

TEXTS

Modern Music (1781)
William Billings (1746-1800)

We are met for a Concert of modern Invention;
To tickle the Ear is our present Intention.

The Audience are seated
Expecting to be treated
With a piece of the Best,
With a piece of the Best.

And since we all agree
To set the Tune on E,
The author's darling Key
He prefers to the Rest,

Let the Bass take the Lead
And firmly proceed,
Till the Parts are agreed
To fuge away.

Let the Tenor succeed
And follow the Lead,
Till the Parts are agreed
To fuge away.

Let the Counter inspire
The Rest of the Choir,
Inflam'd with Desire
To fuge away.

Let the Treble in the Rear
No longer forbear,
But expressly declare
For a Fuge away.

Then change to brisker Time
And up the Ladder climb,
And down again;
Then mount the second Time
And end the Strain.

Then change the Key to pensive Tones and slow
In treble Time; the Notes exceeding low
Keep down a While, then rise by slow Degrees;
The Process surely will not fail to please.

Thro' Common and Treble we jointly have run;
We'll give you their Essence compounded in one.
Altho' we are strongly attach'd to the Rest,
Six-four is the Movement that pleases us best,
Six-four is the Movement that pleases us best.

And now we address you as Friends to the Cause;
Performers are modest and write their own Laws.
Altho' we are sanguine and clap at the Bars,
'Tis the part of the Hearers to clap their Applause,
'Tis the part of the Hearers to clap their Applause.

Musical composition is a sort of something, which is much better felt than described (at least by me). ... But in answer to your question, although I am not confined to rules prescribed by others, yet I come as near as I possibly can to a set of rules which I have carved out for myself; but when fancy gets upon the wing, she seems to despise all form, and scorns to be confined or limited by any formal prescriptions whatsoever.

— William Billings, preface to *The Continental Harmony* (1794)

Chester (1756)

William Billings

Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And Slav'ry clank her galling chains,
We fear them not, we trust in God,
New-england's God for ever reigns.

The Foe comes on with haughty Stride;
Our troops advance with martial noise,
Their Vet'rans flee before our Youth,
And Gen'ral's yield to beardless Boys.

What grateful Off-ring shall we bring?
What shall we render to the Lord?
Loud Halleluiahs let us Sing,
And praise his name on ev'ry Chord.

Jordan (1786)

William Billings

There is a Land of pure Delight,
Where Saints immortal reign;
Infinite Day excludes the Night,
And Pleasures banish Pain.

Sweet fields beyond the swelling Flood,
Stand dress'd in living Green:
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan roll'd between.

Ode on Music (1792)

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Descend, ye Nine! descend and sing;
The breathing instrument inspire;
Wake into voice each silent string,
And sweep the sounding lyre!

In a sadly pleasing strain,
Let the warbling flute complain.
Let the loud trumpet sound,
Till the roofs all around echo,
The shrill echo resound.

While, in more lengthen'd notes and slow,
The deep, majestic, solemn organs blow.

Hark! hark, the numbers, soft and clear,
Gently fall upon the ear;
Now louder and louder and yet louder rise,
And fill with spreading sounds the skies.

Sandusky (1795)

John Cennick (1718-1755) & *Charles Wesley* (1707-1788)

Lo! he comes, in clouds descending,
Once for favor'd sinners slain!
Thousand, thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph, swell the triumph of his train:
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Jesus now shall ever reign.

Bunker Hill (1786)

Nathaniel Niles (1741-1828)

Why should vain mortals tremble at the sight of
Death and destruction in the field of battle,
Where blood and carnage clothe the ground in crimson,
Sounding with death-groans?

Now, Mars, I dare thee, clad in smoky pillars,
Bursting from bombshells, roaring from the cannon,
Rattling in grapeshot like a storm of hailstones,
Torturing ether!

*Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light,
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write.
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms,
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan,
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!
See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light
Involv'd in sorrows and the veil of night! [...]
Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy every action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.*

— Phillis Wheatley, from “To His Excellency General Washington” (1776)

Washington (1813)

Anon.

A soldier, Lord, thou hast me made;
Thou art my captain, king, and head,
And under thee I still would fight
The fight of faith all in thy sight.
The cross all stain'd and hallow'd blood,
The ensign of our cause in God,
The soldier's heav'nly standard is;
And I will fight for King Jesus.

Grant me the arrows of thy word,
Thy spirit's pow'rful two-edg'd sword,
To slay my foes where'er they be,
And own the vict'ry won by thee;
That I a duteous child may be,
To stand and fight the enemy;
And when the alarm's to call the Lord,
May pass the word unto the guard.

Urbs Syon unica from *Hora Novissima* (1893)
Horatio Parker (1863-1919), Trans. by Martha Hollander

Urbs Syon unica, Sion is the only city,
Mansio mystica, mansion of secret rituals,
Conditæ coelo, built in heaven,

Nunc tibi gaudeo, now I praise you,
Nunc mihi lugeo, now I mourn,
Tristor anhelō. my breath falters in grief.

