

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

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Guest Editor's Introduction

Kristine Haglund gave me a gift. This issue is the long thank you note.

She had asked me from time to time to write something on music for *Dialogue*. Or take part in a panel discussion on music for the journal. Or do anything on music, since she loves the art and its place in our faith and I have been a kind of go-to guy on that for years.

And then the proverbial offer I couldn't refuse: Would I guest edit an issue on music, the latest in a long—okay, short—line of music-issue *Dialogues*? Carte blanche, make it what I wanted, long or short? I could commission the articles, edit them as I saw fit, shape the whole the way a composer shapes a score.

So I said yes. I made the choice right off to avoid talking about hymn texts, which many folks want to do. I wanted to tune the content to the sound(s) of music itself as much as I could—how it works in our lives and our imaginations and our relationships and even our senses of humor. I asked smart musical people to write on whatever they wanted or to write about what I particularly wanted to hear from them. What you will read here are vivid responses from a new generation of go-tos on Mormon musical thought.

This all sounds heady in the worst way. Or maybe bland in the best way. Either way, so be it. I love what came of these invitations. In the lead article, Peter McMurray puts a loudspeaker onto the Book of Mormon in an unprecedented way. Time to *restore* that book to its sonic foundations. Then Emily Spencer explains that weird feeling some of us get when we're singing, say, the tenor part of the sacrament hymn and the next tenor over is singing the melody. Why is that happening? She'll catch you up on that. In an almost dervish-like investigation, Jeremy Grimshaw tours the cultural mash-up of Mormonism's best-known/least-known musical protagonist, Lindsey Stirling. Jake Johnson goes on to

survey Mormonism's dicey relationship with musical theater, how we got into it and how we'll never get out. (And shouldn't.) Next, in five not-so-easy pieces, a roundtable ensues: five scholars tersely tell what they wish would change in Mormon musical practice. Finally, I pitch in with the real-but-sounds-fake tale of how I got Spencer W. Kimball's record collection and what became of it.

In the midst of these essays come music-tinged poems gathered by Tyler Chadwick along with newly commissioned ones by Lara Candland. And, of course, we had to have some musical scores. So I asked Christian Asplund to share five of his settings of texts from Emma Smith's founding hymnbook of Mormonism, musical treatments culled from his ongoing anthology, *The Brick Church*.

I said Kristine's offer was a gift. Maybe it was a bet. She went all in and I called. This issue is what the dealer served up. I'd like to think we split the pot.

—Michael Hicks

A Voice Crying from the Dust: The Book of Mormon as Sound

Peter McMurray

The Book of Mormon opens with a provocative conundrum: how can the sensory world of revelation most effectively be rendered in language? After introducing himself and his process of making scripture, the prophet-narrator Nephi recounts his father Lehi's throne theophany and calling to be a prophet.¹ This calling entailed two dramatic audio-visual encounters with the divine. In the first, Lehi prayed, and in response a pillar of fire appeared on a rock in front of him. By means of the pillar, somehow, "he saw and heard much" with such intensity he quaked, trembled, and was ultimately incapacitated by the experience (1 Nephi 1:6–7). The second immediately follows while he remained "overcome with the Spirit" and draws on a variety of sensory modes: "he *saw* the heavens open, and he *thought he saw* God sitting upon his throne," surrounded by angels he heard "*singing and praising*." He then "*saw* One descending" from heaven to earth, along with twelve followers, who gave him a book from which he read aloud, prophesying the fall of Jerusalem (1:8–14, emphasis added). Nephi vacillates in his verbiage, alternately describing these experiences as things Lehi *saw* (1:9–14, 16) or *saw and heard* (1:6, 18, 19). This tension between the visual and the sonic, between things seen and things heard, plays a critical role throughout the Book of Mormon.² Yet all too often, such audio-visual encounters with the divine are rendered simply as "visions," stripped of sound and other sensations, an absence I hope to address here.

Yet as Nephi's opening affirms alongside countless other passages that follow, the Book of Mormon, like all scripture, is a deeply sonic

text. The claim may seem counter-intuitive: scripture is by its very name writing. And yet that veneer of writerly inscription obscures an underlying sonic world that ranges throughout scriptural traditions, whether in their form, content, or process of creation and revelation. Other scriptures of the Abrahamic tradition highlight these sonic qualities in particular. In the Hebrew Bible, the central law emanates from a thundering mountain: sound as scriptural medium. In the New Testament, John the Baptist is characterized as a voice in the wilderness (born to a temporarily deaf-mute father, no less), while Jesus becomes the Word, whose birth/utterance is attended by choirs of angels: sound as scriptural message. Or even more centrally, the Qur'an, literally "a recitation," was delivered and promulgated orally, and despite being written down in the decades after its revelation, it continues to be understood as most complete when intoned aloud: sound as scriptural process.³

At first blush, the Book of Mormon might appear scripturally out of place, given its repeated fixations with its own textuality, its preservation as a book, and its incredible (in all senses of the word) origin story as engraved gold plates discovered in the nineteenth century. But closer inspection suggests that perhaps the book doth protest too much—it simultaneously revels in, fears, and aspires to the condition of sound, despite its apparent obsession with writing and, by extension, visuality. What I call the aural logics of the Book of Mormon can be heard on three levels: first, in the book's repeated self-characterization as "a voice crying from the dust," casting itself not (just) as message but as a sonic medium; second, in the larger narrative of the book—its message—in which processes of sounding and hearing consistently undermine the stability of writing; and third, in the process of producing the book in the 1820s, including Joseph Smith's dictating practices (i.e., "translating"), various acts of witnessing, textual inscribing, and finally disseminating the book from 1830 onward.⁴

Focusing on the acoustic registers of the Book of Mormon thus highlights the book's own theory-of-self as sound, an explanation of how certain events within the book unfold—from silence and disembodied voices after Christ's death to shaking prison walls and other architectural details—and critically, the sonic ecology of the

book's own production, a process of particular interest since the recent publication of images of Joseph Smith's seer stone. The voice plays a particularly important role in all of these different aspects, pointing to a rough foundation for a Mormon theory of voice, encompassing not only God and humankind, but also angels and even terrestrial objects (like buildings), as key mediums for sonic transmissions that pass between the heavenly and the earthly realm.

Following the lead of Nephi's Lehi, we might also imagine a literally sonic reading of the book, reanimating parts of the text such as the (in)famous phrase, "And it came to pass," which I consider briefly in my conclusion. More substantively, the conundrum raised by Nephi's choice of verbs ("see" and/or "hear," plus "read") and their limitations underscores one of the central operations of scripture broadly—the transformation of sonic activity into writing and, more broadly, of a massive set of sensory data into a very finite, inscribed form.

This transformation leaves Nephi ill at ease, as he makes clear in his farewell (2 Nephi 33, discussed below), because it robs the sonic of its spiritual and emotional weight while still failing to contain the entirety of semantic discourse (i.e., his teachings). However, this mismatch between the communicative potential of sound and of writing—sometimes foregrounded in the Book of Mormon, sometimes repressed—gives its readers a critical point of entry. For devotional readers, it emphasizes the importance of seeking out traces of verbal power and multi-sensory effect that must be excavated from beneath the surface of the text; for scholarly or ecumenical readers, it offers a remarkably self-aware case study on how scripture makes literal *sense* of the encounter with the divine. In either case, scripture sheds its status as (merely) "holy writ," becoming an audio-visual medium in which writing alone frequently fails to adequately transmit the powerful, affective orality (and entangled aural) of divine utterance.

Book as Sonic Medium I: Nephi Crying from the Dust

Even before Nephi tells of his father's calling, he gives a brief prologue about why and how he chose to make a record of his life,

testifying that “the record which I make is true” (1 Nephi 1:1–3). Such self-reflexive commentaries about the elaborate writing/engraving practices of the Book of Mormon appear repeatedly throughout its narrative. In the current version of the book, whole chapters are devoted to this type of writing-about-writing, including four chapters (5–6, 9, 19) within the opening book of 1 Nephi alone, not to mention an extended episode about obtaining the brass plates (chapters 3–4), an explicit scriptural model for the book’s prophet-narrators. The theme of writing emerges in bursts throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, as in the string of shorter books (Enos, Jarom, Omni) that conclude the “small plates” that make up the opening of the book, followed immediately by the Words of Mormon, another editorial statement by the namesake editor/compiler of the book, Mormon. Another burst of interest in writing and record-making comes toward the end of the book: the same Mormon concludes his abridged account and passes the plates to his son, Moroni, who writes a brief conclusion (which unsurprisingly includes more of the same writing-about-writing), then inserts a whole narrative about finding an additional record on plates from an earlier civilization, the Jaredites, and then finally (and once again) concludes his record. Such textual practices have prompted Richard Bushman to describe the book as “almost postmodern in its self-conscious attention to the production of text,”⁵ while Terryl Givens turns to a number of literary-theoretical terms from Mikhail Bakhtin to make similar assertions about the book’s “polyphonic structure” and penchant for “dialogic” revelatory practices in which the ritual posing of questions to God drives the revelatory process.⁶

While this rough overview of the Book of Mormon’s graphophilic tendencies highlights the book’s awareness—narrated incessantly—of its own production-as-media, it simultaneously obscures a related fact: that the book’s existence as a written medium is deeply bound up in sound, and especially voice. Indeed, the metaphor of a voice from the dust appears frequently in the writings of two of the book’s narrators—and notably, both key protagonists in the book’s writerly obsessions—Nephi and Moroni. Their usage bookends the scriptural macro-narrative, with each

exploring the idea in different ways: both at times identify themselves with the voice, but Nephi uses it to explore what writing means, especially relative to orality, while Moroni posits a holy discourse network with several different voice-ear/sender-receiver combinations, including himself, the book, martyred saints, and readers of the book. God plays a critical, multivalent role as both (a hissing!) voice and a witnessing ear.

Nephi first introduces this metaphor in recording the final words of his father, Lehi, to his son Joseph. Lehi sets up his commentary with reference to none other than Moses, the example par excellence of a prophet whose revelatory capacities are bound up in his (lack of) ability to communicate through speech. In a complex chain of narratives and media commentaries, Nephi transcribes Lehi's spoken commentary about how prophets speak and write, as spoken to Joseph, which is itself a quotation of text from the prophecies of Joseph (the son of the patriarch Jacob) as written on the brass plates, a special version of the Hebrew Bible that Lehi takes with him on his journeys. Quoting this apocryphal text, Lehi states: "And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of my own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him" (2 Nephi 3:17). Thus Moses is the receiver of revelation-in-writing, which he then writes down for future generations (or as it inimitably appears in the text, "he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins"), to be conveyed in person by his spokesman (presumably his brother Aaron), who "shall declare it" (3:18).

This message, written by the hand of God and re-written by Moses, then shifts to further emphasize its existence as a medium in multiple meanings of the word, both as a form of communication (e.g., writing, speech, etc.) and also as an intermediary that speaks for the dead: "And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust. . . . *And they shall cry from the dust*; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, even after many generations have gone by them. And it shall come to pass that

their cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words” (2 Nephi 3:19–20, emphasis added). Significantly, the focus here seems to be the cry itself more than the content of the speech. It calls to repentance but does so with “simpleness of words,” relying apparently on the sound of the cry and its spiritual-sensory power rather than rhetoric or eloquence for its impact.

As he so often does, Nephi later expands on this revelatory utterance of his father’s in his own writing. After quoting extensive, near-verbatim passages of Isaiah (2 Nephi 12–24, corresponding to Isaiah 2–14), he sets up his heavily amended, midrash-like citation of Isaiah 29 (cf. 2 Nephi 27) by meditating on the fate of his own descendants. Nephi launches his midrash a chapter earlier, in 2 Nephi 26, with a close reading of Isaiah 29:4, in particular. The verse in Isaiah (in the King James Version) reads as follows: “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.” Nephi’s exegesis transforms Isaiah as follows:

[A]nd after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten. For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them, even as it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of the dust. (2 Nephi 26:15–16)

Both versions emphasize the supernatural aspect of summoning the dead (“a familiar spirit”) to speak here, but Nephi inserts his own commentary on the sensory processes of transmission: words shall be written, prayers shall be heard, and his descendants shall not be forgotten. Although Nephi will expand this graphocentric interpretation in the following chapter, from the outset, the language here is one of sound, pointing to the act of speaking, vocal

qualities (a low voice, whispering), and the uncanny strangeness of experiencing a voice “out of the ground” or dust.

Nephi continues his expanded reading of Isaiah in the following chapter, referencing this disembodied voice in several places: “the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered” (27:6); “the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust” (27:9); and, “for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead” (27:13). Nephi turns the entire chapter into a reflection on this book (i.e., the Book of Mormon) that will come forth, yet even in his aggressive biblification of the voice from the dust, he too must concede that the metaphor of the voice is not entirely metaphorical. Indeed, the book—the physical object of the plates which he has created—will vanish, leaving a voice with no inscription:

Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken [i.e., Joseph Smith], the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered. . . . And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony unto the children of men; *for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as it were from the dead*. Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and *in the mouth* of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word. (2 Nephi 27:12–14, emphasis added)

In other words, according to Nephi, the reason the actual book (again, Joseph Smith’s gold plates) would only be seen by a handful of witnesses was apparently to preserve its voice-from-the-dust qualities. The book itself (i.e., the plates) would be seen by a few, while “the words of the book” would be made available to—that is, heard by—all. The word “for” here is critical: no one else will see the plates *for* (i.e., because) God has decreed that the words need to speak from the dead. Taken at face value, then, the plates were (conveniently, critics note) taken away precisely

in order to allow them to speak from the dead via their witnesses. Furthermore, those who *do* have the privilege of seeing the actual material object must affirm its existence orally: it will be confirmed “in the mouth” of these witnesses. In the aural logics of the Book of Mormon, testimony, like scripture, is first and foremost oral.

After concluding his extended exegesis of Isaiah, Nephi concludes his writings by once again embracing the metaphor of the voice from the dust within a larger meditation on voice and writing. Much like the preceding instance, Nephi remains deeply concerned with writing, but here he explicitly concedes the limited capacities of writing, especially when compared to vocality and sound. Beginning in chapter 31, he sets up an extended comparison between these two modes of communication:

And now I, Nephi, make an end of my prophesying unto you, my beloved brethren. And I cannot write but a few things, which I know must surely come to pass; neither can I write but a few of the words of my brother Jacob. Wherefore, the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ; wherefore, I shall speak unto you plainly, according to the plainness of my prophesying. (2 Nephi 31:1–2)

For Nephi, “writing” here appears to privilege the words of others: he specifically comments on his inclusion of Jacob (2 Nephi 6–10, which also quotes Isaiah extensively) and implicitly seems to refer to his expansive citation of Isaiah. But “speaking” seems to align with his own prophetic utterance, even though it is addressed not to an audience of his contemporaries—and by audience here, I mean quite literally, those who might listen to him—but rather to “his beloved brethren” yet to come. He further elaborates on speech, noting that God likewise relies on speaking for revelatory communicating: “For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (31:3). This divine tongue—as both speech and language—may or may not be meant literally, but as Nephi continues his farewell speech-in-writing, the role of vocalized, audible speech becomes increasingly important.

