

# Why Mormons Sing in Parts (Or Don't)

*Emily Spencer*

Most mainstream American Christian congregations sing hymns in unison. But The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has long favored congregational part-singing. Nevertheless, a small but vigorous LDS constituency in the past thirty years has advocated a shift to unison-singing. The debate is best understood in light of the influences that have shaped LDS practice. Chief among these are the nineteenth-century American singing schools in vogue at the time of the Church's early development and the hymnological aesthetics imbued in those same years by the heavy influx of British Mormon converts, who, familiar with much more sophisticated sacred music than their American fellow Saints and well-accustomed to note-reading, brought their tastes with them as they became the Church's earliest music leaders.

Although no extant primary sources detail the practices employed in early Latter-day Saint congregational singing, it is highly likely that the singing was done, at least initially, in unison. In its first two years, without access to a printing press, the Church had no hymns of its own, at least. It is known, however, that singing was a part of its worship, albeit in some sort of oral tradition. Further, when a press was finally acquired in 1832, the "hymns" printed in the Church's newspaper, *The Evening and the Morning Star* consisted only of texts, devoid not only of musical notation but even of suggested tunes. The first official hymnbook (1835) was tuneless as well.<sup>1</sup>

If the practices of the Church's contemporary Protestant sects are any indicator, the technique of "lining out" very well could have been used, a method that entailed a pastor or designated song leader singing a line or two, followed by the congregation singing

them back. This “old way” of singing, as it was known, has been characterized as chaotic and unruly, suggesting that even getting everyone to sing the same tune in unison would have been no small feat. Mormon music scholar Michael Hicks describes the process: “The semi-improvisatory oral tradition of old-way singing freely ornamented melodies with scoops, slurs, and emotion-laden hiccoughs, and it executed tunes in ponderously slow tempi. When an entire congregation indulged in it, the effect was raucous and discordant to those versed in regular singing, that more reverent form of singing that followed the printed notes.”<sup>2</sup> The combination of (a) no musical notation and (b) dependence on oral transmission strongly implies unison- as opposed to part-singing. Or, according to Hicks’s description, perhaps not perfect unison-singing, as such. But it was certainly not the cultivated part-singing to which the Church would become accustomed in later generations.

The “old way” and lining out methods of the oral tradition soon gave way, though. At least one can infer that from Joseph Smith’s founding of a formal singing school early in 1836, which led to many more singing schools and other formal, Church-sponsored music training organizations. What occasioned this first singing school was the March 27, 1836, dedication day of the Saints’ first temple, built in Kirtland, Ohio, with four large singers’ galleries but no singers to fill them. The exact note-reading curricula that the Saints used then, if any formal or standardized curricula were used at all, is unknown. From 1841 on, however, Lowell and Timothy Mason’s *Sacred Harp*, which was notated entirely in parts, was a staple in the book section of the Church’s print shop.

From their onset, the singing schools of the Saints were probably patterned after the singing schools that were popular at the time, all of which emphasized reading by note and in parts, rather than the “old way” method of simply singing back a demonstrated melody. As Charles Seeger wrote in 1940: “The old singing-school teachers . . . had no small hand in the making of America. Their books have sold in the tens of millions of copies. Often, a single book served (and sometimes still serves) as the sole written music source of a dozen or more intensely musical people over many years.”<sup>3</sup> Though four-part harmony was the standard voicing in

these early singing school tunebooks, there were many consisting of two- and three-part settings. One of particular note for Mormons is the first Latter-day Saint collection to feature music along with texts: a small, unofficial compilation entitled *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Use of the Latter Day Saints*, published in Vermont (not far from Joseph Smith's birthplace) in 1844 by G. B. Gardner and Jesse C. Little.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Smith himself was born to a musical family in New England, where the singing school movement had begun and continued to thrive, even a century later, in rural communities and amid the strong revivalist climate in which he had actively taken part. Smith, himself "a constant attendant at their [Mormon] singing schools,"<sup>5</sup> had a far greater vision than merely enhancing worship. Indeed, he hoped the Saints' study of music would prove to be a transcendent experience. Joseph Young, a close acquaintance of Smith's and the brother of Smith's successor, Brigham Young, described Smith as having taught that "when the music performed here is acceptable to their spirits [the sacred choirs that sing . . . in the presence of God and the Lamb], they then co-operate with the choirs, in our earthly courts."<sup>6</sup>

The singing schools continued beyond Smith's presidency, and even more ambitious Church-sponsored music organizations began to cultivate the singing of masterworks by the likes of Handel, Haydn, and Mozart years after the Saints had resettled in the Salt Lake Valley. All such organizations and training appear to have been guided by British immigrants to Mormonism. One of the most significant was Scottish immigrant David Calder, a teacher and former minister who promulgated the tonic sol-fa notation system in response to John Curwen's movement to improve congregational singing in Britain.<sup>7</sup> What started out in 1841 as a modest personal study administered among his own schoolchildren and in the British Sunday schools Curwen oversaw eventually became a nationwide institution with tens of thousands of members. Choral societies throughout Britain employed his methods, which came to be the standard for teaching music in schools throughout the country. Thus, it is highly likely that British Mormons had previously encountered Curwen's techniques. For

the Saints in the United States who had had no prior life in Britain, Curwen's influence still would have been felt through Calder, who left Scotland for Utah in January 1851 and, being enthusiastically supported by Brigham Young, oversaw what came to be called the Deseret Musical Association, imparting the Curwen method to several hundred students.<sup>8</sup>

