music making. In the book, *Sounds of the Pandemic: Accounts Experiences, Perspectives in Times of COVID-19* (Agamennone et al. 2022) author Esteban Buch writes about what happened to live music during lockdown, specifically exploring the early days of social isolation, March-June 2020. (Buch 2022) He observed that, "Contrary to the image of music as a cohesive element... [the pandemic] arguably implied a partial destabilization of prevalent ontologies of sound in normative spatial configurations, such as concert halls and recording studios." (Ibid, 234) By moving their music practice online to maintain their community, shape note singers demonstrated "...a temporary redistribution of the places in which music happens, the pandemic inflected the ways in which sound itself bears witness to life." (Buch 2022, 234)

This chapter will take this a step further, looking not just at how the music itself was destabilized through technological mediation and the silencing of in-person music spaces, but at how the singers themselves were destabilized and the ways cracks formed in the shape note diaspora as a whole. In their review of articles written about how musicians were impacted by the pandemic Alex Brooks and Anjali Patel note that an underlying theme of much of the written research explored the "detrimental effects of the pandemic on psychological wellbeing across studies," noting that performing artists reported various detrimental emotional, cognitive-behavioural and health-related

effects.” (Brooks & Patel 2022, 4) The loneliness, isolation and loss of supportive community systems was something reported across studies. In the case of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group, participants I interviewed tried hard to virtually keep their community in place. There seemed to be an underlying understanding that in times of hardship and uncertainty, social networks and relationships were a key aspect of resilience. (Ibid, 6)

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Canada was announced on January 25th, 2020. (Public Health Agency of Canada 2020) Less than two months later, on March 17th, 2020, a state of emergency was declared in the province of Ontario by Premier Doug Ford. In the early weeks of the pandemic, shape note singers in Toronto were hopeful that the safety restrictions that prohibited them from gathering to sing would be brief. Many of my interviews with these singers occurred in the early months of the pandemic. At the time, most expressed sadness about the loss of their hobby but considered it temporary and looked forward to a day in the near future when they would be singing together again. The last gathering of the Toronto Shape Note group to occur before the state of emergency was declared in Ontario happened on Wednesday, February 19th, 2020. The next official third Wednesday gathering would not occur again until May 17th, 2022, nearly 27 months later. In the over two years in between, singers in the Toronto group would grasp for threads of connection, turning to online and asynchronous singing opportunities and eventually to outdoor park singings before finally, slowly, returning to indoor masked singings.

In the years since completing my primary interviews with many Toronto singers the group has changed somewhat. These changes have been influenced in part by an

aging demographic. Questions of safety with in-person singing immediately arose within the Toronto group at the outset of the pandemic. Ultimately, the people who would first begin to participate in the in-person singings (either in parks or at private homes) were folks who were comfortable with the associated risks of singing together. Sonically, a number of singers did not find singing outdoors enjoyable¹⁶, unable to sit on the grass or in a lawn chair in all manner of weather from spring to late fall, and waited for the return of the monthly indoor singing.

Over the course of the pandemic, much of our socializing moved online. The fraught political climate in the United States and Canada, exacerbated by the pandemic, caused the beginnings of a cultural reckoning within the community. The wider diaspora had to wrestle with some divisiveness just under the surface and reckon with the adage that a shape note singer should avoid talking about politics or religion in (or near) the hollow square. When, in 2020, singers became more reliant on Facebook for communication things shifted. Suddenly, you knew exactly who was liberal and who was conservative, who was a Democrat and who was a Republican. You knew who thought the attack on the Capital Building in Washington DC on January 6th, 2021 was perpetrated by Antifa. You knew who was pro-choice and you knew who believed “all-lives” mattered. You began to understand that many racialized, queer and trans folks no longer felt safe in the community due to the rhetoric they were seeing online from fellow singers. Some folks began to speak openly about micro-aggressions they had experienced at singings. The rise of Trumpism, misinformation campaigns and

¹⁶ Singing outdoors or in large, overly reflective or cavernous spaces is considered acoustically suboptimal in the shape note community.

Facebook's algorithmic privileging of the things that make us mad seemed to impact the shape note singing community a great deal. So, where this chapter was initially going to provide a quantitative exploration of interpersonal synchrony and entrainment it will instead provide a qualitative exploration of the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic destabilized interpersonal synchrony and pro-sociality within the Toronto group and the wider diaspora. This chapter will begin with an ethnographic examination of how the Toronto Group navigated moving their practice online amid the uncertain future of singing together and will conclude with a brief examination of destabilization on a macro scale as I explore the role politics, social media, and isolation has played in the community over the past few years.

The Pandemic and Social Isolation

I completed the majority of my interviews with Toronto singers in the spring of 2020 during the first lockdown in Toronto and the first COVID wave. As I am writing this in July of 2022, over two years later, we are in the midst of the city's seventh wave. It's interesting to reflect on how the Toronto singers were feeling in the early days of the global pandemic. The interviews I conducted during that time were over Zoom. I remember finding that slightly challenging, off-putting even, as I was somewhat new to the technology. It was strange to be speaking with close friends, who lived just a handful of subway stops away, through a screen. Looking back, I am thankful to have had access to technology like Zoom during this isolating time. I do feel it might have coloured the interviews slightly. It was hard to ignore the sense of melancholy that

permeated even the most hopeful thoughts shared about the future of in-person singing through this digital medium.

In our early interviews, singers Lloy Cook and Naomi Duguid both noted that of all the styles of group music making, Shape Note singing had to be one of the worst for transmitting COVID. In spring of 2020, and for the year that followed, it was hard to envision a time when singing indoors again, in the traditional style, would be safe.

It's hard for me to imagine that we're going to have a singing anytime soon. Because even when they let up, they're not going to be... They're going to be discouraging groups of people meeting. And here we are, sitting cheek-by-jowl, breathing heavily in each other's presence, that just isn't the thing to be doing right now. (Lloy Cook; Interview with the author; 16-04-2020)

Naomi Duguid also reflected on the fact that the way this particular style of music is traditionally sung, facing inward, often projecting at a high volume, would be especially transmissible. It is that traditional singing style that gives Shape Note singing its distinctive sound and it simply isn't the same without it.

The whole thing is focused at a center point. And we saw that, we've been in that room at the Quaker House where we had the chairs too far apart and it didn't sound right... I mean we know this. (Interview with the author; 22-03-2020)

It was unclear at the outset how long these restrictions would last. Nonetheless, many singers I interviewed had come to terms with the fact that the future of in-person singing was uncertain. When I asked how people felt about this new reality I was met with a lot of sadness, sometimes tears. Singers spoke about the feeling of being isolated and disconnected from their friends, family and their singing community. When I interviewed

couple Chris Taylor and Jennifer Davies they spoke of the disconnection they felt. Chris described the absence of this musical practice more in psychological terms, noting that the strength of the Toronto community made the loss of it even more challenging. “I mean, it definitely had to do with that community element to it... I can feel the kind of withdrawal from that.” (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Many singers also found themselves missing the routine of singing and feeling it's absence in those early days when the third Wednesday of each month passed by. That absence was articulated through personal anecdotes of a lost social outlet that they had come to count on. Jennifer Davies described missing the community this way:

Definitely for me, I have missed the community a lot during, for example, this period of social and physical distancing, due to COVID-19... I think we're very fortunate in Toronto. I think most of us are very likeable! We're genuinely nice people to hang around with. So, I have actually really enjoyed the people that I've gotten to meet. Chris and I noticed that right away when we went to our first couple of Shape Note sings, you're like, “I feel really close to these people in a weird way. This is really strange!” (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

As borders started to shut and annual singing conventions and all-day singings started to be cancelled many singers expressed sadness that they wouldn't connect with friends in the wider diaspora as well. Pleasance Crawford expressed disappointment that she and Chuck would no longer be able to attend the annual singing in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

That was one of the very first larger singings that was cancelled. I was really up for that. I'm sorry about the circumstances and the loss of that gathering

because we would've seen a lot of good friends from Michigan and elsewhere that we don't see very often. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

This loss of community coupled with the realization that it may be years before they would see their singing friends again in-person brought on a sense of grief. That grief was exacerbated by generalized feelings of loss and the very real risk of serious illness and death that folks were grappling with. In a way, this made some of shape note singing's more somber traditions, like the memorial lesson¹⁷ clearer to singers.