After discussing baptism by water, Nephi describes baptism by fire as an expansion of vocal capacity: “yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 31:13). Nephi follows up these observations with an impressive aural confirmation: the voices of the Son and the Father successively affirm the same promise (31:14 and 15, respectively). The newly baptized are thus granted the capacity for angelic speech and holy shouting, two practices that might seem out of place in the staid confines of twenty-first-century Mormon worship. He again emphasizes this sonic gift of the spirit, speaking with the tongue of angels, a few verses later (32:1–3).

After discussing prayer as a particular kind of utterance, Nephi then returns to this broad doctrine of the tongue of angels. But this time he personalizes it, airing his own anxieties about the shortcomings of writing as a medium relative to the voice: “And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).⁷ Nephi’s speaking apparently taps into the register of angelic speech; his writing is less mighty, however. His aspirations to the tongue of angels, as well as the anxious disappointment about not fully attaining it, foreshadow the yearning of a later prophet/narrator, Alma, to possess an angelic voice—“that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth” (Alma 29:1). Interestingly, Alma seems to suggest that the dissemination of revelation and scripture (translated) in all languages obviates the need for the angelic voice (29:7–8), as though the angelic voice offered a pre-linguistic expressive medium, a kind of acoustic relic left from before the communicative breakdown of Babel.

Ultimately Nephi acknowledges that angelic tongues are not enough even outside of writing, requiring him to turn to other vocal practices as well: “For I pray continually for [my people] by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry”

(2 Nephi 33:3). These comments echo the lamenting moments in his earlier “psalm,” in which he associates crying to God, praying mightily, and sending his voice “upon high” with night visions and angelic ministrations (2 Nephi 4:23–24). In other words, although Nephi struggles to conjure the tongue of angels in writing, he is (apparently) generally able to do so in person; but if even that fails, his vocal repertoire also includes several other emotive forms of oral expression—prayer, weeping, crying-out, and so on—which can apparently call down real angels with real angel voices.

These reflections on various human, godly, and angelic voices set up Nephi’s final farewell, which he punctuates with a now-familiar refrain: “And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come” (2 Nephi 33:13). Whereas previous deployments of this metaphor have focused on books and writing, by the end of his final utterance, Nephi seems to have refocused on voice rather than book, acknowledging what he seems to find a painful concession: that writing pales in its affective prowess and holy persuasion compared to sound and voice. Yet on some level, he has long since conceded this point. As he previously wrote, the voice, after all, is paradoxically both the message of the book (27:12–14) and the medium that transmits its truest power (33:1).

But Nephi adds something significant here, applying the voice-dust metaphor to himself; up to this point, the identity of the “one crying from the dust” was not made explicit or was ascribed to a whole group. Here in his final statement, hampered by the perceived constraints of writing, Nephi lays claim to that disembodied, or post-embodied, voice. Even after bidding farewell, he cannot quite leave the question of voice alone, adding an intriguing post-script: the voice—or more precisely, words as they “proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God” and his prophets (2 Nephi 33:14)—must be respected at risk of eternal condemnation. Unlike most words, however, which vanish as soon as they are spoken, his have the power to “seal” (33:15), a practice/belief that gives earthly utterances binding force in the hereafter.

The voice from the dust, if not quite angelic in its sensory power, is nevertheless a speech act preserved for posterity.

Book as Sonic Medium II: God Hissing from the Dust

While Lehi and Nephi introduce this sonic imagery of a voice crying from the dust, its most poignant application comes from its other major appearance at the close of the Book of Mormon. Shortly after the downfall of the Nephite people and the death of his father Mormon, Moroni, the final prophet-narrator of the book, weighs in with his own application of this imagery. As the sole Nephite survivor of a massive internecine war among the descendants of Lehi, Moroni appends what he expects to be his valedictory thoughts at the end of the book of Mormon, one of the last books of the Book of Mormon. He opens, predictably enough, with reference to writing on the plates, but quickly pivots from his lack of metallic ore to his lack of anyone or anything else. The polyphonic plates are his sole companion:

Behold I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon. Behold, I have but few things to write, which things have been commanded by my father. . . . Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not. Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live, I know not. (Mormon 8:1, 4–5)

Like Nephi, Moroni will set up his descriptions of crying from the dust within the context of the physical plates and the act of writing. And although his position is perhaps more anguished than Nephi's, having witnessed (in person, as opposed to in vision) the mass destruction of his family, friends, and nation, he also finds special relevance in Isaiah, whose writings become a touchstone for another extended meditation on voices crying from the dust:

Search the prophecies of Isaiah. Behold, I cannot write them. Yea, behold I say unto you, that *those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord*; and as the Lord liveth, he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them. . . . And behold, their prayers were also in behalf of him that the Lord should suffer to bring these things forth . . . and it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away; *and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead*. (Mormon 8:23, 25–26, emphasis added)

For Moroni, these voices crying and speaking from the dead are directed at multiple audiences. Like Nephi, Moroni suggests that on some level, the voices are aimed—via the Book of Mormon (i.e., “these things” in 8:25)—at future readers. But he also makes explicit something Nephi only hinted at in his final usage of the metaphor: that the voice is intended to reach God’s ears and perhaps bind God to some particular course of action. Moroni first states that the voices of the deceased “shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord” (Mormon 8:23). In a rather morbid articulation of this metaphor, Moroni repeats this same relationship between the voices of the dead and God, singling out not simply the dead saints who “cry unto the Lord,” but specifically “the blood of saints” that will do so (8:27). Here the voices and blood crying to the Lord are not just attempting to communicate but to prompt a kind of divine response, whether to remember a covenant (similar to Nephi’s mention of a sealing voice) or to call for justice against “secret combinations and the works of darkness” (8:27). Moroni builds into a white-hot frenzy of righteous indignation on the point, criticizing the greed of his future audience (again, readers of the book) with threats that the mourning of widows and orphans will join with the cries of the blood of the saints from the ground to bring about God’s vengeance (8:40–41), a kind of post-mortem vigilante chorus.

As Moroni continues, his tone calms and he resorts (much as Nephi did) to characterizing *himself* as the voice from the dead: “Behold, I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead; for I know that ye shall have my words” (Mormon 9:30). This brief

insertion comes before a request for forbearance from readers for the “imperfection” found in the book’s narrators, followed by a reminder of the unusual linguistic choices Nephi describes in the first verses of the book. Moroni writes: “we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech” (9:32). Once again, the spoken word undermines a stable writing apparatus; whatever the affordances of “reformed Egyptian,” it was subject to (ongoing) revision according to the realities of spoken, sounded language.⁸

In the final verses of the entire Book of Mormon, Moroni returns one last time to the imagery of the voice from the dust, but this time, the source and signal flow of the voice changes: “And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27). According to Moroni, the words in question (“Did I not declare my words. . .”) belong to God, channeled through the voice of Moroni, “crying from the dead” and “speaking out of the dust.” Unlike the crying blood above, which cried out *to* God, this signal originates *from* God, passes through Moroni as prophet/speaker/writer, and reaches its audience.

But the signal flow becomes even more complex still, especially in relation to God: the next verse once again highlights God’s role as a sound source embedded in a network of other speakers/voices, both living and dead, but here, the directionality between God and prophet is reversed. Whereas God was previously the source of the signal and Moroni the transmitting medium, now God is re-stating Moroni’s words: “I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth *out of the mouth* of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation” (Moroni 10:28, emphasis added). Here God’s own orality comes to the fore: he is a being who not only has a mouth from which things proceed, an idea with potentially radical implications that arises elsewhere in the book too, but who also will

(at least on occasion) take verbal cues from prophets, reciting or re-uttering those prophets' words himself. Furthermore, his voice does not simply speak—it hisses forth. It, like all voices, contains some sonic qualities—"grain," inflection, timbre, urgency—that go beyond the pure semantic register of the message.

What initially appears to be a process of divine ventriloquism (i.e., God speaks through the mouths of the prophets) becomes something more dialogic, to return to Givens and Bakhtin. But here the dialogism is rather literal: sometimes God speaks through the prophet, and sometimes the prophet speaks through God. That is, a prophet's words may be the phonetic fodder for God's own speech, suggesting that (to some degree) even God is subject to Bakhtin's maxim of heteroglossia: "The word in language is half someone else's. . . . [I]t exists in other people's mouths."⁹ This shared orality—which presumes a strong sense of aurality as well—lies at the heart of this network of voices and ears hissing from the dust. In particular, it serves as the mechanism by which this hissing can be preserved "from generation to generation," transmitted by a cyborg chain of prophets, saints, plates, books, readers, and God, not to mention the technologies Joseph Smith used in producing the book (seer stones, a printing press, etc.). Ultimately for Moroni, the hiss of God, the declaration of prophets, the mourning of widows and orphans, and the crying of saints' blood all join together in the broader revelatory project of the Book of Mormon: none are present to the reader, all rely on the book-as-medium, and yet all are stubbornly vocal. I have opted to call this trope of a voice crying from the dust a metaphor, and yet on some level, it speaks (almost literally) to the instability of the book-as-message, to the now-vanished engravings on the gold plates, and to the nature of the Book of Mormon as a medium for sound. In other words, the trope highlights what in other media contexts might be termed the book's "lossiness"—its propensity for discarding certain portions of the data (i.e., sensory and spiritual experience) its narrator-prophets set out to represent during its encoding (i.e., "engraving"/writing). As stated above, the book aspires to the condition of sound while emphatically being reduced to text. If taken slightly literally, this media description also raises an aural quandary: What does a

voice crying from the dust sound like? Does the Book of Mormon intend to conjure actual prophetic voices, like the so-called Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28), who summons an annoyed Samuel to answer Saul? Is hearing such a voice only a metaphorical proposition? These questions are perhaps unanswerable, but the Book of Mormon text itself—the message, rather than the medium—does offer some clues to these questions through its handling of sound and voice within its own narrative world.

Book as Sonic Message: Prison as Acoustic Archive

While Nephi and Moroni emphasize the way the Book of Mormon functions as a sonic *medium*, other narrators recount a sonic *message*: a rich world of acoustic religiosity in which teachings are spoken from high towers for amplification, prophets impersonate others' voices or strike them dumb, and interventions from the voice of God and his angels shake cities and bring nations to tears. These narratives engage with sound on a level that is simultaneously narrower than the "voice from the dust" trope—the contents of the book rather than the entirety of the book itself—and also much more expansive, taking on the sprawling question of what comprises the sensory nature of religious practice. As such, the Book of Mormon contains numerous events in which sound plays a crucial role in formulating, transmitting, and representing sacred knowledge and action. It frequently becomes a site of contestation between believers and non-believers. But perhaps most importantly, it functions as a key marker of divinity and an object of aspiration, as prophets and other believers aspire to attain a sonic existence more like that of God and his angels.

The entire narrative of the Book of Mormon could be reconstructed as a kind of sacred sonic drama, from the opening audiovisions of Lehi and Nephi's impersonation of Laban's voice in order to gain access to the brass plates, the model for sacred record-keeping and source of Nephi's "voice from the dust" musings; on down through the discourse of King Benjamin from atop a tower so his voice could be heard, alternating in call-and-response with his people as they take on new names to be called by God on

the last day; with a tangential history of a people called Jaredites whose sacred history dates back to that great sonic scrambling of language at the Tower of Babel, inscribed in a text that also requires translational technologies to be readable; continuing forward with the extensive ministry of Alma the Younger, whose conversion came by way of an angel's voice that shakes the earth, and who dreams of having that same kind of voice, even while smiting an "anti-Christ" deaf and mute; with sonic cityscapes that would become ground zero for preaching, whether in prisons shaken by divine voices or on city walls used as makeshift pulpits; to the death of Jesus Christ in the old world, which precipitates massive destruction followed by a howling throughout the land, in turn silenced by a voice from heaven chastising its hearers and announcing Christ's visit in the Americas; and on several centuries further to a conflagration of perpetual war (never a quiet affair), prompting the final narrator-prophet, Moroni, to meditate once again on voices—and blood—crying from the dust. From Babel to the burial of plates that cry out and hiss forth, this religious history emerges time and time again in and through sound.

A number of key themes arises from this acoustic chronicle and its attendant religious thought and practice. Those might be aphoristically summarized as follows: Voices matter—it's best to have a divine one, if possible. The world resonates (with and against voices). Intense quiet and intense loudness can both be divine. Some forms of vocalization are too sacred to be written.

Beyond the realm of aphorism, many of these issues touch on broader issues of sound and culture that resonate with contemporary concerns (scholarly and otherwise) about sound outside Mormonism. For example, Alma the Younger's near-erotic longing to possess an angelic voice would fit well in post-Lacanian psychoanalysis of the voice, especially in the context of opera.¹⁰ The alternating bouts of widespread lament, disembodied divine voice, and silence that presage Christ's coming could be understood as a mix of soundscape theories since John Cage and notions of the "acousmatic" voice—something heard but not seen—that dates back to Pythagoras and his students yet takes on new relevance in a world of phonographic recording and playback.¹¹ Even the

seemingly niche question of towers as communication technologies (from Babel to King Benjamin to the Rameumptom prayer-tower) is, if not inherently modern, an important part of understanding contemporary media, from the Twin Towers to those used for radio, television, and cell phone.¹²

While all of these aphorisms and contemporary themes warrant further attention, this question of towers and media points to one of the most salient, and perhaps surprising, themes in the Book of Mormon: sound and architecture. In the book's narrative, the built environment becomes an active sonic participant in the narrative (i.e., the message) and occasionally in the inscribing of that narrative (i.e., the medium). Sometimes it constrains sound, as with the Rameumptom (Alma 31), where participating in the sonic rites of communal prayer is an exclusive privilege. Sometimes it amplifies sound, as with King Benjamin or Samuel the Lamanite, who preach from a temple tower (Mosiah 2) and a city wall (Helaman 13), respectively, with the explicit aim of making their voices heard. Sometimes it does both, as when a later Nephi prays from a tower in his garden, ostensibly hoping to commune with God alone but instead, because of his intense mourning, attracts a large crowd of spectators (Helaman 7).

On a few occasions, the built environment also writes or inscribes sound, as in one of the stranger moments in the book, a communal epiphany in a prison, recounted in Helaman 5. It draws together many of the themes above—God's voice, angels, silence, and speechlessness—and situates them within architecture that, while part of the book's text (i.e., message), also remind us of its ongoing engraving of sound (i.e., medium).

One generation before Samuel, the brother-prophets Lehi and Nephi (of garden-tower fame), the sons of Helaman (not to be confused with the father-son duo at the beginning of the Book of Mormon), find themselves imprisoned because of their preaching activities. Like several generations of missionaries had tried before them, they were attempting to convert Lamanites and were thrown into prison—as fate would have it, a prison that had been used in an earlier encounter between Nephtes and Lamanites. But the prison would not last much longer. Just as their captors

are preparing to execute them, Nephi and Lehi are “encircled about as if by fire” but without being burned (Helaman 5:23). Their Lamanite captors are unable to do anything to them, being “struck dumb with amazement” (5:25). Nephi and Lehi tell their captors not to fear, after which “the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth; but behold they did not fall” (5:27). Not yet, anyway.