Vast numbers of those students were children. Since the Saints not only wholly embraced the precept that "children are an heritage of the Lord" but also believed that their very salvation depended on the binding of one generation to the other, the sight of throngs of their own progeny raising their voices to the heavens provoked fervent adulation: "Clad in white, the Deseret Musical Association's members played on the public heartstrings . . . the spectacle of hundreds of children singing concert music provoked their audiences to an almost revivalistic fervor."<sup>9</sup> In the words of John Tullidge (a British convert who hailed from Liverpool, and Utah Territory's first music critic):

The angelic juvenile host was marshalled in, robed in white, to herald a heavenly scene, (aye; for there is nothing on earth so angelic and heavenly as the appearance of little children,) but when the curtain arose and presented to the view such a vast assemblage of choristers . . . one could almost fancy himself in the presence of a host of heaven's celestial choir. The effect produced on the audience called forth a spontaneous shout of delightful surprise. . . .

The children's chorus, "Let all the children sing," was a gem of no common order, and the precision in which the dear little ones mastered the time, and the attention they paid the Conductor . . . produced a thrilling effect, and deserves the highest praise.<sup>10</sup>

With his thriving, Church-sanctioned singing school, Calder was, much after the manner of the choral societies of his homeland, able to propel the Saints' musical experience far beyond their maiden oral, unison-singing traditions into the realms of such ambitious repertoires as Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mozart's *Twelfth Service*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, and Mendelssohn's

*As the Hart Pants.*<sup>11</sup> What this particular manner of dissemination of the choral masterworks potentially meant in terms of accessibility to the citizenry, musically trained or not, was not lost on Tullidge: “I well remember, in the old country, when an oratorio could only be heard at long intervals in few places, and not without great expense to the lovers of the grand and majestic; but now tens of thousands can appreciate the beauties and glories of Handel, Mozart, and Haydn and a host of other great masters.”<sup>12</sup>

A generation younger than Calder, Welshman Evan Stephens continued to cultivate more cosmopolitan choral tastes among the Utah Saints. Emigrating from Wales with his newly converted family as a boy in 1866, Stephens pored over the Welsh tunebooks brought along by his elder brother and spoke of the “grand choral contests of the Welsh people,” which, in his own words, “thus [inspired] me to new and delightful efforts, and daydreams of grand performances, though I really thought nothing of myself in connection with them; but my imagination reveled in such conceptions.”<sup>13</sup> Unbeknownst to him as a boy, time would prove him to be *very* much connected with—even the very impetus behind—the actual realization of the grand performances that had played out in his mind. In 1880, at the age of twenty-six, Stephens undertook the oversight of his own singing school in Logan, eighty miles north of the Church’s headquarters in Salt Lake City. There, like Calder’s before him, his singing classes allowed him to present formal concerts that “surprised and delighted the people, and attracted the attention of some of the general authorities of the Church. These entertainments practically demonstrated his ability to accomplish remarkable results in the training of singing classes composed of the crudest material.”<sup>14</sup> Two years later, he made his way to Salt Lake City to study organ with Tabernacle organist Joseph J. Daynes and also sought an audience with the officers of the Deseret Sunday School Union, a Church auxiliary that had been founded in 1867 to help standardize and centralize Sunday schools and curricula that had been previously independently administered.<sup>15</sup> The organization had steadily expanded in the years following its inception, sponsoring initiatives beyond its original catechistical aims, including “institutionaliz[ing] and

[bringing] under Church governance the vocal training of youth that Calder had begun” and featuring “pageants in which thousands of children sang, not only in thousand-voice choirs, but in trios, quartets, and even in the occasional solo rendition.”<sup>16</sup>

By 1875 the organization formally ratified an official musical arm: the Deseret Sunday School Musical Union. In the time between the Musical Union’s formation and Stephens’s 1882 meeting with the Sunday school board, however, the Utah-based Church had seen the convergence of a myriad of political, cultural, and, in some cases, even personal factors that disrupted Mormon music’s previously auspicious trajectory. The most consequential of these were competing non-LDS musical groups, a cooling public reception of the group’s performances, a tapering inflow of British musical talent, anti-polygamy laws that siphoned the choir of its male participants, and departures, even deaths, of key musical figures or their loved ones.<sup>17</sup> Stephens’s meeting with the Sunday school leaders, therefore, proved a boon to both parties: Stephens proposed the organization of singing classes, just as he had done in Logan, for the children of Sunday schools throughout the city, and the board handily agreed. The venture was timely, with Stephens’s first class numbering 250 pupils. Their concert debut a few months later provoked demand for additional classes, and 400 more students were added within the following week.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his extensive work teaching children music, Stephens also *wrote* music—much of the music the children sang—and he is one of the most prolific contributors to the LDS hymnbook still in use today. The hymns that would flow from his own pen, all intended for congregational singing, were overwhelmingly predominantly written in four-part harmony (though the opening bar or two being sung in unison before a four-part *divisi* is a common Stephens device). And the abundance of literature to which the Saints were exposed during the Calder and Stephens eras generally fostered musical literacy among the young and old alike.