One thing that this current situation has made me realize more than ever is how I associate different songs with different people. Even if I knew that person singing that song ten or fifteen years ago and they're dead, I still think of it as their song. (Ibid)

In a strange way, it's possible the macabre themes present in *The Sacred Harp* coupled with the feelings of community one can experience when they sing this music would have helped folks process the collective grief as it unfolded over the following two and a half years. Without in-person singing the Toronto Group remained relatively siloed, without the usual richness of community connection and support. Nonetheless, as time passed the Toronto singers found ways to make music together. In April of 2020, Chris Taylor had the prescience to note that we would figure out how to get through this challenging time and would figure out how to continue to make music together.

¹⁷ The memorial lesson is a partly extra-musical tradition that occurs at Sacred Harp Conventions and All-Day singings. It consists of a free-form speech by a member of the memorial committee and a reading of two lists of names. One list for the sick and shut-in who are unable to attend the singing and another for those in the community who have passed on in since the last annual singing. The reading of each list is followed by the singing of an appropriate song from *The Sacred Harp*.

You look at us as a species over the history of any civilization, it doesn't matter. We sing, we dance, we make music collectively... I don't know if it's psychology stuff? I just know that sociologically we sing in groups... And yeah, Shape Note is a fun way of doing that, it's a very good way of doing that I think, but I'm a little biased. But I'm sure that whether it was this or something else, people will be finding ways to sing together. (Interview with the author; 05-04-2020)

Singing Through Technology

In the early months of the pandemic Toronto singers as well and singers in the wider Shape Note Community began to look for ways to sing remotely, mediated by available technology. A number of different technologies were experimented with over the pandemic, often somewhat shoehorned into use. These experiments with technology could be divided into two overarching styles: *semi-synchronous live participation* and *synchronous pre-recorded participation*. *Semi-synchronous live participation*, singing using the video conferencing technology Zoom, is the main way the Toronto Group continued singing together (figure 6). Many communities in the diaspora used Zoom and called it *zinging*. Other modes of *semi-synchronous* virtual Shape Note participation have included using Facebook live (*stringing*) and the low-latency open source software Jamulus in combination with Zoom (*jamzinging*). *Synchronous pre-recorded* Shape Note participation involved singers separately recording themselves at home to a guide track and sending it to an adept video editor in the community to assemble it. A major example of this was something called The Quarantine Chorus. Singers also

occasionally combined these digital modalities by playing YouTube videos or recordings, using Zoom and singing along with a group. In both of these particular cases singers participated in *asynchronous* entrainment; the type of entrainment where a musician coordinates with something that is temporally fixed – in this case a pre-recorded audio or video track.

This new mode of shape note participation, mediated by technology, had some benefits. For one, it allowed homebound or immunocompromised singers to participate freely. It also made it easier for singers living in regions without regular singings to participate, sometimes for the very first time, and to meet other singers in the community. The regularity of singings in the Toronto group, who opted to use Zoom, increased from once every third Wednesday of the month to every Wednesday. As a result, many singers were able to hone their practice. This was not always by choice, but rather out of necessity, as one might be called upon to lead a song alone or with a housemate or partner while others sang along on mute. In Toronto, the group's main pitcher did not attend these remote Zoom singings which meant others needed to learn by doing. But singing online through Zoom or other modalities did not work for everyone. The technological barrier was a lot for some older folks to overcome. It required a decent internet connection to start. It also relied pretty heavily on previous technological literacy with video conferencing and a newer, preferably no older than 10-year-old, computer. There were also folks I spoke with who could not suspend their disbelief enough to join in on the Zoom singings. For them, it was a stark reminder that the community they loved was not the same and might never be again. While I attended the occasional Toronto Zoom singing for research purposes, I fell pretty soundly into the

latter camp. The Zoom singings made me feel sad. I missed the feeling of singing next to my friends. But many who stuck with the weekly Zoom singings found themselves to be much stronger shape note singers two years later which today, has strengthened the group as a whole.

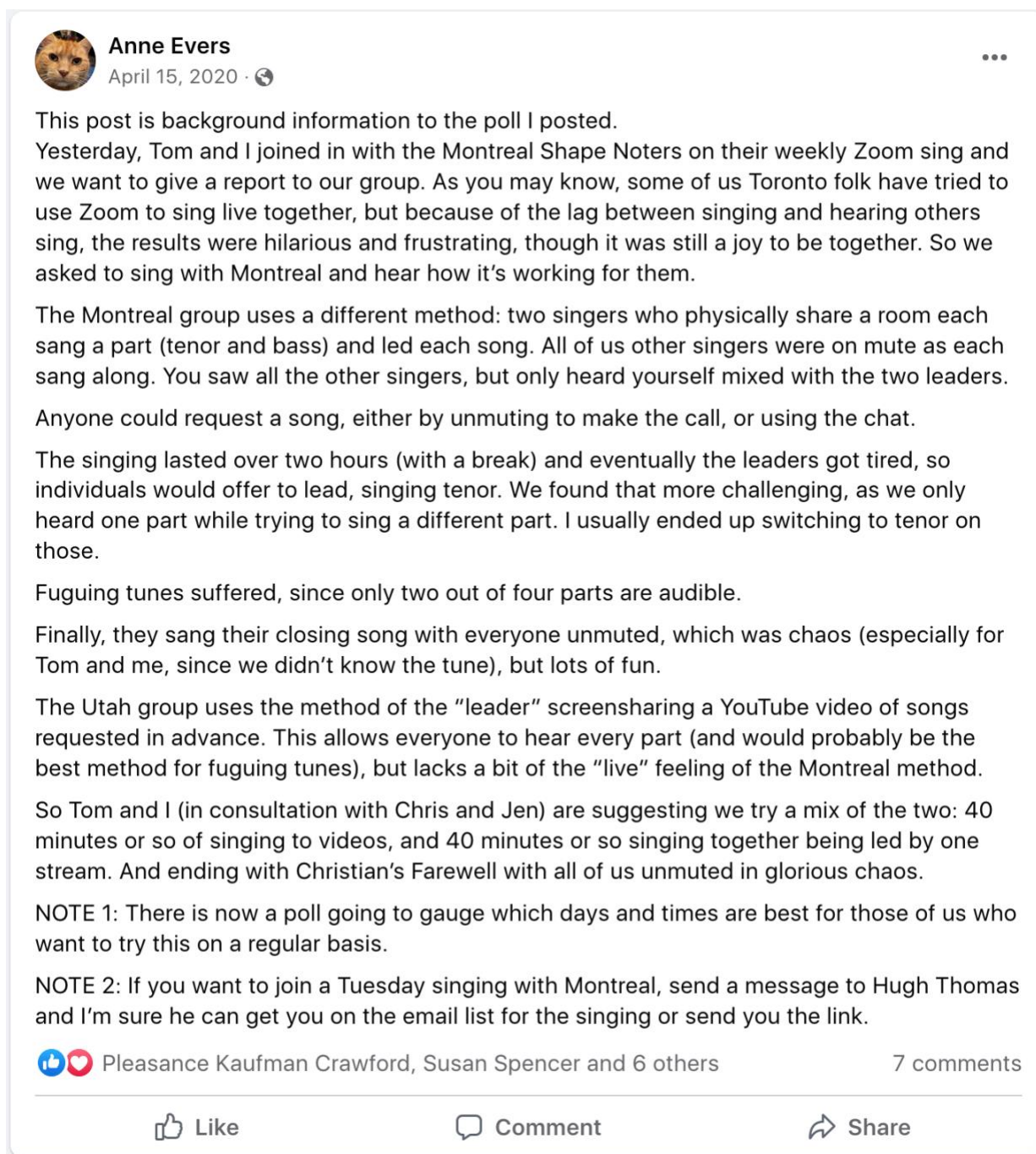
The Zoom Singings



Figure 6: Posted by singer Susan Spencer on the Toronto Shape Note singing Community Facebook page, March 23, 2020.