A cloud of darkness encircles the captors, freezing them in place with fear, and a voice is then heard “as if it were above the cloud of darkness, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings” (Helaman 5:29). A disembodied voice advocates the very-much-embodied voices of its (his?) emissaries. What follows next shares much of the same language of other divinely acousmatic moments, like the disembodied vocal interlude from the heavens between Christ’s death and visit to the Americas, or Elijah’s encounter with Jehovah’s “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–12). But here, architecture plays a key role too:

And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul—And notwithstanding the mildness of the voice, behold the earth shook exceedingly, and *the walls of the prison trembled again*, as if it were about to tumble to the earth. (Helaman 5:30–31, emphasis added)

The voice returns a second time calling them to repentance again, and then once more: “And also again the third time the voice came, and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man; and the walls did tremble again, and the earth shook as if it were about to divide asunder” (5:33). Again, these tropes are not unfamiliar: unexpected qualities of voice (perfect mildness but piercing and earth-shaking); language which is unutterable by humans (and thus well beyond the pale of being inscribable in writing); and the centrality of architecture itself as a way of more clearly perceiving sound. Furthermore, while architecture is presumably

unnecessary to amplify this voice literally, the shaking walls—the aural architecture in crisis—adds a material exclamation point to the power of the voice’s sound itself.

The prison walls hold for the moment and an unexpected group conversation next emerges between “the voice,” Nephi and Lehi, and their captors—and the walls, in a certain sense. Nephi and Lehi “lift their eyes to heaven . . . in the attitude as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld” (Helaman 5:36). The Lamanite guards, otherwise frozen in dread, are able to move their bodies to look at—but not hear—this conversation. One of them, an apostate Nephite named Aminadab, states, “They do converse with the angels of God” (5:39). He encourages his Lamanite comrades, who want to be unstuck, to “repent, and cry unto the voice”—interestingly, not to God, but simply to the voice—and they will be freed from the cloud of darkness holding them in place.

So they do: “they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed” (Helaman 5:40–41). Soon everyone is encircled by holy flames, and the holy spirit of God descends upon them such that “they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words” (5:44–45). A quiet-like voice comes again—“yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper”—presumably from God the Father, who extols their faith in his “Well Beloved” (5:46–47). When they look up to find the source of this voice, they see instead the heavens open and angels descending down to minister to them (5:46–47).

Once again familiar sonic elements appear, including whispering, God’s voice from heaven, visceral orality, and angelic mediums, but I am particularly interested in the interaction between sound and shaking walls here. In other prison stories, like that of Alma and Amulek, the prison collapses (also “with great noise,” Alma 14:29), but here, the prison stays in one piece, while its walls register the impact of this whispering voice—a kind of architectural visualization of sound or reverse seismograph, where this voice is transduced into physical shaking. The walls bear witness to the sonic intensity, shaking but not buckling, holding fast to allow the communal conversion that follows.

In addition, the voice, rather than simply being acousmatically disembodied (as in, say, 3 Nephi 8–11), almost becomes incarnate despite its apparent immateriality. The Lamanite guards can simply pray *to the voice*—no need to worry about its source. Even when it is ascribed to some person (“him who had shaken the earth,” 5:45), they still pray to the voice itself, a kind of Lacanian “object voice” with some recognizable substance beyond its semantic message.¹³ These attributes of the voice—its ability to shake walls and the apparent legitimacy of its functioning as an object of prayer—suggest a substantial and doctrinally orthodox materiality to this voice, despite the lack of a visible body.¹⁴ That materiality is further heightened by its apparent mobility: it comes and goes, initially accessible and audible to some but not all, much like the kind of voice we might expect to be attached to a body; meanwhile, the prison guards—and their voices—are rendered immobile, reversing the normal arrangement of the prison broadly (i.e., the captors are now captive) as well as of the various voices in the prison.

As at Jericho, walls become a marker and a monument for divine intervention through sound. But more critically, like King Benjamin’s tower, which was then augmented with messengers who could write up his sermon and disseminate it to the parts of his audience unable to hear his voice, the prison wall becomes a part of a process of registering sound and preserving it—and then setting into motion the dissemination of that sound. Critically, the prison did *not* fall, allowing the guards to survive (unlike their counterparts in Alma 14), become converted, and then preach, “declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had *heard and seen*”—yet another Lehi-Nephi audiovisual epiphany—“insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received” (Helaman 5:50, emphasis added). The walls and the prison guards become co-witnesses, or “evidences,” of the “greatness” of this event. The witnessing of this joint human-architectural archive leads to arguably the largest scale conversion in the Book of Mormon, which changes the entire racial and national trajectories of the Lehiters for generations.

And lastly, Nephi engraves on plates his recollection of the experience—a plate-based inscription of audiovisual impressions left in walls and their human occupants.¹⁵

Book as Sonic Process I: Translation as Dictation

The aural logics of the Book of Mormon extend beyond the text itself—they also include its process of *becoming* a book from Joseph Smith's accounts of angelic visitations to the dictation, handling, and printing of the Book of Mormon text. Once again, visual paradigms have traditionally held sway, and not without reason: Joseph Smith told of seeing angels, witnesses emphasized having seen the gold plates, and the act of "translation" entailed a variety of supernatural devices for viewing.¹⁶ Yet throughout it all, sound was not only present, but an integral part of how the book came into existence as such.

A convenient place to locate the beginnings of the process of creating the Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith's visions of the angel Moroni. The canonical account of these visions begins with Joseph Smith "calling upon God" for forgiveness for his sins on the evening of September 21, 1823 (Joseph Smith—History 1:28–29). Before he could finish praying, an angel appears whose appearance and corporeality captivate Joseph. Joseph gives a catalog of the angel's unclothed, or "naked," body parts, culminating in the homoerotic statement, "he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom" (1:31). But in addition to (or more likely, heightening) the erotics of the moment, "seeing into the bosom" of an angel also functions as a kind of pulling-back-the-curtain on the physical apparatus of his voice (lungs, diaphragm, throat), as though Joseph is wondering where the vocal thunder comes from. (After all, he had a "countenance truly like lightning," 1:32.)

After an initial moment of fear, Joseph recovers and the two converse quite extensively, with the angel declaring (in an apparently normal voice) that Joseph has been called of God, that people will speak ill of him, and that there are gold plates buried nearby, along with other ancient artifacts to be used to translate the book.

Somewhat paradoxically, the angel Moroni then launches into a recital of scripture, “quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36ff). Although written well after the fact in 1838, this account even emphasizes that Moroni *revised* scriptures as he quoted them, recounting them “with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36ff), a practice Smith would employ throughout his prophetic career.

After the scripture session runs its course, the angel continues “conversing” with Smith about the plates, prompting him to have a vision “opened to [his] mind” to see their location (Joseph Smith—History 1:42). Following this first angelic “communication” (1:43), Moroni departs, then returns twice more and repeats the message verbatim “without the least variation” (1:45), apart from additional material he appends to the end of the messages. The next day Joseph Smith collapses while working outside with his father, coming to when he hears “a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name,” only to see the same messenger, who relates the same message with some new instructions (1:49). While Book of Mormon angels are not all of the thundering variety, it is striking that Moroni’s vocal arsenal is not only non-thundering but draws its oral repertoire so extensively from extant King James scripture—with emendation as needed. The recursive nature of scriptures, as (so often) a chain of things uttered then written then recited (or otherwise re-cited), takes on a whole new meaning when one of those original speakers comes from the dead to enact such performative speech.

Once Joseph obtained the plates, he began “translating” them, a much contested practice that entailed a lively sonic process of dictation. This process may have involved Joseph’s looking at the gold plates themselves, but more likely only entailed looking into his various prophetic prostheses: the urim and thummim, two ancient stones he found with the plates, or more frequently, his own modern “seer stone.”¹⁷ Critically, Joseph did not write for himself; all accounts of the translation process indicate that he dictated aloud to scribes, including his wife, Emma, Martin Harris, and above all, Oliver Cowdery throughout the intensive three-month period in 1829 when most of the book was produced.¹⁸ In looking at their accounts of the process, historians and other scholars tend—again—to privilege the

visual and textual. But these accounts are replete with details about the orality and aurality of the process as well. Emma recounted in an 1856 interview, “When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time.”¹⁹

As Royal Skousen has pointed out, this process entails four steps: Joseph Smith sees the English text in some way; he reads it to the scribe; the scribe hears the text; and the scribe reproduces the text in writing.²⁰ Yet the spelling out of proper names, if Emma’s memory serves, reminds us of the kind of multisensory reading (and attendant difficulties) suggested by Lehi’s theophany-by-book. It reminds us that Joseph did not simply read the text to the scribe—he vocalized it, intoning and pronouncing each word or even letter, a reading-aloud that required conscious effort, accompanied by prosodic rhythm, cadence, and pauses in its sonic flow. Both Emma and David Whitmer commented on Joseph’s inability to correctly pronounce even common biblical names.²¹ In a later interview, Emma recalled that at the time, “Joseph Smith could neither write *nor dictate* a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone *dictating a book* like the Book of Mormon.”²² She continues, “I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when [I was] acting as his scribe, [he] would dictate to me for hour after hour; and when returning from meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him.”²³

Emma highlights the difficulty of dictation (at least for Joseph) and the labor of vocalization: it was not an intuitive task for him, lasted for hours on end, and required focus to pronounce correctly. Oliver Cowdery emphasized (twice!) this same power of orality in his account: “I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages,) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power

of God, by means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by that book, ‘holy interpreters’. . . . I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet.”²⁴ However self-serving Cowdery’s account may have been (“I wrote it myself. . .”), his repetition of the phrase “fell from the lips of the Prophet” underscores the fundamental orality of the translation/dictation process, as well as, again, the erotics of the mouth and voice throughout the bringing forth of the plates.

The implications for such orality go beyond the simple fact of its existence, that orality was central to the process. Much of Royal Skousen’s work in creating a critical edition of the Book of Mormon focuses on the impact of this peculiar orality. He posits a number of points that shed light on the translation process based on his analysis of original manuscripts, a few of which relate closely to sound and pronunciation: “The original manuscript was written from dictation” (a point made most clear by scribal errors, such as the conflation of “and” with “an”). “Joseph Smith was working with [i.e., viewing and in turn dictating] at least twenty words at a time” (a quantity that at times appears to have created transcription difficulties for his scribes). “Joseph Smith could see the spelling of names” (though he apparently also pronounced names fully, yet another variable that sometimes led to scribal inconsistency with a name like “Amalickiah,” sometimes written “Ameleckiah,” suggesting that Smith accented the first syllable). And finally, “The scribe repeated the text to Joseph Smith.”²⁵ As noted above, Terry Givens has described the Book of Mormon text as having a “polyphonic structure,”²⁶ but Skousen’s assessment suggests that its very writing/translation was literally polyphonic as well—the product of multiple voices in conversation with one another, dictating and reading back, “translating” and proofreading.

Furthermore, an even more emphatically sonic position is available—indeed, perhaps necessary—for less “believing” readers and critics. Skousen takes for granted the existence (and textual nature) of both the gold plates and Joseph’s translating devices (urim and thummim, seer stones). A more skeptical viewpoint might eliminate one or both of those writerly objects, thus rendering Joseph’s initial oral performance of the text of *the*

original Book of Mormon, complete with its idiosyncratic diction and linguistic particulars. At the same time, Joseph's scriptural dictations bear striking similarities to episodes and statements in the book's narrative about dictation, including (yet again) King Benjamin's speech, dictated in real-time (Mosiah 2:8), and various commands from Jesus about how and when to produce scripture by writing down his utterances and those of previous prophets (3 Nephi 16:4, 23:3–14).²⁷ Such similarities could be regarded as Joseph Smith's self-projection and/or a generalizable principle, following the book's own text, of how scripture is fundamentally a dictation of godly speech (2 Nephi 29:11–12). But for believer and skeptic alike, the proto-Book of Mormon dictated by Joseph Smith should not be understood as anomalous; it clearly fits well in the book's own narrative of such dictations, voices from the dust, and the salient interest in utterances coming "from the mouth" of God and prophets.

The translation process was punctuated by sound in other ways as well. After an initial period dictating primarily to Martin Harris, Joseph Smith reluctantly agreed to let Harris take home the 116 pages they had produced to show to his wife and some close family members. The manuscript got lost during this period, leading to one of the more poignant—and sonic—outbursts we have on record from Smith when he found out. Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recounts: "Mr. Harris pressed his hands upon his temples, and cried out in a tone of deep anguish, 'Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!' . . . 'Oh, my God!' Said Joseph, clinching his hands. 'All is lost! All is lost!' . . . He wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually."²⁸ Lucy's attempts to comfort her son failed, and "sobs and groans, and the most bitter lamentations filled the house. . . . And he [Joseph] continued pacing back and forth, meantime weeping and grieving, until about sunset."²⁹ This incident can be read in a number of ways (devotional or otherwise), but the anguish and audible lamentation, lasting from a little past noon until sunset, show the raw emotions of this process as well as some of its acoustic side effects. While posthumous prophets like Moroni recite scripture with composure, their human counterparts are left to weep and wail.

Book as Sonic Process II: Dissemination

As the process of dictated translation drew to a close, Joseph Smith inaugurated a critical phase in the dissemination of the Book of Mormon, inviting eleven witnesses to see the plates in the summer of 1829. Unsurprisingly, their experiences involved a broad range of sensory modalities beyond just sight. In June, Joseph had received a revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 17) addressing Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, promising to show them the plates. Once again, Lucy Mack Smith offers scintillating details about the occasion on which the witnesses would see the plates. She recounts the ritual practices that started this day—and by implication, most other days as well—for Joseph Smith: “The next morning, after attending to the usual services, namely, reading, singing and praying, Joseph arose from his knees, and approaching Martin Harris with a solemnity that thrills through my veins to this day,” telling him to humble himself and to join with Cowdery and Whitmer to see the plates.³⁰

Joseph and these “Three Witnesses” went to a nearby grove and prayed, with Harris eventually excusing himself. They then report that an angel appeared to them: “In his hands,” Joseph recounts, “he held the plates which we had been praying to have a view of.”³¹ But this “view” was complicated by sound: first, the angel spoke briefly to David Whitmer, encouraging him to keep the commandments; then, “immediately afterwards, we *heard a voice* from out of the bright light above us, saying, ‘These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.’”³² Smith then joined Harris, who had left the group, and experienced the same thing again, this time punctuated by Harris crying out “apparently in an ecstasy of joy, ‘Tis enough; ‘tis enough; mine eyes have beheld; mine eyes have beheld;’ and jumping up, he *shouted*, ‘Hosanna,’ blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly.”³³ In their formal testimony, included with the published Book of Mormon, they are explicit that they not only saw the plates but that they were translated by

God's power, "for *His voice* hath declared it unto us. . . . [And] *the voice* of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it."³⁴

While the other eight witnesses have a much more straightforward experience, with Smith simply showing them the plates, they are allowed to touch them: "we did handle [them] with our hands . . . for we have *seen and hefted*, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken."³⁵ After this tactile and proprioceptive moment of handling and hefting, these eight similarly agreed to "give our names unto the world to witness unto the world that which we have seen,"³⁶ signifying their witness with that oldest of sonic identifiers, their names. In so doing, they also complied with the Book of Mormon injunction (mentioned above) that "in the mouth" of such witnesses would God's word be established and testified of, enabling "the words of the faithful . . . to speak as if it were from the dead" (2 Nephi 27:13–14).