Glories on Glories from *The Celestial Country* (1902)
Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Glories on glories
Hath our Lord prepared,
To be shared by souls that love,
Glories, one day to be shared by the souls that love him.
Glories on glories, to be shared by souls that love,
He hath prepared for the souls that love him.

Eye hath not beheld them,
Ear hath never heard;
Nor of these hath uttered
Thought or speech a word, ne'er a word:

Forward, marching eastward.
Where the heav'n is bright,
Till the veil be lifted,
Till our faith be sight.

Once a nice young man ... said to Father, "How can you stand it to hear old John Bell (the best stone-mason in town) sing?" (as he used to at Camp Meetings)[.] Father said, "He is a supreme musician." The young man ... was horrified—"Why, he sings off the key, the wrong notes and everything ... and he bellows out and hits notes no one else does—it's awful!" Father said, "... Look into his face and hear the music of the ages. Don't pay too much attention to the sounds—for if you do, you may miss the music."

— Charles Ives (date unknown)

Psalm 67 (1897)
Psalms 67:1-7

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us;
That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.
Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon the earth.

Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.

God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

Psalm 90 (1923-24)

Psalms 90:1-17

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place from one generation to another.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, "Return, ye children of men."

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Amen.

The Last Words of David (1949)

II Samuel 23:3-4

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

Alleluia.

When David Heard (1975)

II Samuel 18:33

When David heard that Absalom was slain,
he went up to his chamber over the gate, and wept
and thus he said:

Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom!

Would God I had died for thee,

Oh Absalom, my son, my son.

What is Sacred Harp? People everywhere are asking that question. Also, they are asking where does it come from? When many people hear the words Sacred Harp they think of a crowd of people, dressed in bonnets, long dresses, overalls, and straw hats, sitting around an old pot-bellied stove in an old Primitive Baptist Church, singing in (what sounds to them) like "unknown tongue." [...]

This “so-called Sacred Harp music” did not just come up over night. In 1620 when the Pilgrims came to America, they settled in the rocky barren wilderness. Aside from their church services, they had no recreation. Therefore they met at the home of a neighbor or at the church and sang the songs that they had sung in England. [...]

Sacred Harp (so called) music is the only truly American music. All other music originated in the European countries. The so-called Sacred Harp music, sometimes called white spirituals, originated in America. Therefore all Americans should love and appreciate it for it is Our American Heritage.

— from an anonymous typescript

Promised Land (1854)

Miss M. Durham (1815-1901)

On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.
I am bound for the promised land,
I’m bound for the promised land,
Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promised land.

Singing School (1855)

J.H. Moss

O, tell me young friends,
While the morning’s fair and cool,
O, where, tell me, where
Shall I find your singing school.

You’ll find it under the tall oak, where the leaves do shake and blow,
You’ll find a half hundred a singing faw, sol, faw.

No doubt the days in which we are living will go down in the history books as the Jet Age – the age when we are supposed to have more and more time in which to do less and less. Why it never seems to work this way is one of the mysteries yet to be solved. It often seems that people are in such a hurry they don’t have time to think. This failure to develop the thinking habit is indeed a tragedy and a great waste.

Man is completely surrounded with wonderful things to think about and be grateful for—all things which come from God. This is basic knowledge and therefore we don’t waste time to think of the beauty and wonder about us.

Of all the Creation, again without much conscious thought, we agree that man is the greatest of all created things, for he is the image and likeness of God. Yet, just think how un-Godlike we are at times.

This singing was organized many, many years ago, and was called the Mt. Zion Memorial Sacred Harp Singing. Among the charter members were many names which might be familiar to us. We remember these people by the good things in their lives, just as the people whom we will sing for in a few minutes are remembered for their wonderful contributions.

In speaking of his death, the immortal Peter Marshall spoke of it as “graduation day.” It is a beautiful thought, when pursued. The person has completed the prescribed course of study and is now qualified to receive his diploma on his graduation to life everlasting.

— Minutes of the Mt. Zion Church All Day Singing, Mt. Zion, Georgia

Distress (1760)

Anne Steele (1716-1778)

So fades the lovely blooming flow'r,
Frail, smiling solace of an hour;
So soon our transient comforts fly,
And pleasure only blooms to die.

Let gentle patience smile on pain,
Till dying hope revives again;
Hope wipes the tear from sorrow's eye,
And faith points upward to the sky.

Saints Bound for Heaven (1884)

William Walker (1809-1875)

Our bondage it shall end by and by, by and by,
Our bondage it shall end by and by;
From Egypt's yoke set free;
Hail the glorious jubilee,
And to Canaan we'll return, by and by, by and by,
And to Canaan we'll return, by and by.

Tho' our enemies are strong, We'll go on, We'll go on,
Tho' our enemies are strong, We'll go on,
Tho' our hearts dissolve with fear,
Lo, Sinai's God is near,
While the fiery pillar moves, We'll go on, we'll go on,
While the fiery pillar moves, We'll go on.

Marching through Georgia (1865)

Henry Clay Work (1832-1884)

Bring the good old bugle, boys! we'll sing another song—
Sing it with a spirit that will start the world along—
Sing it as we used to sing it, fifty thousand strong,
While we were marching through Georgia.