One such singer is Anne Evers. Though she did not initially organize these Zoom singings she spearheaded the regular organization of Toronto's weekly Zoom gatherings. Anne and her husband Tom Evers' early research into how to best use the technology helped the group fall into a steady routine of remote singing. Zoom singings were first successfully implemented in Toronto in April of 2020. The group had experimented twice in March of 2020 with Zoom prior to landing on a successful format. Initially, singers would try and sing together unmuted which led to latency issues and a great deal of frustration. As Evers recalls the meetings were initially organized by Jennifer Davies and Chris Taylor, who already had a professional Zoom account that would allow groups to gather beyond the 40-minute window that was allowed by a free account. Anne and Tom requested to attend the Montreal remote singing and saw what

they were doing there. Shortly after, Anne posted their findings to the Toronto Shape Note Singing Community Facebook page (figure 7):



Anne Evers
April 15, 2020 · 🌐

This post is background information to the poll I posted.

Yesterday, Tom and I joined in with the Montreal Shape Noters on their weekly Zoom sing and we want to give a report to our group. As you may know, some of us Toronto folk have tried to use Zoom to sing live together, but because of the lag between singing and hearing others sing, the results were hilarious and frustrating, though it was still a joy to be together. So we asked to sing with Montreal and hear how it's working for them.

The Montreal group uses a different method: two singers who physically share a room each sang a part (tenor and bass) and led each song. All of us other singers were on mute as each sang along. You saw all the other singers, but only heard yourself mixed with the two leaders. Anyone could request a song, either by unmuting to make the call, or using the chat.

The singing lasted over two hours (with a break) and eventually the leaders got tired, so individuals would offer to lead, singing tenor. We found that more challenging, as we only heard one part while trying to sing a different part. I usually ended up switching to tenor on those.

Fuguing tunes suffered, since only two out of four parts are audible.

Finally, they sang their closing song with everyone unmuted, which was chaos (especially for Tom and me, since we didn't know the tune), but lots of fun.

The Utah group uses the method of the "leader" screensharing a YouTube video of songs requested in advance. This allows everyone to hear every part (and would probably be the best method for fuguing tunes), but lacks a bit of the "live" feeling of the Montreal method.

So Tom and I (in consultation with Chris and Jen) are suggesting we try a mix of the two: 40 minutes or so of singing to videos, and 40 minutes or so singing together being led by one stream. And ending with Christian's Farewell with all of us unmuted in glorious chaos.

NOTE 1: There is now a poll going to gauge which days and times are best for those of us who want to try this on a regular basis.

NOTE 2: If you want to join a Tuesday singing with Montreal, send a message to Hugh Thomas and I'm sure he can get you on the email list for the singing or send you the link.

👍❤️ Pleasance Kaufman Crawford, Susan Spencer and 6 others 7 comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Figure 7: A post by Anne Evers explaining how the Montreal Shape Note Group sings together on Zoom, April 15, 2020.

The group landed on Wednesdays to start this new iteration of remote singing in Toronto and began singing nearly every Wednesday thereafter for around 18 months. The invitation for each weekly event would go out via Facebook and through Pleasance Crawford's email list. The following is text from an invitation to the Toronto Zoom singing in June, 2020.

Join us to be social and test your technology 7:15-7:30, and we will start singing promptly at 7:30pm. Those who would like to lead will be invited to lead two tunes (or only one if you want). We will also make a playlist of YouTube videos we can sing along with. We place a call for requests for this playlist the day before. Please post those requests on our Facebook page. We may not get through everything every week, but we can try. Pleasance Crawford will send out the Zoom link via email. Please use the same link each week. (posted on The Toronto Shape Note Singing Community Facebook Page by Jennifer Davies advertising a Zoom singing on June 3rd, 2020)

The Toronto group settled into a singing structure fairly quickly. Singers would gather via the Zoom link at 7:15pm ET for a 15-minute long social catch-up before starting the "Zinging". During the first half of the singing, from approximately 7:30-9pm folks who had prepared in advance to lead would take their turn leading. This was most effective when leaders lived together, as was the case with couples Chris and Jennifer, Pleasance and Chuck, and Anne and Tom. Each pair would then perform two parts of a given song while the other singers on the call would mute themselves and sing along (figure 8). With the Zoom method, it meant singers at home alone would only hear a maximum of three parts at a time (the leader or leaders' voices and their own).



Figure 8: A photo of an early Zoom singing hosted by the Toronto Shape Note Group.
April 22, 2020

At around 45-minutes into the singing, the group would switch from “live” leaders to singing along with something pre-recorded, usually a YouTube playlist. When I attended the Toronto group’s zingings I noted that the majority of the YouTube videos used were from the Annual Ireland Sacred Harp singing conventions, whose recordings, created and posted by CorkSacredHarp on YouTube are known for being high quality. Toronto singers would then mute themselves and sing along to the video (figure 9).

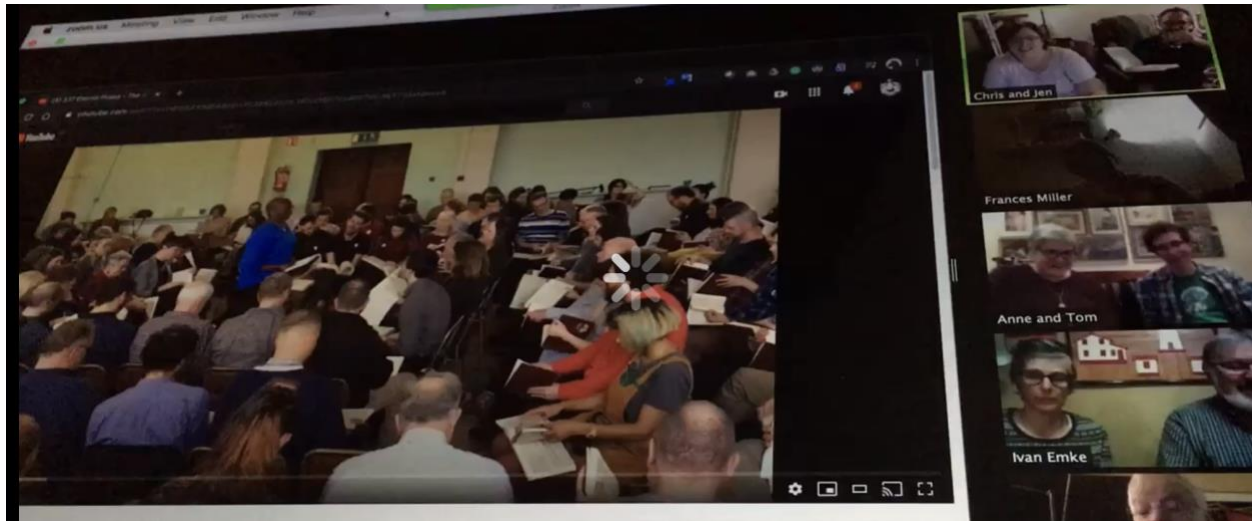


Figure 9: Singers in the Toronto Group sing along to a pre-recorded video of a Sacred Harp singing the meeting host has accessed via YouTube. April 22, 2020.