The printing process likewise entailed significant sonic entanglements. Although written long after the fact, an 1892 statement penned by John Gilbert, the compositor (i.e., typesetter) for the printing of the Book of Mormon, offers a few insights into that process and its own oral/aural logics. Of the Book of Mormon manuscript, he writes:

The manuscript was supposed to be in the handwriting of Cowdery. Every Chapter, if I remember correctly, was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end. Names of persons and places were generally capitalized, but sentences had no end. The character or short &, was used almost invariably where word *and*, occurred, except at the end of a chapter. I punctuated it to make it read as I supposed the Author intended, and but very little punctuation was altered in proof-reading.³⁷

Scholars like Royal Skousen have scoured these statements to better understand the process of dictation and transcription, as well as to formulate a critical edition of the text. But the issue of punctuation deserves comment in its own right. While punctuation (or orthography, more generally) is not necessarily sonic in and of itself, it functions as the articulatory system of language, allowing a string of words or characters to be inflected with prosody and speech style.³⁸

In short, punctuation serves as an inscription system for the realm of speech that extends beyond the semantics of individual words themselves. Thus Gilbert can be seen as re-sonifying the Book of Mormon text to closer approximate the dictated version given by Joseph Smith (or what he imagined that version to be)—a task he paradoxically needed to carry out on behalf of Oliver Cowdery, who took the dictation in the first place and was, as Gilbert notes, present for much of the printing process.³⁹

The printing offices of E. B. Grandin, where the book was published, became a more general site of sonic contestation as well. Lucy Mack Smith recounts one such instance, relatively early in the process, when “clouds of persecution again began to gather” against the project in an unholy alliance of local “rabble” and “a party of restless religionists” that had begun meeting together. She recounts: “About the first council of this kind was held in a room adjoining that in which Oliver [Cowdery] and a young man by the name of Robinson were printing. Mr. Robinson being curious to know what they were doing in the next room, applied his ear to a hole in the partition wall, and by this means overheard several persons expressing their fears in reference to the Book of Mormon.”⁴⁰ According to her second-hand, eavesdropped account, the meeting was a lively back-and-forth between a speaker and collective exclamations. (For example, after some fear-mongering on behalf of local clergy, the speaker “then inquired, whether they should endure it. ‘No, no,’ was the unanimous reply.”⁴¹)

One of the group’s resolutions was to send a delegation of ministers to visit Lucy and her family, which led to a fairly tense standoff in which she told one Deacon Beckwith, “if you should stick my flesh full of fagots, and even burn me at the stake, I would declare, as long as God should give me breath, that Joseph has got that Record, and that I know it to be true.”⁴² This kind of macabre testimonial—echoed later in Brigham Young’s affirmation of Orson Pratt, that if “Brother Orson were chopped up in inch pieces, each would cry out Mormonism was true”⁴³—highlights a striking relationship between body, breath, voice, and violence. Until (or even after!) one’s breath is extinguished, the declaration of testimony is a duty incumbent upon believers, violence (or

threats thereof) notwithstanding. With a similar anti-authoritarian air, Lucy's son Samuel responded to the same delegation, opting for angel Moroni's strategy of reciting aloud passages of Isaiah (56:9–11) to them. His spontaneous recitation included the stinging indictment: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber."⁴⁴ Blind, ignorant, and mute: such were the sensory incapacities of the delegation.

On a more mundane note, the sounds of operating a printing press must have generated a fascinating sonic environment in its own right. From Gilbert's statement, we learn details of the press itself: "The Bible [i.e., the Gold Bible, or the Book of Mormon] was printed on a 'Smith' Press, single pull, and old fashioned 'Balls' or 'Niggerheads' were used—composition rollers not having come into use in small printing offices."⁴⁵ Although the sonic particulars of Grandin's office can only be imagined, technical clues such as these give some sense of what the actual printing of the book on a Smith Improved Printing Press in Palmyra in 1829–1830 might have sounded like. Regular, repeated steps in this process would have included: selecting and setting the proper metal sorts/letters, inking the sheepskin ink balls and "beating" them to ink the type, positioning paper, feeding the paper by means of the rounce, "pulling" (i.e., turning) the platen down onto the type, and eventually cutting the paper. This space, resonant with the encounters of partially-mechanized actions and their human instigators, points again to the mediations in and through sound that marked the book's materialization.

And so the Book of Mormon was born to sound—and re-sound, both among its adherents and its adversaries. Benjamin Winchester's 1841 account characterizes the earliest responses to its publication as a sonic feud: "No sooner had the Book of Mormon made its appearance, than priests and professors began to rage, Madam Rumour began with her poisonous tongues; epithet upon epithet, calumny upon calumny, was heaped upon the few that were first engage[d] in the cause; mobs raged, and the people imagined a vain thing; a general hue and cry was raised and reiterated from one end of the country." The slander of the clergy, he continues,

and “the pen of the learned” have joined forces against the book, and even “the drunkard and the swearer have caught the sound and have joined with the professor in crying ‘delusion,’ &c.”⁴⁶

On the flipside, Winchester compares the believers’ limited ability to respond with the familiar vocality of angelic tongues to still this “hue and cry” against the book: “had we the tongue of Michael the arch-angel it would have been as impossible for us to reason with the uproarious multitude, as it would have been for any man to reason with the Jews while Christ was before Pilate, and they were crying ‘away with him,’ ‘crucify him.’”⁴⁷ Even the voice of angels is apparently not enough against an opposition when it reaches a certain level of loudness, even if figurative.

Yet on a deeper level, as Terryl Givens has pointed out, the Book of Mormon was not simply being treated as a static text by either side. He writes that “the history of the Book of Mormon’s place in Mormonism and American religion generally has always been more connected to its status as signifier than signified. . . . The Book of Mormon is preeminently a concrete manifestation of sacred utterance.”⁴⁸ Once again, these metaphors are perhaps more suggestive when taken literally; conceiving of the book as a generic or figurative “utterance” too easily leads us to believe there is nothing particularly verbal or audibly uttered by or about the Book of Mormon. But closer attention to the book’s aural logics demonstrates that the book is always an uttering signifier: as a medium, as a message, and as a process of dictation and production.

Conclusion: How to Read A Voice from the Dust?

The Book of Mormon, as I described above, opens with a set of visions, culminating in the prophet Lehi reading a book. Nephi makes a special point in designating reading as a special category of sensory experience (1 Nephi 1:19), demanding multisensory sensitivity to the intertwining of the visual (i.e., looking at a book) with the sonic (i.e., speaking its contents aloud). In his book *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel makes a similar assertion: in earlier times, reading was more an “aural hallucination” than a visual experience, while in sacred texts, “where every letter and the

number of letters and their order were dictated by the godhead, full comprehension required not only the eyes but also the rest of the body: swaying to the cadence of the sentences and lifting to one's lips the holy words, so that nothing divine could be lost in the reading."⁴⁹ The history of the Book of Mormon's reception could be told in similar terms, as a collective struggle to figure out how to read the book—and especially how to read a book that claims to be a scriptural chronicle of “dialogues with the dead,” to borrow John Durham Peters's term, in an era already deeply obsessed with the possibility of communing with the deceased.⁵⁰

Even before the book was published, it began prompting questions about how (if at all) to read it. Philologist Charles Anthon allegedly told Martin Harris, “I cannot read a sealed book,” confirming for believers the prophecies of Isaiah by way of Nephi, while suggesting that reading this book might not be an entirely straightforward venture.⁵¹ Some nineteenth-century readers, like Parley Pratt, found the text entrancing, unable to stop reading even to eat or sleep, while others, like Mark Twain, found just the opposite to be true: the book was tedious to the point of inducing slumber.⁵² In the twentieth century, the most overt, extended discussion within LDS circles of not just reading the book but of how to think *about* reading the book may well have come from LDS apostle and later president Ezra Taft Benson. In several of his highest-profile sermons, he spoke repeatedly about the book, advocating particular reading strategies, even encouraging “owners of cassette players to play Book of Mormon cassettes from time to time and to listen to them at home and while walking, jogging, or driving.”⁵³ In fairness to Benson, this was just one of a whole litany of reading techniques he proposed, but it helpfully gestures toward the problem I explore here: how can a reader of the Book of Mormon come to hear its auralty?

Setting cassette tapes aside for the moment, this question closely resembles the title of John Foley's book *How to Read an Oral Poem*.⁵⁴ Foley's interests roam from Homer to slam poetry sessions in North America, but his underlying premise is clear from the title: reading (originally) oral poetry calls for different approaches than reading written poetry. The Book of Mormon

makes (with very few exceptions) no pretension of being poetry, more often embracing a style of “exceedingly great plainness of speech” (Enos 1:23), or what Twain called “a prosy detail of imaginary history.”⁵⁵ But whether prose or poetry, Foley’s reading strategies are suggestive of how one might more productively encounter a sonic text, Book of Mormon or otherwise. He calls attention, for example, to the need for considering special linguistic codes, the role of special formulas, figurative language that may function differently from contemporary usage, appeals to tradition (in this case, other Judeo-Christian scripture), and the complex role of repetition.

One of Foley’s aphoristic “proverbs” for reading oral poetry states: “The art of oral poetry emerges *through* rather than *in spite of* its special language.”⁵⁶ Or, as Dell Hymes writes in his “first principle” on how orality works, “oral narratives consist of spoken lines, which need not be equivalent to written sentences.”⁵⁷ As with other sturdier genres of oral prose—Northern European saga, mixed-genre narratives of West Africa, or American folktale traditions in white Appalachia or a Native American reservation—the sonic Book of Mormon requires a recognition of how its “special language” is working. Presuming that all its utterances function like “written sentences” in a novel or even a history book all but ensures that the book will disappoint on some level. Such a book must be heard, or at least conceived of, sonically.

Concretely then, one might consider all kinds of features of the Book of Mormon as sonic first—as “spoken lines,” broadly—and writing secondarily.⁵⁸ Thus, extended citations of the King James Bible become not copying or plagiarism but recitation and remix, age-old strategies for reviving and reusing not just the text cited but the broad network of associations built into that particular tradition of verbal art. This is what Foley calls “immanent art,”⁵⁹ though his insights should be obvious to any post-hip-hop-generation reader of the Book of Mormon: the sample, remix, or repeated refrain is not a deficit of culture but a newly fashioned production of culture itself. Furthermore, these layers of citation are remixed again in the book’s reception, memorization, formal and informal quotation (including misquotations!), and other contemporary

verbal referencing. Other examples abound in the book, including the direct address to an audience, the frequent self-testifying, and the beginning verses (as now subdivided) with conjunctions (especially “and”), all of which could readily be understood in a sonic/spoken universe much more readily than the writerly one most readers seem to presume.

All of this points to the ultimate Book of Mormon-ism, the phrase, “And it came to pass.” Twain wrote of this phrase: “‘And it came to pass’ was [Joseph Smith’s] pet. If he had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.”⁶⁰ Twain’s assessment is funny, scathing, and observant—yet it also misses the point. “And it came to pass” is rhythm, in an oddly Mormonish way. The phrase, in its hundreds of appearances, is *the* principal source of pacing in a massive historical chronicle. Brant Gardner suggests the phrase may well have served a functional purpose for Joseph Smith in dictating paragraphs,⁶¹ though he, like other Book of Mormon apologists, immediately uses this observation to burnish linguistic arguments about ancient Semitic/Mayan roots.

More interestingly to me, this strange phrase—“And it came to pass”—offers a clear, repeated moment where we can readily hear *the book* articulating Joseph Smith’s voice, and not the other way around. Whether or not one believes there was any writing in Smith’s seer stone or on the plates (or even that there were plates at all), the phrase offers (again and again!) moments of rhythmic punctuation that would have acted on and molded Smith’s speech, particularly the cadence and prosody of his dictation. While accounts of his spelling proper names might have some similar effect, they must have been less ubiquitous than this infamous phrase. “And it came to pass” is the ultimate oral-formulaic trace of the book’s dictation and publication in the nineteenth century, creating structure for a much larger work (i.e., the whole book) from the verbal tradition of its speaker(s), whether understood to be Joseph Smith, ancient prophets, or some combination of both.

Other examples of such sound-friendly reading strategies could be furnished, but that idiosyncratic phrase points to a bigger issue of the text’s orality. The text is often spoken aloud: a lay-preacher in a Mormon worship service quotes it in a homily (or “talk”);

a seminary student memorizes these verses aloud as “scripture mastery”; a blind member listens to the audiobook version⁶²; a missionary stands on a literal soapbox at a street-meeting reciting “Moroni’s promise”; a Mormon apostle reads from a teleprompter a verse (perhaps long memorized) which is then transmitted by satellite (with simultaneous translation) to Church audiovisual systems around the globe; or even the Mark Twains of the world jokingly restate parts of the text at its own expense. These sounding re-articulations of the text act as media “recursions,” expanded repetitions of an originary moment of meditation. Media theorist Geoffrey Winthrop-Young describes recursions as “repetitive instances of self-processing that nonetheless result in something different.”⁶³ In other words, these are moments where a technology or medium (e.g., the Book of Mormon) allows for a collapse of historical time (e.g., from the present to 1829 and/or millennia ago), making it possible to experience something unique to the operations of that medium. For example, it is bringing to pass again (and again) “it came to pass.”

Thus by eliciting the audible voice of a reader, the book channels the same medium operations that produced the book (i.e., Joseph Smith’s dictating aloud that same passage while “translating”), which in turn reiterates the book’s original function as sonic medium (i.e., conjuring the prophetic voices crying from the dust). In these moments, the reader’s voice (or to a lesser degree, one’s internal vocalizing while reading) is doing the same acoustic work as Joseph Smith’s voice, and, for a believer, as those prophets of old, who themselves somehow perhaps channeled God’s voice. These recursions, while connecting past to present through media configurations, may often appear quite prosaic—preaching sermons, memorizing verses, listening to audiobooks. In addition to these commonplace audible readings above with their more startling implications of media recursivity, one more bears mention: family scripture study. The ideal for such a practice might well look less like the conjuring of long-deceased prophetic voices and more like a Norman Rockwell painting, with families sitting around the kitchen table before breakfast, taking turns reading verses, or perhaps in an informal evening devotional in the

living room, led by a parent. It would be tempting to critique the bourgeois, heteronormative expectations projected through this imagery (itself propagated through Church magazines and other devotional literature), but its potential for tapping into the spirit of “And it came to pass” in a particularly striking way is undeniable. The phrase remains a marker of rhythm—of the temporal flow of word after word, verse after verse—but it also becomes a marker of a new kind of time, a genealogical time. As much as the “generations” of the book of Genesis transform history into (mostly sacred) lineage, so too can “And it came to pass” transform a mundane (perhaps even boring) act of reading aloud into a kind of intergenerational “welding link” (D&C 128:18), to use a term Joseph Smith would later adopt in describing his own project of religious rituals for the dead. The temporalities of transmitting the text thus expand from recreating prophetic dictations and rhythms to include a much bigger project of establishing sacred generations. “And it came to pass” marks a similar temporal passage in the Book of Mormon, extending from father to son—notably, and perhaps unfortunately, with even greater gender disparities in its voicing of such time than any other scripture—as much as it denotes the passage of some abstract chronicling. Sonic time in the Book of Mormon is both rhythmic and generational, “the times and the seasons,” event and *longue durée*, point and (spiraling?) line. To read aloud is to conjure and (re)create the former; to read aloud across generations brings to pass the latter.