Nevertheless, while the tunebooks used to disseminate the tonic sol-fa and other such note-reading methods years prior, both in Britain and in America, were written in parts, unison-singing was still the mainstay in nineteenth-century British parishes. Stephens’s

own first exposure to congregational singing in his native Wales had been in his parents' home, where their fledging group of Saints had gathered for services, and even there "[t]he singing was all in one part, and to him was not very impressive."<sup>19</sup> For years, the congregations of English parishes had by convention been limited to unison-singing of psalms only, while harmonized singing was more the pleasure of cathedral and collegiate parish choirs. This had to do with both policy and practicality: the great controversy in the evolution of English hymnody was fundamentally over whether or not there was a "legal" place for non-canonic texts in the liturgy; coupled with this was the pragmatic issue of congregations largely composed of completely untrained singers. In the early nineteenth century there was greater exploration of congregational singing methods, however, and the separation between harmonized choral singing and unison congregational singing began to be undermined somewhat. Curwen was among those advocating part-singing even among the laity, while others clung to the unison models of antiquity: "Arguing from ancient medieval specimens, they pleaded for unison singing only, within moderate compass, in direct opposition to the simultaneous movement among Non-conformists for part-singing, led by Waite and Curwen."<sup>20</sup>

The most explicit summaries of, and pronouncements on, the matter can be found in the preface to the 1906 *English Hymnal*, which leaves no doubt as to the mind of its editor, the revered Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose stature in British hymnody was unparalleled: "Every hymn is so arranged that it can be sung in unison accompanied by the organ. . . . [T]he congregation must always sing the melody, and the *melody only*."<sup>21</sup> Vaughan Williams went on to say that "hymns are essentially for the congregation; the choir have their opportunity elsewhere." His statement came in the midst of a broader Protestant Sunday school movement that had seized the United States at large, along with a new musical form it had engendered, that of the gospel song. "Such songs often used bouncy rhythms, repeated pitches, an infectious verse-chorus pattern, and melodramatic metaphor" and "clearly had descended from the old camp-meeting songs, their style [catching] the imagination of the post-Civil War generation."<sup>22</sup> This new repertoire

filled Protestantism, blossoming in virtually all denominations, to the dismay of many who thought it transgressed the staid and solemn hymn tradition of earlier generations. But one thing was certain: gospel songs were meant to be sung in unison, with the whole congregation united on the melody.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Protestant moves toward unison-singing, for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century the Church almost obsessively promoted musical literacy—note-reading—at all levels. The leader of this promotion was the Church’s General Music Committee, instituted in 1920, with Evan Stephens and other British immigrants among its chief members. They instituted courses in Salt Lake City to teach solfege—the syllabic method for learning vocal note-reading—and set as a goal teaching how “a congregational song may be most impressively presented and effectively taught and studied.”<sup>23</sup> They oversaw music committees in stakes and wards; Sunday school song practice; new hymnbooks that separated “choir hymns” from congregational hymns, but still gave all of them four-part settings; and on and on. Musical literacy seemed a necessary adjunct to literacy at large. Whether the preference for congregational singing was unison or parts seemed moot: the implicit doctrine was, “If you can read notes, read them; if you can’t, learn how.”

Only by the 1970s had a solid pro-unison position begun to take hold. In October 1972 a new Church Music Department was founded in Salt Lake City, with Michael Moody, an avowed fan of Vaughan Williams, as the executive secretary.<sup>24</sup> In December 1973 the department was officially tasked with preparing a new hymnal for the now-worldwide body of the Church and, with his composition background, Merrill Bradshaw was deemed the fitting choice for oversight of the requisite new hymn committee. By this time, the Church had a sizable body of hymnody from which to draw their selections: their current hymnbook *Hymns* (published in 1950), prior hymnbooks and songbooks, hymnbooks of other denominations, and submissions from living composers. The committee felt it incumbent upon them to not only select which hymns would be included but also to determine which of those might require revision. Veneration of their British models would



influence their conclusions—most amply demonstrated by the fact that the most broadly sweeping alteration of the committee's selections by far was the lowering of keys, with the express purpose of “foster[ing] the standard practice in Protestantism: everyone sings the melody in unison rather than singing in parts.”<sup>25</sup> (Moody, too, had instructed participants in his doctoral hymn-writing project that “the tessitura should remain low.”<sup>26</sup>)

Committee members (and unison-singing advocates in general) believed lower settings should underpin unison-singing because it eliminated the vocal stratification that they felt weakened the vitality and potency of the sound produced, both collectively and in individual voices. To underscore the point, Alexander Schreiner, one of the most distinguished Tabernacle organists (European-born and trained) and held in high esteem by Moody, quoted musicologist Willi Apel, who minced no words:

The publishing of hymn melodies in four-part arrangements has been detrimental to congregational singing. The best hymn tunes are generally within the range of the average voice, but many worshipers prefer to indulge in a modest tonal excursion which, they hope, and perhaps believe, is a rendition of the alto, tenor, or bass part. If congregations could be induced to unite on the melody and leave the harmony to the organ, the vigor and assured quality of hymn singing would miraculously increase.<sup>27</sup>

Both sides of the debate between unison and parts desired sincere and meaningful worship, improved congregational participation, increased sense of community, and “harmony” (metaphorically speaking) achieved through unity. But they disagree as to *what*, exactly, “unity” means and how it is symbolized and achieved. Furthermore, both camps look to British practices as exemplars of their ideals.

According to the pro-unison point of view, “harmony” is achieved when all act with one accord, and are of “one heart and one mind,” symbolized quite literally by many voices becoming *one*. Unison advocates also argue that unison-singing better keeps the focus on the message of the text, where struggling to follow part-writing distracts. They also argue that the keys in which hymns designed for part-singing are written often place the melody too

high for those who can't read music and/or are not sopranos, thus making it impossible for all to participate. Don Cook, Associate Professor of Organ Performance at Brigham Young University, explained that "where volume, power, and the resulting increase in the sense of community are desired, unison singing would be most effective."<sup>28</sup> Robert Cundick, former Mormon Tabernacle organist and an especially ardent leader of the contemporary LDS unison-singing movement, shares Cook's sentiments and argues that the power and strength rendered by unison-singing are "impossible if each member of the congregation sings parts at will independently, or worse still, doesn't sing at all. Heard from the pulpit, the usual result is a musical disaster with a few dominant solo voices singing parts at random with no balance, plus a generally somewhat apathetic majority wandering somewhere in between."<sup>29</sup> The following observation from Cundick in 2004 echoes one Vaughan Williams made in 1906:

Unison singing directly from the hymnbook is easy for the higher (soprano and tenor) voices. However, it is more difficult for the lower (alto and bass) voices, because the melody lines are pitched too high at times. As a result, some who cannot sing parts avoid singing altogether. One solution is to pitch (transpose) the hymns down to a comfortable range for the lower voices.<sup>30</sup>

Vaughan Williams stated specifically on the matter of lowering keys:

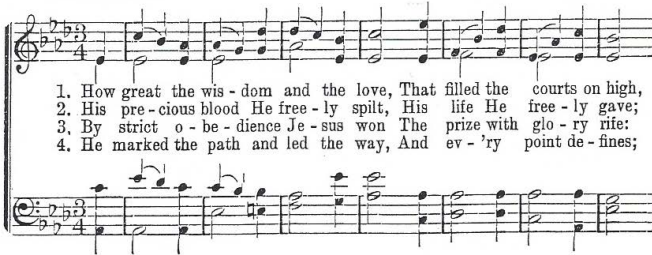
The pitch of all the tunes has been fixed as low as possible for the sake of mixed congregations. . . . [H]ymns are essentially for the congregation; the choir have their opportunity elsewhere, but in the hymn they must give way to the congregation.<sup>31</sup>

But in spite of the lowered keys and the unison-singing they were supposed to foster, the hymns today are still provided almost entirely in four-part harmony. The settings of "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," for example, in pre-1948, 1948, and 1985 hymnals demonstrate how the keys were progressively written lower in subsequent editions while still maintaining the four-part texture. The reason for this is because the General Music Committee (now

No. 115 How Great the Wisdom and the Love

ELIZA R. SNOW

THOS. MCINTYRE



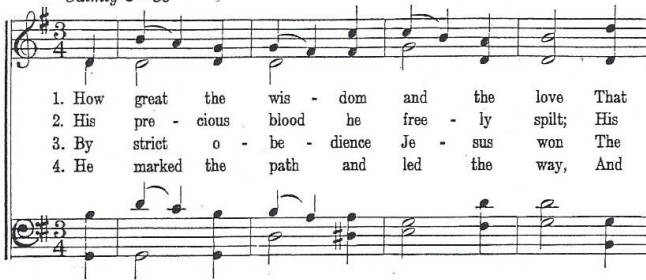
1. How great the wis - dom and the love, That filled the courts on high,  
 2. His pre - cious blood He free - ly spilt, His life He free - ly gave;  
 3. By strict o - be - dience Je - sus won The prize with glo - ry rife;  
 4. He marked the path and led the way, And ev - 'ry point de - fines;

68 How Great the Wisdom and the Love

Eliza R. Snow

Thomas McIntyre

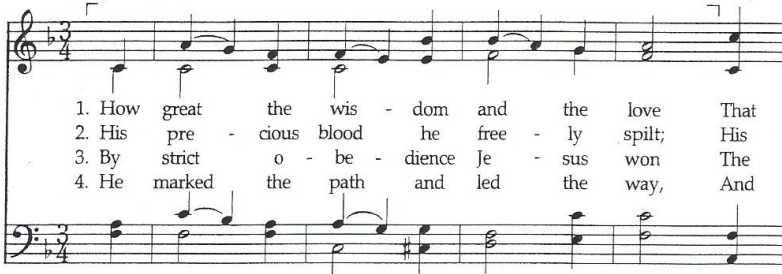
*Calmly* ♩ = 66



1. How great the wis - dom and the love That  
 2. His pre - cious blood he free - ly spilt; His  
 3. By strict o - be - dience Je - sus won The  
 4. He marked the path and led the way, And