YouTube

YouTube has played an important role in the modern singing community for at least the past decade. It has served as a repository for historical film and video of singers and singings past. At the same time, it is a tool that facilitates education and knowledge transfer. On YouTube, there are countless examples of experienced singers leading a class. A singer interested in learning a song from the book that they have not led before need only look up that song using the platform's search engine to find and select a video to practice with. Similarly, YouTube's importance as a cultural transmitter, and disseminator of Shape Note pedagogy cannot be understated. The Toronto group's decision to use YouTube videos in the second half of their Zoom singings has allowed them to dive deeper into the book and sing new songs together without worry about folks struggling to sight read new parts. In our interview, Anne Evers expressed that she was really grateful to have had the opportunity to "sing through the book" rather than sticking to favorites with the occasional new tune in the monthly in-person meetings. At

the Toronto group's previous practice singings there was often an understandable lack of adventurousness. Singers were far more likely to call songs they knew and that the group knew so as to keep up the momentum of the monthly singing which, pre-pandemic, was usually the group's only monthly gathering. The Zoom singings included singers from outside Toronto who were unfamiliar with what had been deemed "chestnuts"¹⁸ by the Toronto group. The support of YouTube videos meant that Zoom singers could explore more of the book. Some singers expressed gratitude that the Zoom singing format led them to become stronger singers who knew the book better. This was particularly true for Evers,

The thing I'm so grateful for, for me personally, out of this whole mess has been I have sung almost the entire book... at least a huge chunk, and I've gotten so much more confident in keying, obviously, because I'm keying all the time, and then just sight reading... So back in the days when a newcomer would come and go, "I'm not going to pick [a song], because I don't know anything," and everyone's going, "Oh, pick one. Pick one," and I would be cringing, like, "Oh, god. They're going to pick something that we do not know and it's going to be a disaster," and I never liked it. I feel so much more confident. I'm like, "Sure. Pick one. We'll muddle our way through it." (Interview with the author; 24-08-2021)

¹⁸ "Chestnuts" are how the Toronto group has referred to the songs from *The Sacred Harp* that they can perform with confidence in a monthly singing.

The Quarantine Chorus

During the pandemic, many choirs chose to present their work virtually. This involved recording individual parts along to a guide track and submitting the audio, sometimes with video, to be assembled in post-production. Shape Note singers were no different and in the first six months of the pandemic they produced a number of video collaborations.

One notable video-based group that many Toronto singers participated in was aptly named The Quarantine Chorus. The Quarantine Chorus consisted of two collaborative videos contributed to by singers all over the world, and edited and compiled by singer, Timothy Morton. The final videos were presented in an impressive VR format. Morton took each individual video that was sent and cut out the solo singer using a masking tool. He then placed them in their respective section; Treble, Alto, Tenor or Bass. Individual audio tracks needed to be lined up manually and mixed down by section. The resulting video places the listener in the center of the hollow square as the sections move around them. These two videos were created in the first months of the global lockdown, and presented singers with a mode of community participation that resulted in what was, at the time, a novel facsimile of an in-person singing. The singers I spoke with said they enjoyed being able to pick out the voices of their friends (figure 10).

Many singers who chose to participate in The Quarantine Chorus found it challenging in a number of ways. To begin, there were the technical considerations of the project which included figuring out how to sing along to a guide track (asynchronous entrainment) and how to create a video with decent, semi-isolated sound. Another

challenge that was a through-line of annoyance, even distress, for the duration of the pandemic, had to do with singers seeing themselves on camera and hearing their voices isolated on a recording for the first time. Rather than hearing themselves as a part of a sonic whole as they would at a regular in-person singing they were now presented with the sound of their solo voice. Pleasance Crawford described this experience as something shared with many singers,

Nearly everybody who's done it that I've spoken to has found it a challenge. Not just a technological challenge but an emotional challenge and a difficult thing to do to hear yourself and see yourself, all of that ... But it was interesting that so many people felt that same way. We're self-critical and then, came around just because (we) wanted to be a part of it. (Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

The Quarantine Chorus only made two videos together. Another collaborative video group called Dispersed Harmonies continued creating videos in a similar fashion for a little longer with some participation from Toronto group members. Eventually though, this joint filmmaking came to an end. This appeared to indicate that, while it was novel and nice to see your singing friends from around the world assembled in this way, it was also a lot of work for both the video participants and the organizers and editors.



Figure 10: A screenshot taken of the [YouTube video link](#) to The Quarantine Chorus' rendition of "Easter Anthem". Posted April 12, 2020.

Jamulus and JamKazam

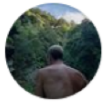
In the article "Like Pieces in a Puzzle': Online Sacred Harp Singing During COVID-19 Pandemic" (2021) Esther M. Morgan-Ellis explores the various technical modalities employed by Shape Note singers in North America during the pandemic as a participant-observer. She notes that groups used three primary modalities to sing together online, "groups of Sacred Harp singers quickly and independently devised a

variety of means by which to sing together online using Zoom (“zinging”), Jamulus (“jamzinging”), and Facebook Live (“stringing”).” (Morgan-Ellis 1, 2021)

While the Toronto group primarily used Zoom in the early months of 2021, singers Anne Evers, Tom Evers and Frank Griggs began to explore the possibility of using low-latency technologies such as Jamulus and JamKazam. In theory, such technology would allow singers to actually sing together and hear one another without a noticeable delay, something that was impossible with Zoom. Shape Note singing with Jamulus was pioneered in Philadelphia with other recurring Jamulus singings taking place in the Bay Area, Omaha and Boulder. (Ibid 5, 2021) It was colloquially referred to as “jamzinging” because it made use of both Jamulus and Zoom at the same time. Jamulus was used to transmit and receive low latency audio and Zoom was muted and used strictly for the video. Additionally, those without the ability to use Jamulus¹⁹ were still able to participate by singing along on mute. (Ibid)

Frank Griggs was the first to publicly suggest that the Toronto group try low latency technology after successfully rehearsing with another choir using it. He initially suggested trying JamKazam, a program similar to Jamulus that his Georgian choir had been using after finding Zoom singing frustrating. He posted the suggestion on the Toronto Shape Note Singing Community Facebook page (figure 11).

¹⁹ At the time of writing the technical requirements to use Jamulus include: a wired internet connection, wired headphones, and a reasonable audio device, soundcard and/or microphone.



Frank Griggs

Admin · March 9, 2021 · 🌐



An invitation for synchronous singing: There is software that (with a bit of gear) allows for remote group singing!

[Darbazi](#) has been rehearsing with a software called Jamkazam, and, aside from a few pops and clicks, it feels remarkably like being in the room together.

I'm posting here to see if anybody has an appetite for trying some shape note singing with the Jamkazam software. I'm posting the gear requirements below. If you're a musician and already have some of these things, that's fabulous; otherwise it does require a bit of investment.

Have a look, and if you're interested in trying it, send me a message. And please feel free to comment on this post with any technical questions.

As distance contributes to audio latency (the main challenge of synchronous singing software), I'd like to keep the experiment to the GTA and surrounding areas if possible, but if you have friends in nearby regions you think would like to join, we can give it a try.

Figure 11: A screenshot of a post written by Frank Griggs on The Toronto Shape Note Singing Community Facebook page explaining how to use the low latency software JamKazam. March 9, 2021.

Frank also noted that successfully employing this technology for the most synchronous possible experience required four things:

1. A wired Ethernet connection as Wifi creates too much latency
2. An audio interface such as a Focusrite Scarlett

3. A vocal microphone, like a Shure SM58 (although he does not mention it in the post this would also require an XLR cable to connect to the interface)
4. Closed-ear headphones, not earbuds. (Griggs 2021)

It initially seemed that in order to participate singers would need the same kind of basic home studio separate setup required of musicians. Later, after researching other singings that used Jamulus, Griggs noted that the interface may not be necessary, and that a USB microphone might suffice. The problem with implementing low-latency technology like Jamulus and JamKazam was of course, the high barrier-to-entry. Nonetheless, Frank, Anne and Tom tried experimenting with JamKazam

Then we got with Frank to try (JamKazam) and that was kind of fun hearing his voice in our heads, but it also never went anywhere, never could get it together. And we just felt like people are so not tech savvy. They can barely do Zoom. (Anne Evers, Interview with the author; 24-08-2021)

The three realized that it would be too challenging to implement either technology with the Toronto group, also noting that the Toronto Zoom singing had attracted some regular singers from far away and the further in geographic distance one is from the Jamulus or JamKazam host, the more latency that is introduced. Low latency technology like Jamulus is still developing. The singers that Morgan-Ellis spoke to noted that it would often be crackly and tinny (Morgan-Ellis 5, 2021). The technology just wasn't there yet and Anne Evers notes that "if somebody could really make it actually work for people at home with their minimal tech maybe in 10 years or five years it'll be doable." (Interview with the author; 24-08-2021)

Singing online has had its benefits of course, it has allowed those who have participated to keep in touch during a very isolating time and to strengthen their singing and sight-reading chops. Anne Evers found herself in a position of leadership, booking and running the Zoom singings (figure 12). She also had to teach herself how to pitch songs and the weekly Zoom meetings meant that in the over two years she sang nearly every song in the book. She also found herself closer with the folks that attended the Zoom singings regularly.