I am not arguing here for a simplistic version of the voice as the ultimate, triumphing presence. Decades ago, Jacques Derrida warned us of precisely this fallacy.⁶⁴ On the contrary, as the strange acousmatic voice of 3 Nephi 11 reminds us, the relationship among voice, aurality, and presence (godly or otherwise) frequently undermines itself, demanding heightened attention to even perceive it, let alone understand it. Indeed, this recursive chain of mediated voices is not intended to call forth God’s presence but to elicit once again the same vocal acts of prophesying—literally of “speaking forth”—repeatedly.

But readers who treat the text as a silent attempt to inscribe truth, whether historical, linguistic, or imaginary, have already

missed the point. Much like William Graham wrote of other scriptural traditions, the Book of Mormon “is often not simply either discursive or esoteric. . . . It is also visceral and sensual, which is to say, nondiscursive, poetic, symbolic, or even aesthetic in nature.”⁶⁵ Even as “prosy” prose and “exceedingly” plain speech, the book’s aural life always goes beyond mere teaching, opening toward a different sensory register. Since its publication, the book has been sonically remediated in the form of hymns, pageants, an oratorio, operas, and even a Broadway musical (sort of). All these point to precisely the “visceral and sensual” qualities of the book, so oft forgotten in the mute hermeneutics of (so much of) Mormon and religious studies. To read—to understand—these voices from the dust, perhaps we need to listen more carefully.

Notes

1. I am indebted to many colleagues and friends who gave feedback on earlier versions of this article: Benjamin Pratt, John Durham Peters, Rosalind Hackett, Michael Hicks, Eunice McMurray, Terryl Givens, Kim Berkey, William Graham, and Zach Davis and Laurel Ulrich’s Second Sunday discussion group.

2. The entire episode contrasts strikingly with the account given in Isaiah 6 of his own calling and throne theophany, with God sitting on his throne while being praised by angels. As in so many instances, the Bible’s sonic qualities are much more present here than in the Book of Mormon account: angelic voices shake the temple, Isaiah’s voice and mouth must be cleansed with a hot coal, God converses with Isaiah, and even his prophetic calling is described in terms of the sensory capabilities of the people he will preach to. Nephi includes this chapter in his mass-citation of Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 16) but gives no direct commentary on it. For a more extensive discussion of Lehi’s theophany, see Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 67–87.

3. William Graham’s landmark book, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1987), points to several of the themes I explore in this paper in the context of Christian and Islamic scriptural traditions. He argues that “virtually every scripture has traditionally functioned in large measure as vocal, not silent discourse. . . . Too often lost to us is the central place of the scriptural word recited, read aloud, chanted, sung, quoted in debate, memorized in childhood, meditated upon in

murmur and full voice, or consciously and unconsciously used as the major building block of public and private discourse” (ix). While I am less interested in the oral uses of scripture he enumerates, I share his guiding insight—that scripture is sound as well as (or sometimes prior to and more emphatically than) writing.

4. A further reception history might then go on to consider the ways the book was preached, evangelized, quoted, memorized and recited, and often musicalized from some of Parley P. Pratt’s earliest hymn-texts to the spate of Mormon pageants that emerged beginning around 1930, and from art music oratorios and operas to the recent Broadway musical. For present purposes, I set aside this post-publication reception of the text, however intriguing the many sonic repurposings of this (already) sonic scripture may be.

5. Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 87.

6. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51, 209ff. Givens cites Bakhtin specifically in several other places in drawing on his formulations of “authoritative discourse” (80–81) and “internal persuasiveness” (176). Polyphony and dialogism, two of Bakhtin’s hallmark theoretical contributions to literary theory, go uncited by Givens, presumably because of how widespread their usage has become. I return to this point later, but these Bakhtinisms unfortunately pull Givens from a literal realm of sound into a metaphorical realm of theory. Thus polyphony (literally “many-voicedness”) and dialogism are denied their original sonic characteristics, unintentionally obfuscating the book’s insistence on its own aurality.

7. Hundreds of years later in the book’s narrative, the failure of writing-as-medium to transmit the sensory power of orality is noted again by another narrator-prophet named Nephi, when Jesus prays for the Lehite multitudes gathered at the temple. This Nephi vacillates in his assessment: he first notes that Jesus “prayed to the Father, and *the things which he prayed cannot be written*, and the multitude did bear record who heard him” (3 Nephi 17:15, emphasis added). But then drawing on the language of Paul’s epistles (themselves a citation of earlier scripture), Nephi’s account continues: “The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:16; see 1 Corinthians 2:9). But not only have these sensations never been experienced, they cannot be reproduced in any medium: “*And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man*, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak” (3 Nephi 17:18, emphasis added). The passage at first affirms the first Nephi’s point of view—Jesus’ prayed utterance, full of groanings (17:14), was

too powerful to be written; then, upon more reflection, it goes further, noting the impossibility of any kind of reproduction or transmission. The same human irreproducibility marks Jesus' next prayer, as well (19:32–34).

8. The Book of Mormon's descriptions of its writing systems offer yet another intriguing point of convergence with broader discussions of contemporary media theory, particularly interest in the complex relationship between sound and alphabetic character in the work of media theorists like Sybille Krämer, Friedrich Kittler, and more controversially, classicist Barry Powell. While most of those discussions focus on Greek, the non-verifiable nature of the Book of Mormon script offers an entry point into a more speculative world of voice-writing and sound-character relations, consciously appropriated and distorted over time. See Sybille Krämer, "'Schriftbildlichkeit' oder: Über eine (fast) vergessene Dimension der Schrift," in *Bild, Schrift, Zahl*, edited by Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 157–76; Wolfgang Ernst and Friedrich Kittler, eds., *Die Geburt des Vokalalphabets aus dem Geist der Poesie: Schrift, Zahl und Ton im Medienverbund* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006); and two books by Barry Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and *Writing: Theory and History of the Technology of Civilization* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 293–94. Bakhtin makes a similar point elsewhere, noting: "Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness'" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern W. McGee [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986], 89). Once again, in Moroni's reformulation of the "voice from the dust," God seems to be a co-creator of this haunting speech with human beings (at least prophets).

10. See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), and Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

11. See John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961); R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Pierre Schaeffer, "Acousmatics," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 76–81; and Brian Kane, "The Acousmatic Voice," in *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 180–221. Several instances in the episode between Christ's death and his appearance to the Lehites

are also suggestive of Roman Jakobson's "phatic function" of language, which serves to establish communication and ensure that a channel is open for sending transmissions (i.e., speech), in "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas Sebeok (New York: Wiley, 1960), 350–77, especially 355. These particular events also echo other Christian narratives (e.g., Jesus' baptism in the New Testament, his transfiguration) and the official account of Joseph Smith's own First Vision (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

12. John Durham Peters writes, "Like calendars and clocks, towers mediate between heaven and earth: they point upward to the sky, but thereby gain more advantage over the earth's surface. . . . A tower is a fulcrum, providing mechanical advantage for the eye and favorable acoustics for the ear; and is thus a power technology par excellence." In addition to examples of radio, television, and cell phone towers, Peters also draws on examples of towers from the Tower of Babel and Aztec temples to lighthouses and meteorological outposts. See John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 233ff.

13. For Lacan, the "object voice" is "a remainder" after "the reduction of the voice that phonology has attempted," or in other words, after all signifying features of language are removed. See Dolar, *A Voice*, 35–36.

14. Two particularly strong treatments of the voice as a material force are Roland Barthes's classic essay, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image Music Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 179–89, and once again Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More*, especially 34–57. Both deal extensively with questions of timbre, vocal production, and the body, along with its consequences for a broader idea(l) of "voice." But the Book of Mormon takes the materiality of voice farther, giving it power to affect the physical world directly.

15. Other episodes in the book emphasize sound as a communicative medium more overtly, such as King Benjamin's tower, real-time messengers, and the ensuing call-and-response with his people (a covenant *in* and *about* sound, and specifically names; see Mosiah 2–5); Alma the Younger's angelic narratives, including his accounts of being visited by an angel (Mosiah 27, Alma 36) and also his meditation on possessing an angel's voice (Alma 29); or the disembodied voices presaging Christ's visit to the Americas (3 Nephi 8–11). But the unusual set of sonic interactions in this prison account—among prophets, prison guards, angels, and architecture—offers a more striking illustration of how sound embeds itself in narrative, shaping events and human interactions.

16. For an overview of Joseph Smith's life and work in the 1820s, see Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 30–108.

17. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 71–73.

18. Givens, *Hand of Mormon*, 30–32.

19. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents, Volumes 1–5* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 1: 530.

20. Royal Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 24.

21. Emma noted in the same 1856 interview, for example, that “even the word *Sarah* [or *Sariah*, in some accounts] he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.” See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1: 530. For similar accounts using the name *Sariah*, see Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 26. For Whitmer’s statements, see Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 124.

22. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 26.

23. Ibid. See also Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 70.

24. Oliver Cowdery, “Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, vol. 21, no. 34 (August 20, 1859): 544.

25. Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated,” 24–27.

26. Givens, *Hand of Mormon*, 51.

27. For a more in-depth treatment of the significance of Jesus’ commentary about the teachings of Samuel the Lamanite, see Jared Hickman, “*The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse*,” *American Literature* 86, no. 3 (2014): 429–61.

28. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S.W. Richards, 1853), 121.

29. Ibid., 121–22.

30. Ibid., 164.

31. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 1:54.

32. Ibid., emphasis added.

33. Ibid., 55, emphasis added.

34. Ibid., 56, emphasis added.

35. Ibid., 57, emphasis added.

36. Ibid.

37. John Gilbert, personal statement, reproduced in Royal Skousen, “Worthy of Another Look: John Gilbert’s 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 71.

38. For a gripping account of punctuation and its discontents, see Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

39. Grandin in Skousen, “Worthy of Another Look,” 71.

40. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 171.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 175.

43. Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 216.

44. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 148.

45. Gilbert in Skousen, “Worthy of Another Look,” 71.

46. Benjamin Winchester, “Introduction to the Subject of the Book of Mormon,” *Gospel Reflector* 1, no. 5 (March 1841): 99.

47. Ibid.

48. Givens, *Hand of Mormon*, 64.

49. Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 43–44.

50. Strikingly, for Peters, the deadness in question is sometimes not literal—communication at a distance can be difficult to distinguish from it, while the act of interpretation (e.g., of a text) shares the same paradigm and problems of communicating with the dead. See John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 149–50.

51. On the Anthon-Harris exchange, see Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 64–65. For more on the verses in question, see Isaiah 29:11 and 2 Nephi 27:8–11.

52. Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Chicago: Law, King and Law, 1874), 37–38. Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1872), 127ff.

53. Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* (Nov. 1988): 4. Other major talks by Benson on the Book of Mormon include “The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign* (May 1975): 63–65, and “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign* (Nov. 1986): 5–7.

54. John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

55. Twain, *Roughing It*, 127.

56. Foley, *How to Read*, 133.

57. Dell Hymes, *Now I Know Only So Far: Essays in Ethnopoetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 234.

58. Although they approach the question from completely different directions, both Alberto Manguel and Friedrich Kittler conceive of reading historically as a sonic experience and, critically, one in which religious (and specifically Christian) reading practices played an integral role in the emergence of an interiorized, “silent” practice of reading. See Manguel, *History of Reading*, 41–55, and Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, translated by Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 27–36, 148–64.

59. Foley, *How to Read*, 109ff.

60. Twain, *Roughing It*, 127–28.

61. Brant Gardner, “Does ‘And it came to pass’ Come to Pass Too Often?,” *Meridian Magazine*, July 7, 2004, <http://ldsmag.com/article-1-207>.

62. According to a 1988 article in the Church-owned newspaper, the *Deseret News*, the first recordings of the Book of Mormon on tape were not for general distribution but for the visually impaired. See “Church is Offering Book of Mormon Tapes to Members at Low Cost,” *Deseret News*, October 22, 1988, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/22790/lds-church-is-offering-book-of-mormon-tapes-to-members-at-low-cost>.

63. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Siren Recursions,” in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, edited by Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 75.

64. Two of Derrida’s early books have particular relevance here: Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967) and *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972). More recently, Jonathan Sterne’s “audiovisual litany” has reminded us of the facile assumptions that underscore many binary distinctions between sound and vision (e.g., hearing is spherical, immersive, interior, etc., while vision is directional, perspectival, concerned with surfaces, etc.). See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 14–19, and “The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 2 (2011): 207–25.

65. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 113.

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.¹

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 hic-coughs, 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.”² 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.”³ 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.⁴

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,"⁵ 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."⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸

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."⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.*¹¹ 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."¹²

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."¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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 fledgling 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."¹⁹ 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."²⁰

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*."²¹ 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."²² 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.”²³ 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.²⁴ 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.”²⁵ (Moody, too, had instructed participants in his doctoral hymn-writing project that “the tessitura should remain low.”²⁶)

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.²⁷

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."²⁸ 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."²⁹ 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.³⁰

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.³¹

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



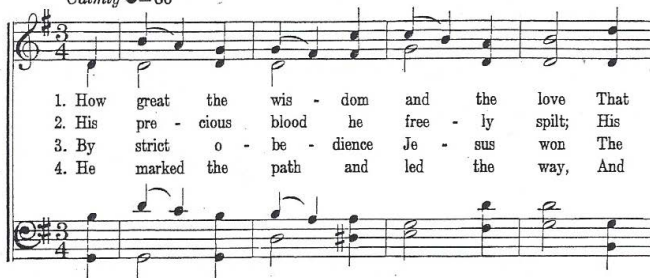
1. How great the wis - dom and the love, That filled the courts on high,
2. His pre - cious blood He free - ly spilt, His life He free - ly gave;
3. By strict o - be - dience Je - sus won The prize with glo - ry rife;
4. He marked the path and led the way, And ev - 'ry point de - fines;

68 How Great the Wisdom and the Love

Eliza R. Snow

Thomas McIntyre

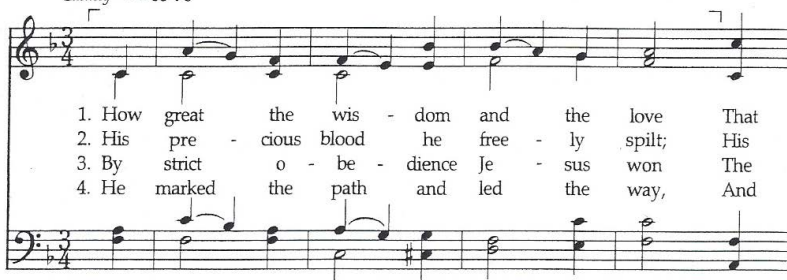
Calmly ♩ = 66



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.”³²



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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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.³⁶

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_b4, a step and a half above middle C. (In fact, only two of the hymns reached E_b4, 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.”³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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
(11B 117)
6 verses



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.³⁹ 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 resource⁴⁰ 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,"⁴¹ 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 G4, 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.”⁴² 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.”⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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.

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.