195 How Great the Wisdom and the Love

*Calmly* ♩ = 66-76



1. How great the wis - dom and the love That  
 2. His pre - cious blood he free - ly spilt; His  
 3. By strict o - be - dience Je - sus won The  
 4. He marked the path and led the way, And

Figure 1. Lowering of keys in "How Great the Wisdom and the Love": pre-1948, 1948, and 1985 (Ab, G, and F, respectively).

called the Music and Cultural Arts Committee) sought to provide a way to make the melody more accessible to all vocal ranges while still allowing those comfortable with part-singing to do so, affording all to participate in whatever way is most suitable: “Although part singing (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) has a strong tradition in the Church, the goal in congregational singing is that all participate, no matter what their vocal ability may be. Because many members sing the melody regardless of their vocal range, the hymns are in keys that accommodate both unison and part singing.”<sup>32</sup>



In February of 2004 unison-singing proponent Cundick approached Dale Monson, then director of Brigham Young University’s School of Music, to seek his involvement in an organized effort to encourage unison-singing in area congregations. His hope, of course, was for the effort to produce findings that would influence Church practice and, ultimately, make unison-singing the decreed convention. Cundick’s proposition was followed up not long afterward by contact from Elders John H. Groberg and James B. McDonald, Area President and Area Authority Seventy, respectively, with a formal request for Monson’s oversight of a Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project in which data on reception and compliance would be collated while participants engaged in unison congregational singing.<sup>33</sup> The study would survey student wards (congregations) of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, through the summer months of that year.

Although five student stakes initially committed their involvement, the number gradually dropped to only two. Still, the remaining stakes represented twenty-three wards and produced 869 completed surveys, so a substantial amount of data was successfully collected.<sup>34</sup> The methodology involved half of the wards singing all hymns in all meetings in unison, while the other half served as a control group, carrying on the more usual part-singing. Accompanists of the unison singers played all hymns in lowered keys, the scores of which were provided by Cundick and Cook. Choirs continued singing in parts, even within the wards that

otherwise observed unison-singing. Last but not least, participants were instructed to observe the effects produced by this new method of worship. At the completion of the study, evaluation included focus groups in which ecclesiastical leaders, music personnel, and congregation members came together to discuss the experience of unison-singing, along with the submission of paper surveys in which participants responded on a numerical scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of prepared statements. At the conclusion of the study, Monson prepared a thirty-nine-page report synthesizing the study's objectives, methodologies, and findings, which was then presented to McDonald, who commended him for the professionalism, clarity, and organization with which the study had been carried out.<sup>35</sup>

The feedback was overwhelmingly negative. Most detested the unison-singing experiment and strongly favored the part-singing model with which they were accustomed. A possible bias in the study is that it was conducted among university-goers, specifically predominantly LDS Brigham Young University-goers, potentially (though not necessarily) a more musically astute population. Nevertheless, many of the reactions to the unison-singing were quite visceral. Below are some examples of feedback received when respondents filled out a survey at the end of the study:

I did not like the hymns in the lower keys. They lose some of their brightness and cheeriness.

The congregation does not have to sing in unison in order to "sing with one voice." . . . The singing of parts emphasizes our individuality and different voices being unified to make one beautiful sound.

I feel more unified with others when we are singing parts. Not only does it sound better, but each part feels needed.

I don't think the goals of the program were met. Those who didn't sing before still didn't sing.

Instead of lowering our standards to make it possible for everyone to sing together, how about if we educate others so that we can all sing in harmony?

When we played out of the book you gave us, some . . . would start singing and then they gave up, because it was too low for them to sing.

It sounded like a funeral march. There was no praise in the song . . .

There is a tendency for the music that was once a quick pace . . . to mellow out, slow down and loosing [sic] its excitement. . . . It felt like we were mourning the death of the Savior—a no hope kind of a feel.

Blah! Parts are more beautiful and uplifting. Singing in unison was very monotone, dull, and uninteresting.

Please don't make us do this. It offends my soul.

If you make us sing in unison, you will go to hell.<sup>36</sup>

Resigned to the fact that, at least in the near future, a sweeping reformation of the Church's congregational singing practices was unlikely, Cundick resolved to focus his energies on winning over the men of the Church, assuming that from there, the movement would take hold and then incite a steady conversion of the rest of the membership. This thinking relied on the fact that in the Latter-day Saint tradition, men preside over all administrative affairs of the Church; even the women who run various auxiliaries answer to men. Thus, in Cundick's mind, to sway the male leadership would be to ultimately alter the course of congregational singing throughout the entire church.