I have gotten closer to Chuck and Pleasance (Crawford) over these two years... We had Susan Spencer over the other night to Shenandoah together.²⁰ I've known these people for 20 years, and yet I'm getting to know them even better. (Ibid)

While all this new technology could be confusing, and likely excluded some from participating, it also allowed folks who had otherwise been unable to sing due to geography or disability to participate. In some ways, Shape Note singing became more accessible than ever before. Nonetheless, Zoom can be frustrating. I participated in around four Zoom singings with the Toronto group in two years. Anne echoed my frustration noting that she looked forward to a time when she would no longer need to organize Zoom singings.

I was curious if Anne felt that online singing and some combination of imagination had ever caused that elusive feeling of collective joy that shape note singers traditionally refer to as "The Spirit Coming In". She replied, "It does not happen

²⁰ *The Shenandoah Harmony* is a Shape Note songbook with a concentration on early nineteenth century music from the Shenandoah Valley. The Toronto Singers usually organize a few dedicated Shenandoah singings each year.

online. There's nothing about online singing that comes close to that. It's really just about maintaining the group.” (Ibid)



Figure 12: Anne Evers leads a group of singers at the Detweiler Meetinghouse in North Dumfries, Ontario on the second day of the 2nd Central Ontario Convention. Photograph by Tom Evers, used with permission, 2019.

Park Singing

In-person park singing began in Toronto as restrictions started to ease and then started and stopped with subsequent lockdowns. Anne spoke of an early singing at Fred Hamilton Park in Toronto’s west end describing a woman who had stopped by to listen.

Her mother died recently and she heard us singing something about life or heaven or something. And she was just really moved by it. So it's been helping

her. She doesn't want to sing. She doesn't want to be part of it. She just wants to listen, and it's been helping her dealing with her grief. So we've had encounters like that... There's a human connection. When Chuck and Pleasance were here and the four of us were just kind of singing together. It was just lovely. And yeah, nothing about online does that. Absolutely nothing. It's just not there. And yeah, I've done a Zoom choir, it's almost worthless. It's just the social connection.

(figure 13; Ibid)



Figure 13: Members of The Toronto Shape Note Group gather at Fred Hamilton Park to sing. Photograph by the author. August 21, 2021.

Émile Durkheim referred to religious groups that practice rhythmic rites as

“positive cults” and noted that even secular gatherings that employ these practices can take on aspects of religious gatherings. (Durkheim 1912, 285) Although many who sing shape note music consider their practice to be secular, rhythmic synchronization can trigger collective feelings of euphoria, an experience that Durkheim called “collective effervescence”. Collective effervescence, is referred to in many shape note singing circles as “the spirit coming in”. It is something that singers told me they did not experience during Zoom singings. The park gatherings offered a welcome alternative to meeting in person. Many Toronto singers so enjoyed these gatherings that they have continued meeting at the park even as COVID restrictions lifted. Others I spoke to found it less enjoyable noting that it was uncomfortable to publicly sing music with religious lyrics and that outdoor singing was acoustically suboptimal. For Durkheim, one cannot separate the “rite” from the religion. In our case, one cannot really separate in-person, indoor singing from the shape note tradition. This is because the rhythmic rites in shape note are so impacted by the performance environment and acoustics. The tradition and the practice are inextricably linked. Traditional shape note singing offers a shared musical practice that strengthens communal bonds, through shared ritual. Durkheim writes,

Religion would not be religion, if it did not make some place for the free combinations of thought and activity, for play, for art, for all those things that renew the spirit worn down by the constraints of daily labor; the very causes that called religion into existence make it a necessity. (Durkheim, 284).

Online singings and park singings were not meant to replace indoor singings. They were about maintaining a thread of social connection during an unprecedented period of isolation (figure 14).



Figure 14: The Toronto singers brave the weather at Fred Hamilton Park. Photograph from The Toronto Shape Note Singing Facebook page, used with permission.

Disconnection, Social Isolation, and Facebook

The pandemic physically separated the majority of us from our friends and family and from other social support systems. As we became more isolated from in-person supports many of us turned increasingly to online communities. In the case of shape note singing, many members of the diaspora turned to the online communities once used primarily to organize in-person events, to connect with fellow singers and to lean on one another as a means of social support. Increased time spent online coupled with a number of seismic world events led to the sharing of personal grievances and fears. This section will not look deeply at those events but will instead comment on the

divisiveness and disconnection that singers in the Toronto group experienced and observed with a focus on the social media platform, Facebook.

An Unwritten Rule of Sacred Harp Singing

When I first attended a third Wednesday meeting of the Toronto Shape Note Group at Bloor Street United Church in 2011, I was struck by how disorienting I found it. Before I attended, I had done research on the music itself but one thing I had very little understanding of was *who* was singing this music. Walking up to Bloor Street United Church that day I naively expected the group I encountered to at least somewhat reflect the diversity one sees in Toronto. Instead, I noted that there was not one visibly racialized singer in the group of twenty or so singers. The group appeared to be completely made up of white folks. I remember being struck by the extra-musical movement involved in the practice, beating time and leading. I wondered if I had perhaps walked into a room of socially conservative, religious people who sang this music as a form of ecstatic worship. I wondered if I, a non-believer, was invading a religious practice.

As I got to know many of the members of the Toronto Group through one-on-one conversations and interviews during my Master's research, I came to understand that the religious beliefs of the group ranged from atheist to practicing Christian. Some singers considered their participation in the Toronto Group to be a form of religious practice but the majority of folks saw the monthly singing as a hobby, or at most, as a spiritual practice somewhat divorced from their own personal religious beliefs. Everyone

that I interviewed valued the sense of community and the physical act of singing in a room together with others.

Early on, I learned that it was considered inappropriate to discuss politics or religion in the hollow square. This was considered especially impolite when leading. Although the Toronto group was never very strict about this (I can recall a singer dedicating a song to the late, federal NDP leader Jack Layton after he passed away from cancer) it was understood that too much political talk could negatively impact the cohesiveness of the group. In fact, I think many would say that one of the benefits of singing this music is that you might sing next to folks with different political viewpoints which, in turn, could allow friendships to form across social, political and religious lines.

This unwritten rule was something that was also actively practiced, even taught, at Camp Fasola. I remember feeling nervous the first time that I sang in the South at the Aldridge Memorial at Johnson Schoolhouse in Pleasant Hill, Alabama. I was on my way to camp and this was my first southern singing. Although I had become more familiar with the tradition, I found myself feeling similarly to the way I had felt during that first singing in Toronto. I took in the wonderful sonic experience in that room with many lifelong singers, born into the tradition but was also somewhat disoriented. I was in a room of mostly Southern folks dressed in their Sunday best. The homogeneity in appearance was there again, aside from a few folks who were clearly headed to camp. I assumed in that moment that if some of the people there knew my political and religious beliefs I might not have been welcomed with smiles and open arms. Of course, the views of traditional singers also range widely but there was a real fish-out-of-water feeling that was exacerbated every time someone asked if I wanted to lead a song with

my “husband”, a friend who I had carpooled to camp with who also happened to be gay. I was uncomfortable for both of us but imagine that first singing might have been a little more awkward and possibly more challenging for him than for me. After that first camp and subsequent singing in the south I came to realize that there is an understanding among local Southern singers that visiting singers might not share in the region’s prevailing religious and political viewpoints. Rather, there was to be a mutual understanding that we might all rub off on one another. For Christian singers they understand the Northern revivalists might be self-described non-believers but at the end of the day are singing music with Christian lyrics and a Christian message. For politically left-leaning visitors there is sometimes an altruistic belief that singing with folks with opposing political beliefs could mean exposing them to more socially left-leaning and inclusive ideas.