The Lindsey Stirling Effect

Jeremy Grimshaw

Mormon Celebrity, Mormon Normalcy, and the Dress

We will get to the violin playing. First, let's talk about the dress. On May 17, 2015, the Mormon blogosphere erupted into controversy over the designer gown worn by dancing violinist and YouTube star Lindsey Stirling to the Billboard Music Awards show, where she was to receive the Top Dance/Electronic Album honor. Much of her fan base was torn. Her charm, her quirky fiddle-prancing shtick, and her unapologetic LDS religiosity had made her one of the most eminently Facebookable Mormons in an era in which LDS members have been encouraged quite specifically over the pulpit to share their faith online. And yet there she was, posing for the press in a form-fitting dress with slinky black crisscross straps that framed far too many windowpanes of flesh. "You were a role model until you publicly shamed your religion," one Instagram commenter lamented.¹ Was Stirling flouting—or had she somehow missed—the continued ecclesiastical admonishment and consequent orthodox eagerness, now several years running, to cover the skin from shoulder to knee?

On the other hand, some less conservative voices, many of which, I suspect, do not regularly ride on the same social media bandwagons as do Stirling's fans, leapt to defend her autonomy over her own body and its public presentation and, explicitly or implicitly, enlist the incident in an ongoing critique of Mormon modesty culture's obsession with surface and assumption of the "male gaze."² Stirling herself proposed an odd and logically limber defense: "The dress I wore to the awards was fully lined with tan fabric. But after looking at the pictures, I see that you actually can't tell that it's lined. In hind sight [sic] it wasn't the best choice

because modesty is important to me.”³ Some echoed this cognitively dissonant tack. Megan Gee, a fashion video blogger and student at Brigham Young University–Idaho, encountered a number of students who were perplexed by the dress, including one who felt “like it’s kind of misleading a little bit *because you can’t tell if it’s modest or not*” (emphasis added).⁴ Yes, the dress *looked* provocative, but was it *technically* “modest” because the open parts were lined with skin-colored fabric? Does counterfeit immodesty contain a self-cancelling double negative that leaves you with modesty? If Stirling had made a mistake, some fans opined, it was not so much in wearing the dress but in somehow not conveying the fact that the dress was revealing skin-colored fabric, not actual skin. Stirling’s was an awkward concession and one delivered with regret that the dress and its wearer had been met with such judgmental hostility.⁵

Though seemingly a triviality, the dress incident shows how dramatically a rising Mormon celebrity can project and magnify certain twenty-first-century Mormon cultural tensions. On the one hand, as J. B. Haws has observed, “Mormons seem intrigued, sometimes to the point of obsession, with those in their ranks who achieve celebrity” because seeing such individuals in the public eye “contributes measurably in the quest to demonstrate, in President Hinckley’s words, that Mormons ‘are not a weird people.’”⁶ On the other hand, however, an increasingly variegated American culture makes Mormonism’s hard-fought normalcy itself seem weird. That’s how we arrive at such a strange internal dialogue: *Yay, there’s a Mormon on the red carpet! We’re normal! But she’s wearing an immodest dress! We don’t want that kind of normal! Oh, whew, it’s lined with skin-tone fabric—modest and normal!* Those tensions between normal and boring, between different and devious, are ever-present in American culture but exacerbated in Mormon culture. They are, in fact, the very strings Lindsey Stirling has played to internet stardom.

The Artist as Artistic Development Breakthrough Story

The first sentence of Stirling’s online bio is telling. It does not say “Lindsey Stirling is a violinist,” or “Lindsey Stirling is a dancing

violinist,” or even “Lindsey Stirling is a musician.” In fact, it doesn’t even say that she’s a human. It identifies her as a media product: “Lindsey Stirling is one of the biggest artist development breakthrough stories in recent years.”⁷ It should come as no surprise, then, that when she graduated from Brigham Young University in August of 2015, she performed at the business school’s convocation (her degree is in recreation management), not at the Harris Fine Arts Center. Her story is about media and marketing and business and technology as much as it is about music. She rose to fame on and through the internet, which means that even though her musical projects have sold impressively (her website boasts that her self-titled debut album sold 350,000 copies and did so without the marketing support of a record label; her follow-up album of original music from 2014, *Shatter Me*, debuted at #2 on the Billboard charts), her music is not just consumed *as music*. It is, to an extent greater than most artists, part of a larger, sprawling, evolving, multimedia story involving visual presentation, stylistic allusion, fan culture/cosplay, and compelling biographical narrative. Her public perception is something like a brand, but one in which the labels and genre-markers and search-engine keywords, the bios and the peeks-behind-the-scenes, have become intrinsic rather than ancillary to the ostensible musical product itself. The music she makes is stylistically indistinct: it leaves plenty of room for everything else, such that her story and identity have become entangled with the musical “text.” This is not uncommon in and of itself—“artist development” is an established industry concept. Media companies make it their business to develop an artist’s image in this way to some extent in order to cultivate fan loyalty and increase revenue. As fan culture scholar Mark Duffett explains, “[S]ome music fans have textual objects (the song, the album, the genre), but there are many others who have become fascinated with a particular individual or group (the star, the band); in some senses the distinction itself is debatable because musical texts and their makers have inevitably become confused.”⁸

What is remarkable about Lindsey Stirling is the discernment (perhaps leavened by luck) with which she has pursued that process independently. Rather than doing what independent artists often

claim or aspire to do—namely, eschew the heavy homogenizing hand of record labels and their “development” teams—she has ingeniously used emerging technological and social trends to take over that job. She has successfully commercialized her self herself.



Stirling was born in Santa Ana, California, to parents of such limited financial means that they purportedly had to find a violin teacher willing to give five-year-old Lindsey fifteen-minute lessons instead of the beginner’s standard half-hour.⁹ The family eventually moved to Gilbert, Arizona, where Lindsey played violin in her high school rock band, Stomp on Melvin, and parlayed her pop-violin style into a first-place finish in the 2005 Arizona Junior Miss competition. After a year at BYU, Stirling served a mission in New York City, then returned to BYU and began developing her career in earnest. Her first shot at stardom occurred in 2010, but it fell short: after a promising debut on the NBC variety show *America’s Got Talent*, she was eliminated at the quarter-final stage with pointed criticism from the judges. Her approach took a different tack when in 2011 she accepted an offer from BYU film student Devin Graham to film a video for her original track “Spontaneous Me.” Shortly after the video was posted online, her web traffic and sales increased by an order of magnitude and her subsequent self-titled album of original music saw remarkable sales. Additional videos, sometimes produced at a breakneck pace, expanded her fan base further; at the time of this writing, her YouTube channel boasts more than seven million subscribers and some six dozen videos that together have garnered over a billion total views.

Stirling’s 2011 breakout correlates roughly to a period of dramatic change in media history. As media scholars Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green observe, the end of the twenty-first century’s first decade saw a shift from broadcasting-based “distribution” to social-media driven “spreadability.” They take as an introductory case study of this phenomenon

the overnight stardom of Scottish singer Susan Boyle. A decidedly un-glamorous, middle-aged woman whose public singing experience had mainly consisted of church choir and karaoke, Boyle became famous after giving an unexpectedly stirring performance of “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables* during her 2009 appearance on the television contest show *Britain’s Got Talent*. Fans loved her voice but also fell in love with her glum-to-glamorous story; the editors of the show set up the audience for surprise in the introduction by emphasizing her frumpy awkwardness, then shocked them with her unexpected vocal skill and expressive fervor.

Although Boyle’s initial public introduction came from a slickly-packaged professional television show designed for broadcast, Jenkins, et al., argue that “Boyle’s international success was not driven by broadcast distribution. Fans found Susan Boyle before media outlets did. The most popular Susan Boyle YouTube video [of her televised debut] reached 2.5 million views in the first 72 hours and drew 103 million views on 20 different websites within the first nine days of its release.”¹⁰ Boyle’s success was owed initially to her television appearance, but the remarkable spread of the clip across the globe resulted from the tech savviness of her fans, who by 2009 had developed the technical skills necessary to transfer the video onto various online platforms and share it via social media networks. More importantly, Jenkins, et al., argue, she became famous because of the *social* aspect of those social networks: “The Susan Boyle phenomenon would not have played out in the same way if not for the relationships and communities facilitated by social network sites, media sharing tools, and microblogging platforms.”¹¹

Lindsey Stirling quickly acclimated to this new media terrain governed more by “spread” than “broadcast.” Moreover, she leveraged her religious community’s unusual status within that new environment. Even prior to the ubiquity of Facebook and YouTube, Mormon tribalism had given a boost, via the “social media” of the call-in vote, to LDS artists competing on *American Idol* and the like.¹² And as long-time early adopters of communication technologies, Mormons in the US at the turn of the millennium

owned more computers and had more internet connectivity per capita than most other Americans.¹³ Consequently, during the subsequent decade, they likewise embraced social media and actively enlisted it for religious expression and virtual congregation—what Benjamin Burroughs calls “techno-faith.”¹⁴ This combination of cultural solidarity and technological sophistication among LDS consumers positioned Stirling not only to take advantage of the emerging technological opportunities available to independent artists through viral media but also to use a friendly and tech-savvy community of co-congregants as a social media launching pad.

Stirling’s internet fame and her Mormon identity soon developed a symbiotic relationship. She appeared in a popular video profile for the “I’m a Mormon” campaign in which she shares her faith and talents and also divulges her struggles with an eating disorder. She also appeared in the second installment of the Church’s “Face to Face” live broadcasts for youth.¹⁵ Such invitations to share her story in Church-sponsored media presumably solidified her LDS base while her rising fame lent more celebrity cachet to her Church media appearances. This is not to say that her contributions to proselytizing or public relations efforts were driven by commercial ambitions. Many faithful Mormons in the public eye seek to sincerely consecrate their fame in some way. But the presence of Mormonism in her story is inevitably connected to the impact of Mormonism on her media strategy. A famous Mormon cannot help but be aware of the influence her religious identity exerts on her audience reach, and vice versa. Lindsey Stirling either consciously sensed or stumbled upon the potent compound brewing among digital media, musical genre-bending, and Mormonism. It would not be inaccurate to say that Lindsey Stirling’s primary instrument, and her real area of virtuosity, is YouTube.

The Mix Is the Message

Stirling’s audience appeal—generally, and with Mormons specifically—owes, in part, to her fluency in what have become the lingua franca of the social web: hybrids, genre crossovers, and mashups.

When Stirling first landed in the national spotlight in 2010 on *America's Got Talent*, judge Piers Morgan initially identified this as a key to her appeal: "What I like about Lindsey is that she combines a traditional instrument with a very modern flavor kind of routine. And that's exciting!" Stirling's approach to the crossover doesn't rely on combining multiple artistic proficiencies—in fact, it doesn't really even rely on proficiency as an underlying assumption. It relies on highlighting and exaggerating the point of intersection and the act of intersecting. It relies not just on novelty or newness but a particular kind of newness: an exhilaration that comes from the perception of stylistic transgression. Not only are two things put together that normally aren't put together, there's a vague sense that they *shouldn't* be put together.

Stirling's approach to the crossover concept is slippery and strange. It focuses not on the elements being combined so much as the act of combining them; to borrow from McLuhan, the mix *is* the message. Stirling makes this plain with the fact that her identity—her story—has consistently emphasized the multiplicities of her media while changing the ingredients being combined and/or the emphases placed on them. Most obviously and consistently, she plays the violin and dances. There's a certain basic carnivalesque novelty to this: she does two things that are both physically difficult, and when done at the same time the execution of each ostensibly increases the difficulty of the execution of the other. This also implicitly lowers the expectation of virtuosity for both; to adapt the old circus adage, it's not *how well* the violinist dances, it's *that* the violinist dances. She doesn't do Balanchine with her feet and Brahms with her fingers; rather, she plays a visually busy but technically uncomplicated style of pop-fiddling while prancing, spinning, swaying, lurching, posing, shifting her weight, and kicking—often not so much dancing as simply exaggerating the expressive kinetics of a typical violinist, or a stage-roaming pop musician, or a mime. The music-plus-dance combination is compounded by Stirling's highly stylized evocation of genre. She has alternately worn the label "hip-hop violinist" and "dubstep violinist," and her promotional copy and her music-industry accolades both emphasize her reputation as a "crossover" artist.

Her online bio is clearly crafted for keyword inclusion and search engine optimization. She's both "electronic" and "classical." A "ballerina" and a "rave fairy."

There is something particularly appealing to Mormons about crossovers and mashups. They speak in a subtle way to the long-standing Mormon desire to be perceived as normal, but normal *today*, in a world in which the previous patterns of normalcy to which Mormons aspired for much of the twentieth century—namely, the normalcy of the stereotypical white, American, suburban, 1950s nuclear family—are now seen as abnormally homogeneous and conformist. In other words, Mormons don't just feel the need to let loose, they seek collective social capital through the public performance of their abilities to let loose. The challenge is that Mormons must find ways to do so in a manner that does not threaten their adherence to religious standards. Stirling herself said this more or less in the video montage introduction to her 2010 *America's Got Talent* audition: "Being a hip-hop violinist is kind of out of the ordinary. . . . A lot of people are really surprised when they hear that I'm Mormon and that I do hip-hop violin. I want to stand for the fact that I haven't compromised any of my values, and you can be what you want to be and you can stand for everything you want to be at the same time."

This embodies a paradox of Mormon identity: the very acts that offer the safe, low-level exhilaration of normalcy-deviation and boundary-transgression are the ones that Mormons also offer up as evidence of Mormon normalcy within an eclectic, diverse cultural landscape. Crossing boundaries—specifically, articulating and then transgressing them—is a way of conforming to non-conformism through religiously non-incriminating behavior.¹⁶ To put it more concisely: genre-bending paradoxically says, "We're wild and crazy! Just like everyone else!" Perhaps this is why Stirling is not alone among Mormon media figures in choosing the crossover as her medium. The Piano Guys, a group from St. George, Utah, likewise found rapid internet success during the same period with their combination of cello and piano in "classical crossover" arrangements and high-art/low-art mashups presented on YouTube with clever and cinematically sophisticated music

videos. (Their videographer is actually credited as a member of the ensemble.) Alex Boyé, a Mormon convert from London with Nigerian ancestry, has garnered millions of YouTube views by producing “Africanized” covers of pop hits by Lorde, Bruno Mars, and many others, including a collaboration with The Piano Guys on a cover of Coldplay’s “Paradise.”¹⁷

The paradox manifested in Mormon genre-mixing is a local refraction of a larger aspect of mashup culture: its reliance on a strange, collective amnesia. In order for some stylistic combination to seem new and fresh, it depends on listeners’ forgetfulness or ignorance of earlier hybrids. It relies on audiences’ maintaining a sense of transgressiveness in boundary-crossing, even though those boundaries are crossed all the time. In fact, arguably, from a music-historical standpoint, crossing genre boundaries is so common as to be one of the principal forces in musical development across recorded world history. Early Christian chant borrowed from Jewish cantillation. The crusaders returned with musical souvenirs and left mashup liturgical music behind. Two centuries before the word “mashup” existed, during the rule of the English East India Company over the Indian subcontinent, Muthuswami Dikshitar, the eighteenth-century Carnatic master musician, wrote a Sanskrit song based on “God Save the King.” The bass drum and cymbals initially found their way into the Western orchestra from the Janissary bands of the Turkish military. Gershwin combined jazz and classical. George Harrison learned the sitar. Taylor Swift started out country. Mashup is how music works.