Collaborating with Cook, Cundick prepared an anthology of simplified accompaniments for hymns especially suited for unison male voices, to be sung in their all-male priesthood meetings. The selected hymns of this 2011 collection were drastically pared down: accompaniments were reduced from chordal four-part textures to single melodic lines in the right hand with a linear parallel line in the left hand, keys were limited to those using no more than three sharps or flats at a time, and ranges ascended no higher than E<sub>b</sub>4, a step and a half above middle C. (In fact, only two of the hymns reached E<sub>b</sub>4, and in each case the pitch was sustained

for no longer than two beats.) This simplification, of course, was intended to optimize practicality “for players of modest ability and . . . to encourage unison singing of the melody.”<sup>37</sup> Curiously, even the text was absent from the settings. When asked for an explanation as to why, Cundick stated that it was in keeping with the work’s spirit of simplicity and an effort to keep focus on the bare essentials.<sup>38</sup> Why the texts were not considered a fundamental component of the hymns was not made clear. (In fact, it seems that if one’s musical literacy is lacking enough that he would be relying on a simplified compendium such as this one, then having the text follow along with both the musical notation and the voices of the singers might be of great assistance.) Figure 2 demonstrates how the four-part writing has been reduced and the key lowered dramatically—what began in A major in the nineteenth century then moved to G in 1948 and now sits in E $\flat$  major.

2

Sweet Is the Work  
(Hymn 117)  
6 verses

The figure displays four systems of musical notation for the piano accompaniment of the hymn 'Sweet Is the Work'. Each system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The notation is simplified, using mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some rests and a few accidentals. The first system includes a fermata over the final note of the first measure in the treble staff. The second system has a fermata over the final note of the first measure in the bass staff. The third system has a fermata over the final note of the first measure in the bass staff. The fourth system has a fermata over the final note of the first measure in the treble staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Figure 2. *Priesthood Hymns: Easy Accompaniment for Unison Singing 2011*, key of E-flat.

While, at a glance, such a rendering seems too simple to offer a very satisfying musical experience, it is true that, as the booklet's preface states, it is often a challenge to find a key that is suitable for both unchanged and mature male voices alike, and, with a Church that now extends to practically all corners of the globe, it is frequently the case that an experienced keyboardist is not always among the group, nor is there always an accompanying instrument available, which makes the CD included with the collection a very useful asset.<sup>39</sup> The final aim, of course, was to simplify the rendering in order to make those participating feel more inclined to play and sing out with greater confidence. For a time the collection was available via free PDF download on the Church's official website to see if it would find a place in common usage among the Saints, or even just the men of the Church. It has since been removed.



In light of the history of the Church's congregational singing practices, the issue of whether unison-singing has a place in modern worship becomes more complex, both practically and philosophically. For example, part-singing may not be practical in regions unfamiliar with Western musical traditions. In these cases, it will be enough, at least initially, to help these Saints learn the *tunes* of their newly-found "Zion." Moreover, it is difficult to institutionally enforce something as subjective as "strength" or "beauty" or even "unity," as demonstrated by the respondents to the Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project. Expanding the study beyond the campus of Brigham Young University, the United States, or even Western civilization, would only yield increasingly complex results as more and more cultures, backgrounds, and experiences became involved. How is it possible that a one-size-fits-all model can be effective, especially now that this initially fledgling, six-member, American-born denomination has grown to exceed a worldwide membership of over fifteen million members? Considering these practical issues, the Church must determine whether it simplifies



its music to increase accessibility or returns to forging a culture that expects some level of musical literacy—and, if the latter, is prepared to support these measures through some form of music education. (The Church does have an extensive music section on its website with numerous resources for individuals serving in music capacities, as well as formal curricula for both conducting and keyboard self-study, even providing grant-funded keyboards on a needs basis, and certificates to those completing the course requirements. These courses and course materials are accessible worldwide through the Church's website.)

One more question to consider is: what, exactly, are the different roles of the choir and the congregation? According to the part-singing model, along with an official proclamation that choirs are to use the hymnal as their primary resource<sup>40</sup> and dismal budgets that scarcely allow for any purchases of commercially-published choral music, there often isn't much distinction between choir and congregation other than the numbers of singers. Muddying the water, most "arrangements" of hymns sung by choirs alternate between (a) some or all parts singing the melody in unison and (b) all parts singing their respective lines in harmony.

In an era in which choirs are urged to sing only hymns, the hymnbook itself blurs categories. The new hymnal committee of the 1970s overseen by Bradshaw had voted to omit "over 30 percent of past congregational hymns, 67 percent of choir hymns, and 90 percent of men's and women's arrangements,"<sup>41</sup> and, though this committee was disbanded before the hymnbook it strove for was realized and was replaced in 1983 by a *new* committee, Moody, installed as the leader of yet another attempt at getting the new hymnbook together, carried the torch forward: the new hymnbook, when it was finally published in 1985, contained exactly fourteen out of 341 hymns designated for *choirs only* (interestingly, all fourteen are written only for *male* choirs—a bit ironic since it is often the male sections of church choirs that hurt for numbers, far moreso than the female sections), ten hymns arranged for women's voices, ten hymns for children's voices, and five hymns for men's voices. ("Men" in this hymnbook is apparently distinct from "Men's Choir," the only discernible

differences in the settings being the use of the sub-octave treble clef and that two of the choir arrangements descend as low as  $E\flat_3$  and two ascend as high as  $G_4$ , exceeding the extremities of the non-choir settings by a half or whole step, correspondingly.)