The widely held belief that one should refrain from speaking about politics and religion extended to the weekly Zoom singings in Toronto during the pandemic. There were a few folks regularly joining the Toronto Zoom from the Southern United States. When I spoke with Anne Evers about it, she said the group was trying to be careful and not to make presumptions about one another or discuss politics, “It’s not like people aren’t willing to make comments, but we’re trying to... I think everyone’s trying not to be inflammatory.” (Anne Evers, Interview with the author; 24-08-2021)

During the pandemic, the political landscape felt particularly fraught. This was true here in Canada but it was particularly true in the United States after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Social media websites, like Facebook, who understood that

anger is a form of engagement that keeps people on their platform, added fuel to the fire. Stark political lines were drawn that pitted folks firmly on one side or the other.

The Positive Side of Social Media

In many ways, social media has been a boon for shape note singing. It has been used as a way for the wider diaspora to stay connected. The Facebook group *Shape Note Singing Friends* has followers from all over the world. Facebook 'invites' have served as an important way for groups to communicate about their conventions and all-day singings. Facebook is also regularly used to organize housing for out-of-town singers. For the Toronto Group, it has been used to invite local and visiting singers to the third Wednesday singings as well as to invite singers to other, less-frequent, singing events such as monthly Shenandoah singings and the annual Central Ontario All-Day singing.

Aside from the obvious organizational benefits of Facebook, many Shape Note singers who travel to other places to sing noted that Facebook is a way to stay connected with singing friends you meet on the road. It's a way to keep up with the goings on in someone's life from afar.

...When I see someone that I haven't seen for months or for the year, let's say I'd be able to see them at an annual singing. I feel we're a little bit more up to speed than we otherwise would be because we're Facebook friends, and that's really nice. You don't start where you left off a year ago. You start from the last post they made, that sort of thing. (Pleasance Crawford, Interview with the author; 28-02-2020)

Many folks I spoke to in the Toronto group in 2020 thought of Facebook as a tool that was largely positive for the wider community because it was a way to keep in touch with fellow singers. But feelings about the platform ranged with some singers voicing it was too much pressure to keep up with. Susan Slottow mentioned that she felt folks would often compare their local singings to the singings in other cities.

I don't look at other singings and go "Oh, our singing isn't like that." Social media lends itself to comparison. They do this, we don't do this. Who cares? We do what we do and it's fine. (Susan Slottow, Interview with the author; 16-04-2020)

Frank Griggs, an internet and tech savvy member of the group who also runs a popular blog, has a far more pragmatic view of Facebook but understands why it's a popular platform for Shape Note groups and singers alike.

...People are flying all over the country to attend singings and support singings from other communities that are sometimes really far away, which is a really amazing thing, you now have friends that are really far away from you. Facebook is a great tool to stay connected to the larger community and to stay in contact with, to share things, if you want to think of Facebook as a sharing platform, which I personally don't... But I mean it does have that functionality but it's an ad platform with sharing features. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

Very few of the people I spoke to in the Toronto Group thought of Facebook as an ad platform even though that is the primary way Facebook and Facebook's parent company Meta make money. The implications of Facebook as an ad platform have had deep repercussions as it is in the platform's best interest to keep people online and

engaged as long as possible. Furthermore, a Facebook-funded study published in 2014 exploring “social contagion” on Facebook found that posts that conveyed emotion, whether positive or negative in nature, could increase engagement. (Kramer, Guillory, Hanock, 2014) This is particularly true for negative posts. With more and more Shape Note singers from all over the world connected via Facebook it was really no wonder some singers started to notice that their social and political views did not always align with those of their Shape Note singing friends.

Desynchronization and the Negative Impact of Social Media on the Shape Note Singing Diaspora

Facebook, particularly at a time of heated political divisiveness in the United States with the election of Donald Trump, and during the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic, was a platform for online disagreement and outright conflict for Shape Note singers. This could be seen both on a micro, interpersonal scale and on a macro scale that appeared to impact the cohesiveness of the wider diaspora.

I personally noticed this dichotomy around 2016 after attending Camp Fasola in Alabama. On the one hand, the platform allowed me to connect with the singers I met there and keep in touch. On the other, I was now, at least in some cases, privy to their social, political and religious points of view and these often did not align with my own. On occasion, I found myself feeling upset when someone I met and genuinely liked expressed views on social media that I felt were misinformed or xenophobic. Similarly, I imagine some felt the same way about me.

Back in 2016, shortly after I returned from my first camp (with a number of new Facebook friends) I came across a group of anti-abortion demonstrators at Bloor and Dundas in Toronto. I naively took to Facebook to express my anger at being approached by these folks as I was trying to walk by. I wanted to warn my friends in the area to avoid that intersection. Later, I noticed a few folks I met at camp had unfollowed me. While I cannot be sure, I suspect my anger toward these demonstrators was the reason why. Later, when I spoke with Frank Griggs about it, he asked why I hadn't had my new Facebook friends from the South on "limited profile", a feature that allows you to choose who sees which posts. I admitted I hadn't thought about it but found myself wondering if it might have been more in-line with the ethos of the tradition to keep my singing friends from seeing every post of mine. But why would I censor myself on Facebook? That idea felt a bit strange to me. At the time, I did not understand how Facebook operated, that their algorithms were prioritizing posts that expressed strong emotions, and that they had even funded research that concluded that the more their users were exposed to strong emotions the longer they were likely to engage with the platform (Kramer, Guillory, Hanock, 2014).

On Facebook, the more we engage the more ad revenue Facebook makes. So, it follows that every post one makes contributes to the ouroboros that is "engagement", keeping our friends online for longer. Frank Griggs has been skeptical of Facebook for almost as long as I've known him. When we spoke about some of the recent conflict that had arrived on the worldwide shape note group *Shape Note Singing Friends* Facebook page he expressed his frustration that there wasn't a better community-wide understanding of how these social media platforms were operating.

Yes, it's like, "Oh it's a free sharing tool..." Like no. I think people need to know that they are currency... every word you type is labour. Your words are a product that you are giving them for free... Their goal is just to keep you on there as long as possible and if you're angry you're engaged, you're going to stay. You're going to participate and you're going to give them more and more...
(Frank Griggs, Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

This became even more evident as the Shape Note singing community was pushed online during the pandemic and disagreements began happening more frequently on the *Shape Note Singing Friends* page. There, you could read revelations related to wider world movements including Me Too and Black Lives Matter. In particular, queer and racialized singers began sharing some negative experiences they'd had at singings which seemed to be met with support and defensiveness in equal measure. Griggs noted that while Facebook has been invaluable as an organizational tool for Shape Note Singing, it has also been rather toxic as a worldwide forum for discussion.

Locally, I would say it's practical and functional. But globally... as a large discussion forum, I would say it has shown to be pretty toxic (and) no one is really in the position to moderate or mitigate it even... and I don't know how we would talk about it civilly. You can't talk about it. You can't have a civil discussion about it without accusing people of something or people feeling accused of something... Yeah, I don't know. I'll just say I know it's important to people. People feel it's an important tool for staying connected. I personally just have a lot of problems with Facebook in general... I think ultimately, it's monetizing people's anger. I think it feeds on conflict. So, therefore when conflicts arrive

such as they have, in the Sacred Harp community... basically the platform's encouraging that kind of thing. It's not mitigating it, it's encouraging it... It's providing a forum for conflict where there never was one before. Where a sense of decorum would have prevented these kinds of conflicts from happening in a room, like a physical room. Opinions and accusations and topics can be broached that never have been before. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

In 2013, Facebook commissioned a study that was published by *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS). The article was entitled "Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks." (Kramer, Guillory, Hancock, 2014)

In an experiment with Facebook users (N = 689,003) they examined whether emotional contagion "occurs outside of in-person interaction between individuals." (Ibid) This was done by reducing the amount of what was deemed to be "emotional content" in the Facebook News Feed.