Crossover culture is nothing new. Except for a few rare isolationist examples, “crossover culture” is simply a forgetful way of saying “culture.” But in the twenty-first century, the proliferation and inter-combination of genres and styles have accelerated alongside technological advances. The age of YouTube has brought us The Cherry Coke\$, a Japanese Celtic punk band; a Muslim tween girl in hijab playing heavy metal riffs on an electric guitar; and ukulele covers of dance club hits. Not only is any combination possible, it seems that every combination, sooner or later, is inevitable: *of course* there’s a Japanese Celtic punk band, or indigenous Australian pop, or a heavy metal band

inspired by the Ned Flanders character on *The Simpsons*, given enough time and bandwidth.

The violin is one of the most frequent boundary crossers. The notion that it is “native” to the classical world, and that taking it out of that world is somehow unusual, results from quite recent and indeterminate associations in the popular mind of “classical” with “fancy”: the violin, as a stand-in for European classical music generally, evokes a caricature of Western upper class. But its origins trace to Asian spike fiddles, and its diasporic branches spread from Irish pubs to Athabaskan lodges. Baluswami Dikshitar, the brother of the aforementioned nineteenth-century Carnatic cosmopolitan, borrowed the European violin from colonial British ensembles and made it a staple of the South Indian canon. The violin had been around the block a few times before anyone rigged it with a pickup and played it over a drum machine.

But just as the pace of stylistic crossovers and mashup matchups has accelerated, so too has our ability to miss or forget, in the proliferation of possibilities, which combinations have already been tried. Mashup culture doesn’t reward the new, it rewards the new-to-you. The secret is not to find something innovative, necessarily, but to find an audience for whom it seems so. This is where Lindsey Stirling excels. She has managed to make a career and garner an enormous online following using a concept that had actually already played out in demographic circles beyond her own and those of most of her fans. The moniker “hip-hop violinist” had already been coined in the early 2000s by Miri Ben-Ari, an Israeli-born violinist with classical and jazz training.¹⁸ Ben-Ari had already collaborated with a number of popular artists by the time she released her debut album, *The Hip-Hop Violinist*, with Universal Records in 2005. The album’s featured guest artists include such prominent hip-hop figures as Akon, Lil Wayne, Fatman Scoop, Doug E. Fresh, and Kanye West. That same year, Ben-Ari won a Grammy for Best Rap Song for the hit she co-wrote with West, “Jesus Walks.”

Five years later, Lindsey Stirling sent a video to *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* in hopes of landing an appearance. According to Stirling, it was a member of DeGeneres’s team who first pitched

the idea of hip-hop violin. “[O]ne of their producers called me back and said I bet I could get you on the show if you did hip hop. So I wrote my first hip hop song and I upped my dance moves.” Stirling took the idea to heart, even though an invitation to perform on Ellen’s show never materialized.¹⁹ The resultant audition video ended up gaining enough internet attention to lead to her 2010 appearance on *America’s Got Talent*, where she introduced herself with her mashup persona: “I’m Lindsey Stirling. I’m from Utah. And I play hip-hop violin.”

The announcer kept up the theme when she advanced to the quarter-finals: “Here are three words you don’t often hear in the same sentence: hip-hop violinist.”²⁰ Stirling’s use of the term is curious, particularly compared to Ben-Ari. Whereas Ben-Ari collaborated with a number of actual established hip-hop artists and eventually won a hip-hop Grammy, Stirling’s music borrows only the most basic and indistinct hints of actual hip-hop. It uses electronic drums and some electronic synthesizer sounds that might be found in certain kinds of hip-hop music (though not exclusively), and it might seem vaguely urban to a suburban audience. But for the most part, it lacks the musical earmarks of hip-hop such as rapping or turntable scratching. It no more sounds like hip-hop than “Book of Mormon Stories” sounds Native American.

Of course, genre authenticity holds less of a premium for YouTube audiences than near-range novelty. But just as mashup culture rewards audience amnesia or isolation, it penalizes audience memory and awareness: the appeal of any particular crossover has a limited shelf life with the same crowd. Before Stirling’s quarter-final appearance, contest judge Howie Mandel warned: “I think what she does is different. That being said, [the] two times that I’ve seen her have not been different from each other. She has to be different tonight.” Her performance, in teased hair, nerd glasses, and schoolgirl stockings, was energetic but too sloppy to be saved by stylistic eclecticism. Afterwards, judge Piers Morgan denigrated her playing, complaining that she missed too many notes and that she wasn’t good enough to pull off both movement and music without sounding like “rats being strangled.” Stirling responded somewhat sheepishly: “I’ve never headlined before,

I've never done my own hip-hop music so this is completely new for me." What's most interesting is how, when pressed by Morgan about the plausibility of her act and her inability to play well while dancing, Stirling pivoted to the question of genre: the "hip-hop violinist" admitted to having never previously created any hip-hop music. The label was an affect, no less pretended and stylized than her costume. She disregarded entirely the issue of her violin abilities. (As will I, for now.)

Fantasy and Fan Culture

In the story of Stirling's rise to internet stardom, her losing performance on *America's Got Talent* would become the "I'll show them" moment. Stirling soon discovered that the appeal of genre-bending doesn't just fall across boundaries between musical styles but also across music and other media. To a certain extent this had been part of her story all along: before she was the hip-hop violinist, she was the dancing violinist. Something or other had always been crossing-over. The hybridizing aesthetic simply compounded when musical genre—particularly one with as much demographic potency as "hip-hop"—was added to the mix. But what ultimately proved key to Stirling's viral stardom was her decision to apply her mashup approach to draw in other audiences attached to genres not specific to music: video game, fantasy, and cosplay cultures.

One of Stirling's biggest early YouTube hits was her medley of Koji Kondo's themes from Nintendo's popular *Zelda* video game series. The timing of the video's premiere on YouTube deliberately coincided with Nintendo's November 2011 release of a new game for the Wii system, *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*. In the video, Stirling performs the piece while dancing through forests and meadows dressed as the game's protagonist, Link, in tights and pointy hat and with a quiver of arrows on her back. The success of that video made it clear that this was a lucrative audience to pursue. Subsequent videos featured themed costumes and thematic medleys from the video games *SkyRim*, *Pokémon*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Halo*, and *Child of Light*.²¹

Many of Stirling's videos target other specific groups with devoted fan cultures, including musical theater (*Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*), the George R. R. Martin/HBO fantasy series *Game of Thrones*, several movie score spinoffs (including a *Lord of the Rings* medley and a *Mission Impossible* video with The Piano Guys), and a cappella (including two projects with YouTube a cappella stars Pentatonix). She has also performed and spoken at cosplay events, where ardent fans of comic books, video games, and fantasy films gather to discuss their passions and admire each other's character costumes. In an interview with Larry King in December of 2012, Stirling spoke matter-of-factly about how consciously she cultivates her fan base by taking requests for fantasy/video game/cosplay ideas.²² Her formula has become so established that it recently inspired a parody by BYU's sketch comedy television series, *Studio C*, in which Stirling's fictional sister "Leila" clumsily attempts to prance through the forest wearing an elf costume and playing a sousaphone.²³

Moreover, Stirling herself projects a kind of cosplay image, regardless of costume. Her petite frame and large eyes, particularly when complemented by her characteristic oversized back-combed hair and pigtails, evoke the exaggerated physiology of an anime character. In fact, Sharon Osbourne, the third judge on *America's Got Talent*, made exactly this observation: "Lindsey, you're here because you're unique, and we loved you at the audition . . . *you remind me of a little cartoon character. That's what you remind me of.*" Fittingly, one of her most popular covers is a realization of "Senbonzakura," originally sung by Hatsune Miku, a virtual holographic pop star with a digitally-generated voice.

In another truly post-modern move, Stirling has caricatured fan culture by spoofing her own fans. Her YouTube channel features a handful of videos starring "Phelba," a character played by Stirling herself with little to no effort at disguise. Phelba is Lindsey, but simply out of costume and with feigned social awkwardness. She claims to be Lindsey's best fan and can be seen walking the streets before Lindsey's live performances, dauntlessly inviting passersby, in a pretended geeky whine, to come to the show. As one watches the Phelba videos, the layers of refracted

and deflected identity are dizzying: an artist pretending to be a fan of herself, a self whose stock and trade are pretending to be—whatever: an elf, a nymph, a wild-west gunslinger, a ballet dancer, a hip-hopper, a dub-stepper.

And She Also Plays the Violin

Although Stirling's remarkable internet success has leveraged the unusual intersection of Mormon technological access, Mormon social networking, and American mashup culture, the fact remains that Stirling's fan base has expanded around the world to such an extent that she is no longer bound to virtual venues. She has completed multiple international tours with bookings in major cities throughout the world. And although her careful management of her audience relations and her explicit efforts to please her fans have made her cover songs and cosplay medleys a key to her fame, her most-watched video is that of her original song "Crystallize," which has been viewed over 133,000,000 on YouTube since its 2012 release. Whatever path Stirling's music has taken to people's screens and ears, then, and however interesting the technological and social topology of that path may be, she still makes music that people listen to, and any musicological examination of her work must eventually arrive at the music itself.

This poses some analytical challenges. For example, in the twenty-first century a wide gulf exists between live and studio performance. The technological means to cosmetically enhance or correct sub-par musical performances are now so widely available that mistakes that decades ago would never have been forgiven by the microphone can now be corrected with an app on a smart phone. Mistakes, as they say, can be "fixed in post." In fact, some problems, like being flat or sharp, can be fixed digitally on the fly. This makes it possible for Stirling, who readily admits that she does not count among the world's violin virtuosos, to nonetheless make a career as a violinist. A distinction must be made, then, between live performance and studio production.

Stirling is certainly not the first musician to struggle with the disparity between digitally-produced music and real-time

performance. But because her unusual technological savvy and social media mastery outshine her violin virtuosity, her playing draws both larger audiences and greater scrutiny than a musician of her caliber would usually garner and makes the problem of live performance more acute. Observers often comment on the less-than-professional tone she attains and note the problems she frequently encounters with pitch. A YouTube video of her live performance at San Francisco's Outside Lands Music Festival in August 2015 reveals chronic technical problems that are often compounded conspicuously when combined with dance moves. This was precisely the problem Piers Morgan complained about when he voted Stirling out of *America's Got Talent*: she couldn't play accurately while dancing. Even though Stirling highlights that criticism repeatedly as one of her principal triumphs as a YouTube sensation, her subsequent live performances never really proved Morgan *wrong*. Rather, her studio records, videos, and social media skills proved him *irrelevant*.²⁴

Compositionally, Stirling's approach is highly formulaic. Certain harmonic and melodic ideas appear over and over again in her original pieces and share with her cover songs many stylistic and textural traits. Much of her music lingers in minor modes, with motoric arpeggios articulating the underlying chords or simple sustained consonant notes. Except for when she's playing someone else's melody (as in a video game or movie score), the music is not nearly as melodically driven as one might expect a violin feature to be. A trained musician who listens to a number of her original tracks might nonetheless be at a loss if asked to hum one. He would more likely recall the general effect so many of Stirling's tracks share: a sense of unspecific, burbling, misty, cinematic mystery. It's a sort of stock musical mood that echoes the recurring visual themes of semi-translucence in the videos: veils, mists, fog, shadows. It seems to conjure the kind of shared hazy musical climate that one imagines elves and orcs and fairies inhabiting. "Formulaic" cannot really be taken as a criticism in the context of what this music is supposed to do: formulas are consistent, and consistency carries value and commercial viability with its target audience. The minor mode and harmonic shifts by

thirds and steps have by now become standard musical markers, particularly in film and media music, of an Otherworld. Stirling ornaments these stock chordal vamps with fairly standard bowing figurations that hover in place without much trajectory. The music doesn't tell a story so much as convey the notion or feeling of far-flung narrative. It's a "Once upon a time. . ." but with a period instead of ellipses.

Her most-viewed song, "Crystallize," offers a characteristic example. The video was filmed in and around a fantastical structure of snow caves and blue-tinged icicle towers, sometimes lit from within. Stirling poses and prances in winter wear resembling a pixie or Peter Pan: pointy hood, tights, and boots. The music has a somewhat aggressive electronic feel. When it was uploaded in 2012, the tagline "hip-hop violinist" had been replaced by "dub-step violinist," a designation that in this case aligns much more plausibly with the music's groove. It features the prominent, spare, moderate-tempo drums and the characteristic dubstep "wub-wub" bass, overlaid with Stirling's violin melody. The minor harmonies and floating chordal loops resemble those of so many of her other tracks, as does the violin part, which works through the notes of each chord in rising and falling arpeggios and uncomplicated motivic sequences that seem to meander without arrival. This perception of "Crystallize"—that, though visually and musically pleasant enough, the song seems to spin on the ice without getting any traction—was shared by Jon Caramanica and Zachary Woolfe, who expressed in their tag-team *New York Times* review both wonder and perplexity:

Caramanica: But there's also an otherworldly quality to it. It's the stuff of sci-fi and fantasy . . . but also of utopianism. To me, that's the most strikingly right thing she does—to tap into an idea about joy that includes the dance floor, the place in pop that still most believes in collective ecstasy. That said, she deploys the sort of moves that would leave our dance critic colleagues uneasy and unimpressed. (Me, too, for what it's worth.) And for all of this music's breathlessness, I find it cold, vague and almost mistlike in its inconsequentiality. And I like New Age music.

Woolfe: Cold is the word. I keep wishing there was more sweat in her music. There is something so weirdly still about it, like the music that Cirque du Soleil uses to accompany all those slow-moving high-wire contortionists—a lot of busy white noise around an empty core. And just like those Cirque scores, it indicates intensity—“wow, look at that trapeze!”—rather than being intense.²⁵

This seems to be the key to the music: it indicates intensity without being intense because it is meant to evoke genre without actually telling a story. And not a musical genre, a media genre. It's supposed to *sound* how liking video games or fantasy characters *feels*.

In the banter between songs during a live performance at the 2015 Outside Lands Music Festival, Stirling described an aspect of her method that contributes directly to the drifting, drafty character of her music. She explained that often she comes up with the basic concept for one of her videos *before* she has written any music for it. Once the visual concept is in place, one or more of her standard musical formulas presumably serves to populate the visual concept with compatible sound. The music lacks teleology in part because it doesn't attempt to melodically follow a plot—it seeks to harmonically and texturally evoke an atmosphere. That atmosphere would seem at first to be mysterious: it has all the musical markers of intrigue and the unknown. Accordingly, Stirling can be seen in several videos repeatedly craning her neck, peering expectantly but with trepidation, as if seeking the source of a threatening sound or wondering what awaits around a corner. But the atmosphere is also safe; it is the air breathed in that fantasy world where, no matter what danger awaits, no one is a weirdo because everyone is a weirdo: pixies, pirates, nerds, geeks, and even Mormons.

Notes

1. Arianna Rees, “Why Lindsey Stirling’s Billboard Dress Doesn’t Matter,” *Deseret News*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865629148/Arianna-Rees-Why-Lindsey-Stirlings-Billboard-dress-doesnt-matter.html>.