Chorus:

“Hurrah! Hurrah! we bring the Jubilee!
Hurrah! Hurrah! the flag that makes you free!”
So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,
While we were marching through Georgia.

So we made a thoroughfare for Freedom and her train,
Sixty miles in latitude— three hundred to the main;
Treason fled before us, for resistance was in vain,
While we were marching through Georgia.

*Chorus***The Battle Cry of Freedom** (1862)

George Frederick Root (1832-1884)

Yes we'll rally round the flag, boys, we'll rally once again,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom,
We will rally from the hillside we'll gather from the plain,

Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.

Chorus:

The Union forever,
Hurrah boys, hurrah!
Down with the Traitor,
Up with the Star;
While we rally round the flag, boys,
Rally once again,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.

So we're springing to the call from the East and from the West,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom,
And we'll hurl the rebel crew from the land we love the best,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.

Chorus

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away.)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress the wound in the side, deep, deep,
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame.)

— Walt Whitman, from "The Wound Dresser" (1867)

Tenting on the Old Camp Ground (1864)

Walter Kittredge (1834-1905)

We're tenting to-night on the old Camp ground.
Give us a song to cheer
Our weary hearts, a song of home,
And friends we love so dear.

Many are the hearts that are weary to-night,
Wishing for the war to cease;
Many are the hearts looking for the right

To see the dawn of peace.
Tenting to-night, tenting to-night,
Tenting on the old Camp ground.

We've been fighting to-day on the old Camp ground,
Many are lying near;
Some are dead and some are dying,
Many are in tears.

Many are the hearts that are weary to-night,
Wishing for the war to cease;
Many are the hearts looking for the right
To see the dawn of peace.
Dying to-night, Dying to-night,
Dying on the old Camp ground.

The Mississippi itself sometimes seems in doubt which way to go; it twists backward several times, and only after slowing down in lakes and marshes seems finally to make up its mind and meander on toward the south.

The valley watered by the Mississippi seems created for it alone; it dispenses good and evil at will like a local god. Near the river nature displays an inexhaustible fertility; the further you go from its banks, the sparser the vegetation and the poorer becomes the soil, and everything wilts or dies. The aspect of the whole countryside bears witness to the waters' work.[...] On the right bank of the river there are huge plains as level as a rolled lawn. But nearer the mountains the land becomes more and more uneven and sterile; the soil is punctured in a thousand places by primitive rocks sticking out here and there like the bones of a skeleton when sinews and flesh have perished. [...]

All things considered, the valley of the Mississippi is the most magnificent habitation ever prepared by God for man, and yet one may say that it is still only a vast wilderness.

— Alexis de Tocqueville, from *Democracy in America* (1835)

Beautiful River (1864)
Robert Lowry (1826-1899)

Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod
With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

Chorus:

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river,
Gather with the saints at the river,
That flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the silver river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease;
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

Chorus

Jerusalem (1855)

Anon.

Jesus, my all, to heav'n is gone,
He whom I fix my hopes upon;
His track I see, and I'll pursue
The narrow way till him I view.

Chorus:

I'm on my journey home, to the new Jerusalem.
So fare you well, I'm going home.

Then will I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found;
I'll point to thy redeeming blood,
And say, "Behold the way to God!"

Weeping Mary (1852)

John McCurry (1821-1886)

Are there anybody here like Mary a weeping?
Call to my Jesus and he'll draw nigh;

Chorus:

Glory, glory, glory, glory,
Glory be to my God on high.

Are there anybody here like Peter a sinking?
Call to my Jesus and he'll draw nigh;

Chorus

Are there anybody here like jailors a trembling?
Call to my Jesus and he'll draw nigh;

Chorus

Soar Away (1935)

A. Marcus Cagle (1884-1968)

I want a sober mind,
An all sustaining eye,
To see my God above,
And to the heavens fly.

Chorus:

I'd soar away above the sky,
I'd fly, and fly,
To see my God above,
I'd fly, to see my God above.

I want a Godly fear,
A quick discerning eye,
That looks to Thee, my God
And sees the tempter fly.

Chorus

I have learned that there lies dormant in the souls of all men a penchant for some particular musical instrument, and an unsuspected yearning to learn to play on it, that are bound to wake up and demand attention some day. Therefore, you who rail at such as disturb your slumbers with unsuccessful and demoralizing attempts to subjugate a fiddle, beware! for sooner or later your own time will come.

— Mark Twain, from “A Touching Story of George Washington’s Boyhood” (1864)

Hallelujah (1844)

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

And let this feeble body fail,
And let it faint or die;
My soul shall quit this mournful vale,
And soar to worlds on high,

Chorus:

And I’ll sing hallelujah,
And you’ll sing hallelujah,
And we’ll all sing hallelujah,
When we arrive at home.

O what are all my suff’rings here,
If, Lord, Thou count me meet
With that enraptured host t’appear,
And worship at Thy feet!

Chorus

Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away,
But let me find them all again,
In that eternal day.

Chorus