This tested whether exposure to emotions led people to change their own posting behaviors, in particular, whether exposure to emotional content led people to post content that was consistent with exposure – thereby testing whether exposure to verbal affective expressions leads to similar verbal expressions, a form of emotional contagion. (Ibid)

While this article was published in the academic journal PNAS, it was published alongside an "Editorial Expression of Concern." Within the original article the authors had noted that their work was "consistent with Facebook's Data Use Policy." (Ibid) The editors noted that it fell short of Cornell's institutional best practices and did not "fall

under Cornell's Human Research Protection Program" as the researchers did not obtain informed consent from any of the 689,003 participants.

Despite this controversy, the article offers valuable insight. In William Bainbridge's book *The Social Structure of Online Communities* he notes that "social media companies thrive by learning how to manipulate users, so naturally they conduct extensive research of this kind, without the nuisance of having to submit to universities' institutional review boards on research with human subjects." (Bainbridge 2020, 28)

The work of philosopher Tony Sampson explores contagion on the internet and notes the ways that capitalism has and will continue to "exploit consumer mood and guide intension by targeting the mostly unconscious neurological absorption of human and non-human affective contagion." (Sampson, 2011, 3) Although one cannot be sure, it does seem likely that "Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks" might have been a driver of Facebook's "Reactions," an extension of their Like button which included new, more emotional responses. In Meta's press release dated February 24, 2016 they explain how the new Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry reaction buttons came to be.

We understand that this is a big change, and we want to be thoughtful about rolling this out. For more than a year we have been conducting global research including focus groups and surveys to determine what types of reactions people would want to use most. (Meta 2016) ²¹

²¹ Note that the "Care" reaction button was introduced later in April of 2022, roughly one month after the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic.

By this time one can safely assume that Meta had a strong understanding of the impacts of exposing their users to more emotional content. It is not lost on me that the word “contagion” seems like an ironic way to explain online conflict during a global pandemic.

One major positive with the online conflict that occurred is that it has made the wider diaspora start to interrogate problems within the community and start to ask more questions about how “inclusive” the tradition really is. For one, there is a clear lack of racialized singers in the tradition despite the existence of a parallel Black tradition that was once popular in the segregated South. Nonetheless, Facebook’s algorithmic privileging of emotions like anger make some Toronto singers, including myself, question whether it is the right place for these discussions. Frank Griggs explained why he felt that taking such discussions to Facebook was not very productive,

Like the Sacred Harp Singing Friends group, there’s so many people and not to generalize, but Sacred Harp does attract some unusual people. People who are maybe seeking community. People who have very divergent beliefs obviously but also sort of different ideas about social norms. I don’t know, I would just say it’s a bad combo. You have people with sort of different social standards, wildly divergent views all in one barely moderated forum for everyone all over the world for a niche hobby. It’s just asking for trouble on a platform that monetizes anger and conflict. (Interview with the author; 18-02-2020)

It has struck me that measures introduced during lockdowns to prevent the spread of viral illness contributed to online emotional contagion and discord on social media, particularly Facebook. With singers, the positive, healthful, and prosocial

benefits of singing together in person, of synchronizing with one another together in a room, was lost during the pandemic. The lasting harm done to the shape note community remains to be seen but I suspect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for many years to come.

This chapter has explored what happened when a community of people that has inadvertently used in-person synchronous action to foster social bonds was forced online during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explored the community's attempts to recreate the sense of musical synchrony felt in-person, mediated through a variety of technologies and facilitated by more prevalent access to high-speed internet in 2020. Singers in the Toronto Group and beyond worked to maintain their communities despite physical separation using tools like Zoom, JamKazam, and Facebook to connect. Despite this, the community seemed to experience a sort of fracturing across political lines that may have otherwise been eased by the act of singing together and having conversations with one another in the same room. The conclusion of this dissertation will reflect upon the broader implications of these disruptions and will lead to a final discussion of overall findings, limitations of this project, and areas that should be explored in future research.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

The Toronto Shape Note Singing Group and the wider shape note singing diaspora held on to their community during the pandemic by creating new ways to sing together mitigated by technology. In the days since the long, isolating lockdowns the Toronto singers have reconnected with each other and begun to sing in person again. As the possibility of travel reopened, members of this group began revisiting their singing friends in communities all over North America and Europe. In the summer of 2023 eager singers of all ages gathered at Camp Fasola in Alabama for the first time since 2019. Unfortunately, many of the registered campers contracted COVID-19 at a singing prior to camp, an indication that things had not yet “returned to normal”. Camp attendance was sparse. Today the pandemic is still affecting the wider diaspora. At the first in-person Central Ontario All Day singing in Toronto in August 2023 organizers required proof of a negative COVID test to attend. Singers still referred to singings where COVID was present as “super-spreader” events. Health and safety remain a concern for older and immunocompromised singers, many of whom have still not returned to Toronto’s, mostly maskless, in-person singing. Today, the Toronto monthly singings look a lot like they did prior to the pandemic. There is a sense of relief among the singers who have returned and have been greeted with most of the same feelings gleaned from singing together as before. From elation to frustration and everything in between.

Concluding Overview

This project began as an ethnographic, observational look at intrapersonal synchrony and entrainment among Toronto group members using deep ethnographic examination and introspection. Using interviews, observation, and analysis, I was able to explore how the group perceives their singing experiences. I looked at what singers feel makes a high-quality singing, noting through my research that it appears to be a combination of things that includes a shared awareness with singers around you, confidence in what you are singing, and a rhythmic locking in. They credited this to a number of specific factors, including responsive and confident singing from those around them and widespread adoption of synchronized movements such as accent and arm-beating. Overall, a sense that the group is, “in-sync”. This synchrony often led to shared euphoric experiences that members of the Toronto group described as emotionally and spiritually moving. These findings support a growing body of research that suggests that interpersonal synchrony can enhance feelings of connection in groups.

This project explored shared feelings of euphoria, sometimes experienced by a group of singers when things align. I also noted the ways in which a singer or group of singers can disrupt synchrony either sonically, with volume or timbre, rhythmically by pushing or dragging a given song, or socially, by interrupting the flow of a singing. The key to a quality singing, according to many members of the Toronto group appears to be a feeling that the group is operating as one unit with a single-minded purpose. The shared euphoria strongly connects to Émile Durkheim’s concept of collective

effervescence—a phenomenon in which one may lose their sense of individuality as they participate in collective rituals. This also connects to Teresa Brennan's theory surrounding the transmission of affect, most notably, her highlighting of the ways emotion can circulate in groups via shared rhythm and gesture. Clayton, Sager, and Will (2004) called for the use of entrainment theory in ethnomusicology, suggesting it offers a new model for understanding how music-making fosters social cohesion through bodily and cognitive synchrony. My ethnography of the Toronto group aligns with these theoretical frameworks and demonstrates how these concepts can be applied to the living musical practices of this community.

My dissertation is also a snapshot of the Toronto group during a painful and isolating moment worldwide. It serves as a historical look at how this one musical group chose to navigate the pandemic. It looked at the ways singers tried to keep their singing community together using various technological interventions including Zoom and YouTube. The use of this technology was not meant to recreate the feeling of in-person singing, but rather, was used as a means of maintaining social connections and friendships that had been fostered through a shared love of this music and by singing together in-person. It was yet another way to help stave off loneliness during a time of extreme isolation. Facebook was also used as a tool to maintain connection among members of local groups and the wider diaspora. I noted the ways in which the community's move online actually exacerbated disconnection and highlighted socio-political difference in the community. These differences were heightened by the divisive political atmosphere. This moment represented a kind of reckoning in the shape note community as they grappled with a number of bottled-up grievances that had previously,

perhaps unfairly, been stifled using the “unwritten rule” that one should not talk about politics or religion in the square. This led to online conflict during the pandemic, as singers began to discuss wider social issues in the context of sacred harp singing. Many singers that I interviewed felt that the lack of in-person connection during this time exacerbated these feelings, that these difficult discussions would have been handled differently if singers could have been in the same room together.