A cursory perusal of the hymnbook, especially when comparing it to the makeup of prior hymnbooks, might lead one to be astonished that 302, or 89%, of the book's hymns were seemingly not given any classification at all as far as what the nature of the ensemble's vocal composition should be. One might suppose then that this would result in a free-for-all as to who is to sing what and *how* (the congregation? the choir? and thus parts, or thus unison?). With the hymnbook's prefatory injunction that choirs use it as their primary source material, in large part it is a free-for-all, at least when it comes to the question of whether it is to be sung by a choir or congregation.

Yet closer examination makes it clear that that there *are* hymns that are *supposed* to be sung in unison—presumably as an exception to a part-singing—to accurately reflect the aims and desires of the composers who wrote them and more effectively embody the spirit of each individual hymn. This is made manifest in some cases by overt unison writing (as in “For All the Saints,” where the melody even gets its own staff for the unison verses, or the opening phrases of hymns like “Father, Thy Children to Thee Now Raise,” “O God, the Eternal Father,” or “Arise, O Glorious Zion”). In other cases it is plainly stated at the beginning of the hymn where harmonization in the right hand of the keyboardist part might otherwise be mistaken as an alto line (“Because I Have Been Given Much,” “Families Can Be Together Forever,” “I Know My Father Lives,” “Teach Me to Walk in the Light,” “God’s Daily Care”). Sometimes, even with a four-part harmonization, the piece is designated a duet, some specifically, but not always necessarily, intended for treble voices (“Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd,” “Jesus, Lover of My Soul,” “Love One Another,” “Keep the Commandments,” “Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words to Each Other,” “Truth Reflects Upon Our Senses”). Yet other times, a composer employs *both* unison- and part-singing at different times within the same hymn (in addition to those

named above, “For the Strength of the Hills,” “Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise,” “Behold! A Royal Army,” “Carry On,” “Rejoice, the Lord is King!” or “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?”) or different *types* of part-singing; for example, soprano-alto textures juxtaposed with full four-part textures (“I Stand All Amazed,” “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” “O Lord of Hosts,” “Behold the Great Redeemer Die,” “He Died! The Great Redeemer Died,” “Again We Meet Around the Board,” “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains”), or even three-part with four-part textures (“Reverently and Meekly Now”).

Over forty years ago Lowell Durham wrote that “[choirs] are gradually disappearing, even as the Church doubles its membership every few years. It is safe to assume that unless Church music policy is drastically modified . . . there will be only congregational singing within twenty years. This may please some members of the General Music Committee who have long favored the Protestant-type unison-singing congregational music ‘conducted’ from the console by the organist.”<sup>42</sup> Thankfully, Durham’s grim prophecy as to the disappearance of choirs altogether has not yet come to pass. But note that Durham mentions the leading of unison-singing by the organist. It is true that the leading unison-singing advocates almost all happen to be organists. Perhaps part of the desire for unison-singing is for the advantage and freedom to reharmonize at will, expressing their own musical skills and, perhaps, personal (i.e., independent) form of worship through hymns. In other words: unity for the singers, but solitary exploration for the instrumentalist. In presenting his position, though, Don Cook explained: “While my point of view is technically ‘pro unison,’ it is not exclusively so. It would more accurately be described as ‘pro worship’ through congregational hymn singing with skilled, varied, and inspiring organ accompaniment.”<sup>43</sup> Part-singing advocates counter that if greater options and flexibility afford the organist a richer, more gratifying experience, why then would it not be so for the singers? If the results of the Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project are indicative of sentiments beyond those surveyed, it seems singers do not care to be pigeon-holed any more than organists do.

The unison movement has not really taken hold, and some among the unison advocates see the merits in discerningly using both practices, as Cook acknowledged: “There’s some real value in both approaches.” Diane Bastian of the Church’s Music Department verified that the current official stance of the Church is that local leaders are encouraged to thoughtfully and prayerfully exercise discretion as to what best meets the needs of their individual congregations.<sup>44</sup> She explained that the leadership of the Church wants the hymns to unify what is now a worldwide faith, and in order for that to happen, the hymns need to be accessible to all people, whatever form that may take case by case. Indeed, this has always been the heart of the Church’s congregational singing practices. From the Church’s onset, leaders recognized singing as a unifying force, even before they had hymnbooks. When leaders embraced part-singing, the point was still to engage, unify, and elevate their flock. Today, the pendulum swings both ways, depending on the needs, abilities, and aesthetics of the respective congregations, with the aim ultimately still being inclusiveness and connection to a faith that remains universal in its spiritual aspirations even in the face of profound diversity among its adherents.