I learned that, for the most part, socio-political difference was something that the Toronto singers really appreciated. They enjoyed the fact that this musical tradition brings together people of all ages and from many different walks of life. They felt that singing this music broadened their own understanding of different lived experiences and fostered unique friendships that would not have formed otherwise. The singers I interviewed all placed high value in the diversity of the group, specifically speaking to me about their appreciation of the unlikely friendships that had formed for them across social, religious, and political difference. Many singers also reflected on how singing with folks who came from different backgrounds helped them to better empathize and encouraged a kind of social humility. This mirrors the findings by researchers Hove and Risen (2009) and Cirelli et al. (2014), which suggest that synchronized movement or music-making can enhance feelings of affiliation even among those who differ from one another in meaningful ways. While this dynamic may not extend to all shape note communities, it was strikingly present among Toronto singers and deserves further exploration in the wider shape note singing community.

This dissertation has built upon my major research paper by expanding the historical and ethnographic record of shape note singing in Toronto. It delves deeper

into how modern singers negotiate singing this esoteric and religious music, looking more closely at how singing this music fosters social connection. This project was not so much an explanation of why folks choose to sing this esoteric, religious music. Rather, I was concerned with how singers of different ages and backgrounds, holding different, even oppositional social, political and religious beliefs, were able to sing together. I looked at how the act of entraining to one another musically helped foster camaraderie and understanding and helped to bridge deep chasms of social difference.

Contributions to the Field

This project is one of the first of its kind in ethnomusicology to employ entrainment theory in a strictly ethnographic context. Whereas much of the existing research on musical entrainment uses quantitative measures, this project offers a qualitative, perspective grounded in the singers' lived experiences. This project has carefully foregrounded the voices of singers while also drawing from the over ten years I have spent personally immersed in the tradition. My work offers new insight into the ways entrainment is felt and interpreted by members of the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group.

With this project, I also argue that ethnomusicologists can presume the existence of interpersonal entrainment simply through the observation of musical performance and synchrony between members. In the introduction, I note that the understanding that interpersonal synchrony and entrainment exist in music almost universally opens up the field of ethnomusicology to different, exciting modes of exploration and inquiry. The

study of interpersonal synchrony in music making can be applied to exploring extra-musical, social behavior in musical groups at a deeper level. In this case, I have explored how this style of community music making promotes connection across socio-political divides. This new method for understanding social connection in musical groups can be used as a way to better understand how group music making strengthens social connection. This project builds upon the work of Clayton, Sager, and Will (2004), who encouraged ethnomusicologists to explore the embodied and social dimensions of entrainment through a more traditional ethnographic approach. Unlike studies that focus primarily on musical pulse, my project also explores group synchrony as a social phenomenon—one that can be impacted by outside factors including group dynamics and the broader cultural moment. My findings support claims made by researchers such as Heider and Warner (2010) regarding group performance and affiliation. I also draw attention to the fluidity and fragility of these social bonds by exploring disconnection in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Project Limitations and a Call for Future Research

This project came up against a number of limitations, but was impacted the most by the pandemic. This changed the nature of my proposed project which was initially meant to include a time-series analysis to measure the degree to which singers in the Toronto group entrained to one another. This led me to pivot to an entirely ethnographic, interview-based project that included a chapter discussing the disconnection felt during the pandemic. I also explored the ways that singers tried to maintain feelings of connection using technology when they could no longer sing

together in person. This aspect of my project could have been better served by concrete examples of disconnection and interviews with singers who were frustrated by the wider diaspora's lack of accountability when it came to the participation of marginalized groups in the tradition. My dissertation also does not account for the lack of racial diversity in the tradition, focusing more on social, political and religious difference. An important area for future study would be a comparative exploration of Black and white Sacred Harp traditions. The Black Sacred Harp tradition has its own musical aesthetics and history shaped by post-slavery community building. Understanding how entrainment functions in these communities would be a valuable contribution to the field.

Singers' ability to feel "in sync" was also sometimes disrupted by political and ideological tensions in the wider singing community. On a more micro scale, Toronto singers described frustrations with things such as unclear leadership and social disruptions of a given singing, which could create confusion and affect flow. Though these moments are less often a focus in ethnographic observation of musical groups, they are important for understanding the ways in which group dynamics can impact, and in some cases undermine, the collective musical experience.

This project notes that the use of low-latency technology such as Jamulus was a way to sing together "live" over the internet. Although the singers who used this technology noted that the sound quality was low it should be understood that eventually this technology will develop to a point where latency is negligible and sound quality is high. Eventually this technology will mimic the sound of singing together in-person. As this "no-latency" technology is developed, future research could explore online musical entrainment and how the psycho-social aspects of online community music making

compare to in-person performance. Further, “no-latency” technology coupled with the rise of emergent technologies like virtual reality and spatial audio could eventually lead to immersive singing experiences with shape note groups around the world. It is possible that, as technology improves, singers could meet, interact, and sonically entrain virtually with one another. This could eventually lead to feelings of kinship and pro-social behavior between singers only mediated by the internet. As the viability of online musical gatherings increases and low-to-no latency technology and VR become more accessible, scholars will need to explore the ways these environments replicate (or fail to replicate) in-person singing. This work could open exciting new areas of research; rethinking community music-making that is mediated by technology.

This project was limited by time constraints. This includes the relatively short period of time in which I completed interviews contrasted with the very long period of time it took to analyze and synthesize this research and complete my dissertation. Nonetheless, this dissertation helps carve new paths for ethnomusicological inquiry by exploring something musicians already understand inherently; that music making in a group strengthens social bonds. My hope is that this research and additional research like it will lead to more collaboration across disciplines, particularly between ethnomusicologists and neuropsychologists. These disciplines have an immense amount of knowledge to share with one another. I hope that in the future, these collaborations will lead to a better understanding of both the social and physiological benefits of making music in groups.

This project offers a compelling case study for understanding the ways a in which a community of shape note singers navigate connection and conflict through

participation in their singing community. By exploring how interpersonal synchrony and entrainment are perceived by the group musically and socially this project offers a nuanced ethnographic understanding of how the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group connects to one another and how they worked to hold on to this connection through crisis.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Pandemic Interview Questions

What is your relationship to singing? When did you start?

How did you come to learn about Sacred Harp music?

How long have you been singing?

What drew you to sing this music?

What do you like about Sacred Harp music?

When and where did first sing Sacred Harp?

What kept you coming back?

What did you first think about the tradition?

Was anything at all off-putting?

Did you feel comfortable right away?

When a sing is going well how does it make you feel?

Have you heard of the phenomenon, "The Spirit Coming In"?

What does that mean to you?

Is there a moment in a particular song when you are likely to feel it?

Can you describe a moment when you felt it (what song, when, etc)?

Can you describe what is happening musically when you are feeling the best?

Do you feel Sacred Harp singing fosters friendships you might not have otherwise?

How so?

Do you have examples you feel comfortable sharing?

Has Sacred Harp singing taught you anything about yourself?

Do you have any examples?

Do you feel Sacred Harp singing plays a role in maintaining your overall health and wellbeing?

Why or why not?

In what way is the Sacred Harp community important to you?

Is community music making important to you?

Why or why not?

Have you travelled to sing?

Where is your favourite place to sing Sacred Harp and why?

Does Sacred Harp line up with your religious beliefs?

Were you raised in a religious household?

Does social media play a role in your connection to the tradition?
What role does it play?

Is social media important to Sacred Harp?

Have you ever connected with a Sacred Harp singers on Facebook and realized you were at odds politically?

Is community music making something that benefits society?
Why or why not?

Appendix B: Pandemic-Related Interview Questions

How has the pandemic affected your participation in shape note singing?

Have you participated in online singings? What has your experience been like?

Do you feel online singing connects participants in a similar way to in-person gatherings? What are the main differences?

Have you experimented with any low-latency software like Jamulus for online singing? What was your experience?

How did the Toronto Shape Note Singing Group adapt to pandemic restrictions?

Do you think online singings will continue even after it is safe to gather in person again? Why or why not?

What are your thoughts on the idea of “the spirit coming in” when singing online versus in person?

How has the shift to online singing affected the sense of community within the group?

Can you describe your feelings about returning to in-person singing after the pandemic?