Whatever position on this matter one takes, both kinds of congregational singing can be used compellingly, in different ways and for different reasons. If the bottom line is to create meaningful worship, as both sides assert, then it is best to respect and facilitate the individual worshiper’s desire to intimately commune with his or her God in whatever way is a sincere expression of that individual’s heart. Throughout the Church’s history, Saints have revered one particular scripture about singing. Believed to be a revelation received in 1830 from God himself, the scripture reveals a god who doesn’t care nearly as much about method as he does meaning: “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.”<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

1. The information in this paragraph relies on the first two chapters of Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and Michael Hicks, "What Hymns Early Mormons Sang and How They Sang Them," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 107.

2. Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 38.

3. Charles Seeger, "Contrapuntal Style in the Three-Voice Shape-Note Hymns," *The Musical Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1940): 492–93.

4. See Marilyn J. Crandall, "The Little and Gardner Hymnal, 1844: A Study of Its Origin and Contribution to the LDS Musical Canon," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 136–60.

5. Joseph Young, *History of the Organization of the Seventies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishment, 1878), 15.

6. *Ibid.* Though a close study of Joseph Young's pamphlet on the subject of the Saints' singing does not make it clear with perfect certainty, it appears he quotes Smith directly, speaking of the study of vocal music as a discipline capable of sanctifying its subjects.

7. Bernarr Rainbow, "Tonic Sol-fa," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.28124>.

8. Edward W. Tullidge, "Music in Utah," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* 1 (1881): 222. This 1881 source features an excerpt from John Tullidge's original 1863 review of a Calder-directed concert given on the evening of December 16, 1863. Edward Tullidge was John Tullidge's son.

9. Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 93.

10. Tullidge, "Music," 225.

11. *Ibid.*, 93, 95.

12. *Ibid.*, 223.

13. Andrew Jenson, ed., "Evan Stephens," *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 742.

14. *Ibid.*, 744.

15. B. Lloyd Poelman, "Sunday School," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 1, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1425–26. Available at [http://com.byu.edu/index.php/Sunday\\_School](http://com.byu.edu/index.php/Sunday_School).

16. Michael Hicks, *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 27.

17. For a more in-depth discussion, see Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 99–101.
18. Jenson, “Evan Stephens,” 744.
19. *Ibid.*, 741.
20. W. T. Whitley, *Congregational Hymn-Singing* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1933), 185.
21. Ralph Vaughan Williams, ed., “Preface,” *The English Hymnal: With Tunes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), xiii. Emphasis in original.
22. Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 116.
23. “Program of Auxiliary Group Conventions for 1921,” *The Improvement Era*, vol. 24 (July 1921): 950.
24. “New Department Oversees Church Music Activities,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1973, (accessed July 29, 2015), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/02/news-of-the-church/new-department-oversees-church-music-activities?lang=eng>; Michael Hicks, “How to Make (and Unmake) a Mormon Hymnbook,” in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, edited by David J. Whitaker and Arnold K. Garr (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 503–19. Available at <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/firm-foundation/22-how-make-and-unmake-mormon-hymnbook>.
25. Hicks, “How to Make,” par. 9.
26. Michael Finlinson Moody, “Contemporary Hymnody in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” (DMA diss., University of Southern California, 1972), 100. Available at <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll18/id/503680>.
27. Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 347, as quoted by Alexander Schreiner in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” *The Instructor* 98, no. 11 (November 1963): 404.
28. Don Cook, phone interview by author; November 17, 2011.
29. Robert Cundick, “Why Not Unison Singing?” (lecture transcript from BYU Organ Workshop, Brigham Young University School of Music, Provo, Utah, August 10, 2006). Available at <http://organ.byu.edu/06unison.pdf>.
30. Robert Cundick, “Handout of Instructions to Participating Wards,” found in Dale Monson, “Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project: Report,” 12.
31. Vaughan Williams, “Preface,” xii.
32. “Using the Hymnbook,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985). For more on the release of the 1985 hymnal, see Kathleen Lubeck, “The New Hymnbook: The Saints are Singing!,” *Ensign*,

Sept. 1985, <http://lds.org/ensign/1985/09/the-new-hymnbook-the-saints-are-singing?lang=eng> (accessed November 15, 2011).

33. Monson, "Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project," 1. The relevant information that follows is from this source.

34. *Ibid.*, 4.

35. James B. McDonald, letter to Dale Monson, August 20, 2004, in the author's possession.

36. Monson, "Unison Hymn Singing Pilot Project," 23–39, along with two individual letters from respondents (copies in the author's possession).

37. Robert Cundick, ed., *Priesthood Hymns: Easy Accompaniments for Unison Singing* (Provo: Brigham Young University Creative Works, 2011), iv.

38. Robert Cundick, phone interview with author, November 17, 2011.

39. Cundick, *Priesthood Hymns*, iv.

40. *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), x.

41. Hicks, "How to Make."

42. Lowell M. Durham, "On Mormon Music and Musicians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 35. This manner of directing from the keyboard can today be observed in traditions such as Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and even Catholic, to name a few.

43. This and the following quotation come from Don Cook, phone interview with author, November 17, 2011.

44. Diane Bastian, phone interview with author, November 18, 2011.

45. Doctrine and Covenants 25:12.