2. See, for example, Samantha Shelley, "Sit Down, Modesty Police—Lindsey Stirling Looked Great at the BBMAS," *Whatsoever is Good* (blog), May 19, 2015, <http://www.whatsoeverisgood.com/sit-down-modesty-police-lindsey-stirling-looked-great-at-the-bbmas>.

3. Chelsea Potter, comp., "Lindsey Stirling Responds to Modesty Criticism on Instagram," *Deseret News*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865629183/Lindsey-Stirling-responds-to-modesty-criticism-on-Instagram.html>.

4. "Students react to Lindsey Stirling's dress—what the clothes say," YouTube video, 0:33, posted by "what the clothes say," May 21, 2015, <https://youtu.be/17wxPmzk7MU>. See also Megan Gee, "What the Dress Said: Lindsey Stirling," *What the Clothes Say* (blog), May 22, 2015, <https://whattheclothesay.wordpress.com/2015/05/22/what-the-dress-said-lindsey-stirling>.

5. A few months later, Stirling gently poked fun at the controversy, posting a selfie to her Instagram account in a boxy, black, puritanical-looking dress with multi-layered coverage from neck to wrist to ankle and the caption, "Ready for the #teenchoiceawards. Playing it safe this time around #thedress." Lindsey Stirling (@lindseystirling), Instagram post, August 16, 2015, <https://instagram.com/p/6dHsjoLk6t>.

6. J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195.

7. "About," Lindsey Stirling, last accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.lindseystirling.com/about>.

8. Henry Jenkins, "Why Do We Need to 'Understand' Fans?: A Conversation with Mark Duffett (Part One)," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins* (blog), March 3, 2014, <http://henryjenkins.org/2014/03/why-do-we-need-to-understand-fans-a-conversation-with-mark-duffett-part-one.html>.

9. Jacob F. Frandsen, "Violin with a High Kick," *BYU Magazine* (Summer 2012), <http://magazine-dev.byu.edu/violin-with-a-high-kick>.

10. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 10.

11. *Ibid.*, 11.

12. The "Mormon Effect" in reality television shows has been covered widely in the popular press. See, for example, Sally Atkinson, "Reality TV: America's Next Top Mormon," *Newsweek*, May 10, 2008, <http://www>.

newsweek.com/reality-tv-americas-next-top-mormon-90117, or Atkinson, “American Idols: Mormons and Reality TV,” *Newsweek*, May 5, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/05/05/america-s-next-top-mormon.html>. For a more thorough examination, see Karen D. Austin, “Reality Corrupts; Reality Television Corrupts Absolutely,” in *Peculiar Portrayals: Mormons on the Stage, Page, and Screen*, edited by Mark T. Decker and Michael Austin (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010), 183–96.

13. As compiled in “Sampling of Latter-day Saint/Utah Demographics and Social Statistics from National Sources,” http://www.adherents.com/large-com/lds_dem.html.

14. Benjamin Burroughs, “‘And I’m a (Social Media) Mormon’: Digital Ritual, Techno-faith, and Religious Transmedia,” *Querty: Open and Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology, Culture and Education* 8, no. 2 (2013): 71–81.

15. The first “Face to Face” event featured *American Idol* runner-up David Archuleta. The third would be Elder David A. Bednar and his wife, Susan.

16. This way of talking about genre also carries racial undertones; Mormon musical culture has a long history of appropriating and “domesticating” music—including jazz, then rock—previously considered by more conservative Mormons to be both socially and racially problematic. The invocation of “hip-hop” connotes race whether Stirling intends to or not.

17. See Jeremy Grimshaw and Ali Colleen Neff, “The Tribal Sounds of Sal Tlay Ka Siti: Alex Boyé’s ‘Africanized’ Covers and Mormon Racial Dynamics,” paper presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology 59th Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, Pa., November 2014.

18. Loolwa Khazzoom, “Kanye West Violinist Miri Ben-Ari Debuts,” *Rolling Stone*, September 23, 2005, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/kanye-west-violinist-miri-ben-ari-debuts-20050923>.

19. Brooke Self, “Lindsey Stirling—Hip Hop Violinist,” *Her Campus*, April 9, 2011, <http://www.hercampus.com/school/byu/lindsey-stirling-hip-hop-violinist>.

20. “Lindsey Stirling America’s Got Talent,” YouTube video, from *America’s Got Talent* 2010 quarterfinals, posted by Lukas Eriksson, April 27, 2012, <https://youtu.be/M2xL7D5IPAk>.

21. Whether in imitation or simply as a result of arriving at the same idea at the same time, in late 2011 another YouTube violinist, Taylor Davis, began posting her video game soundtrack arrangements and fantasy-inspired videos. See <https://www.youtube.com/user/ViolinTay>.

22. "YouTube Music Stars," *Larry King Now*, December 7, 2012, http://www.ora.tv/larrykingnow/2012/12/7/youtube-musicians-0_5fhqfbvl.

23. "Lindsey Stirling Sister Debut—Studio C," YouTube video, posted by Studio C, November 7, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9omhrIOPnq8>.

24. Nonetheless, even though Stirling left *America's Got Talent*, she can't leave it alone. In live performances of her track "Moon Trance," the YouTube video of which is a "Thriller"-inspired zombie dance in a cemetery, the dancers come onto the stage behind oversized cartoonish headstones—one of which purports to mark Piers Morgan's grave.

25. Jon Caramanica and Zachary Woolfe, "Defining an Online Phenomenon: Virtuoso or a Wedding Band Star?" *New York Times*, May 2, 2014, <http://nyti.ms/liU09jc>.

Mormons, Musical Theater, and the Public Arena of Doubt

Jake Johnson

“Hi, I’m Brother Jake.” An image of a smiling white man in white shirt and tie flashes across the screen as I watch yet another edition of the “Brother Jake” YouTube video channel. Brother Jake, described by one YouTube commenter as “the Stephen Colbert of Mormon satire,” carries a growing audience through fallacious explanations of controversial or historically problematic aspects of Mormonism. These explanations are presented as “Brother Jake Explains:” followed by video titles covering a number of dicey issues including “polygamy,” “Mormonism is not a cult,” “Church discipline,” “Mormons are not racist,” and “Prophets are awesome.” Similar to other satirical explanations of church culture from within the Mormon ranks (such as the “Dictionary of Correlation” by anthropologist Daymon Smith), Brother Jake’s material jocularly occupies a liminal space, protected by online anonymity, where questioning, frustrated, or transitional Mormons dialogue with one another and true believing members (often labeled TBMs for short).¹

The particular video I am watching this day mockingly refers to that latter demographic. Entitled “True Believing Mormon Dude,” this video is a departure for Brother Jake. Rather than his typical fast-paced narration and hokey collages, Brother Jake sets this story to the tune of Gilbert and Sullivan’s “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General” from *Pirates of Penzance* (1879).² Images flash across the screen as Brother Jake patters:

I feel weird when people talk about my Mormon underwear
And when I go to church I dress real nice and shave my facial hair.
And even though you might be thinking “this guy is a giant prude,”
It’s no big deal because I am a true-believing Mormon dude.³

Gilbert and Sullivan's "modern major general" is a bumbling and laughable buffoon whose naïve, self-deprecating words have charmed audiences for generations. Brother Jake's caricature of faithful Mormon men exploits Mormons' special affinity for musical theater. In other words, if Brother Jake's video complicates an easy response, it's because Mormon cultural offense is mixed with a Mormon cultural virtue. Mormons and musical theater have long maintained an open courtship. From local ward roadshows to the Hill Cumorah Pageant and from the Polynesian Cultural Center to *Saturday's Warrior*, Mormons have found in musical theater a remarkable means of self-expression and identity that is probably unique among American faith traditions.

Why is this so? What is it about the musical stage that Mormons find so attractive, so natural a space in which to explore religious identity? And what does it then mean when Mormons like Brother Jake begin using musical theater to challenge that identity? Moreover, what of the spectacular satire writ large on the Broadway stage in *The Book of Mormon: The Musical* (2011) or in the online "viral picket sign" *Prop 8: The Musical* (2008)?

The Book of Mormon's creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, clearly voiced their reasons for portraying Mormons on the musical theater stage:

To us there's [*sic*] so many things about Mormonism, even the way they present themselves, when you go to Salt Lake City, the temple, when you go to some of their things, they present themselves in a very kind of Disney kind of way.

And we would have this running theme. We would always say when we're working on either the sets or the costumes or whatever, we'd say: No, make it more Rodgers and Hammerstein. Or make it more Disney. Or make it more Mormon. And they're like:

Well, which one is it? And we're like: No, it's all the same word for the same thing.⁴

These outsiders saw in Mormonism an immediate connection with the overstated optimism and wholesome demeanor of musical theater. From Golden Age musicals to the late twentieth-century

launch of Disney into the Broadway industry, Mormonism, at least according to Parker and Stone, remains remarkably associable with the entire evolution of American musical theater. Yet at first consideration, a musical about Mormons is an unseemly proposition. Indeed, displaying Mormonism on the musical stage would seem laughable (which the show definitely is!). For some reason, though, it just makes sense. More to the point, such a display has been happening for a long time.

Nevertheless, the more recent satirical works have arisen in this particular moment and through this particular medium for a reason. My task here is to examine this phenomenon and explore just what it is about musical theater and Mormonism that make them such successful if unlikely, bedfellows, and what these recent satirical works may have to say about modern Mormonism and its association with musical theater. A complete accounting of Mormons and musical theater is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would like to open up the possibility of using musical theater as a lens through which to view Mormon culture and identity in order to better understand through the musical stage the inherent *theatricalities* of Mormonism and its community of believers.

Theatricality and Mormon Beginnings

Mormons have long been a theatrical people. Harold Hansen has written that while the Saints were in Nauvoo,

planned leisure became a part of the well-ordered Mormon life. There was time to participate in debating societies, adult educational programs, music, and the theatre. . . . It was during this period that the Prophet gave his permission and influence to the production of plays. The Mormons had for some time a small hall that they referred to as the Fun House, where music, recitations and dances were held.⁵

This embrace of the theater would immediately have set the Mormons apart from other nineteenth-century religious groups, most of which demarcated the theater as a space of immorality. Kenneth Macgowen similarly argues that “of all the churches

that have welcomed back their prodigal son, the drama, none has given him so royal a welcome as the Latter-Day Saints of Utah.”⁶

Pitted as they were against continual harassments, early Mormons might be justified in lacking a sense of humor or possessing an aggrandized self-importance. Yet early Mormons seem to have been willing to engage in theatrics and various amusements in spite of (or perhaps to spite) the mounting challenges they faced. Joseph Smith’s reported lightheartedness smacked some as an attribute unbefitting a self-pronounced prophet. As Davis Bitton writes in *Wit & Whimsy in Mormon History*, however, Mormons “were not insufferable bores.” Rather, moments of theatrical celebration and other festivities demonstrated that, “like their Prophet, the Mormons saw themselves on an eternal journey, but they did not mind enjoying some good times along the way.”⁷

Indeed, early Mormons took their recreation—particularly their theatrical entertainment—seriously. The dedication of the Salt Lake Theater in 1862 embodied the fervor and seriousness with which Church leaders embraced and understood the role of the theater among the Mormons. Although the building was not yet complete, in the dedicatory prayer, Daniel H. Wells of the First Presidency petitioned that the theater “may be pure and holy unto the Lord our God, for a safe and righteous habitation for the assemblages of Thy people, for pastime, amusement and recreation; for plays, theatrical performances, for lectures, conventions, or celebrations, or for whatever purpose it may be used for the benefit of Thy Saints.”⁸ Wells continues:

As the unstrung bow longer retains its elasticity, strength and powers, so may Thy people who congregate here for recreation, unbend for a while from the sterner and more wearying duties of life, receive that food which in our organization becomes necessary to supply and invigorate our energies and vitality, and stimulate to more enduring exertions in the drama of life, its various scenes and changes which still in Thy providence still await us.⁹

Wells’s prayer alludes to both the literal dramas to be performed and enjoyed in the theater as well as the figurative association

between the theater and “the drama of life.” It might seem, then, that Mormons had already begun viewing their life in theatrical terms. The theater was to be a holy space of recreation, invigoration, and stimulation. “If I were placed on a cannibal island and given the task of civilizing its people, I should straightway build a theater for the purpose,” Brigham Young once proclaimed.¹⁰ So it was not surprising that he focused on building the Salt Lake Theater at the same time as he was building the Salt Lake Tabernacle—twin spaces for refining the Saints.

Brigham Young’s apparent interest in the theater dates back at least to May 1, 1844, when he played the role of the “High Priest” in Thomas Lyne’s play *Pizarro*. This role would prove prophetic. On June 27, less than two months after the performance of *Pizarro*, Joseph Smith was murdered and, following the ensuing succession crisis—which included people claiming to have envisioned Young accurately *portraying* Joseph Smith, as it were—Young became the second president of the Church. Perhaps Young understood the providence of such casting the way others did. According to actor Joseph Lindsay, Thomas Lyne humorously “regretted having cast Brigham Young for that part of the high priest” because “he’s been playing the character with great success ever since.”¹¹ Inasmuch as John Taylor, who was with Smith when he was murdered, would proclaim that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it,” Young’s prominence took on a definite theatrical legacy, at least in the eyes of some.¹² Perhaps echoing Taylor’s remarks, Philip Margetts called Young a “champion of the drama and friend of the actor,” adding that the Mormon prophet “did more to elevate the drama and encourage the histrionic art, in his day, than perhaps any man in America.”¹³

Theatricality lies at the heart of the Mormon experience. Joseph Smith’s various tellings of his storied first vision, in the latter versions of which God and Jesus Christ appear before Smith in a grove of trees near his home in Palmyra, New York, lend a decidedly melodramatic quality to the Church’s genesis story. Megan Sanborn Jones has most persuasively argued for this very interpretation, claiming that “Smith’s entire life and eventual death

were melodramatic rather than tragic if his calling is read as a miraculous event that intervened in his life.”¹⁴ Moreover, Smith’s writing of received revelations, as Claudia Bushman and Richard Bushman have written, “reenacted the writing of the Bible.”¹⁵

The temple rite, emerging in prominence at the end of Smith’s life, can be viewed in light of its dramatic qualities, being described by one scholar as “a staged representation of the step-by-step ascent into the presence of the Eternal.”¹⁶ The performative nature of the temple ceremony becomes even more apparent when studying it in its evolution to the version taught in temples today. In earlier versions of the endowment ceremony, the character of a sectarian minister functioned as a theatrical straw man against which Mormon faithful could perform their restored religion. This satirical and laughably one-dimensional representation of religious thinkers outside of Mormonism curiously creates an inverse scenario to the satirical theatrical jokes that Mormons today find themselves the butt of (a topic to which I’ll return below). For now, it is enough to point out that satire, like theatricality in general, has a long history within Mormonism. From the live-action (or pre-recorded) drama of the Mormon endowment ceremony, where selected members of the audience can even break through the fourth wall to perform the lead roles of Adam or Eve, to the concept of “performing” baptisms for the dead—another opportunity for Mormons, like stage actors, to don alternate identities not entirely their own—the Mormon temple is a space of the theatrical. It isn’t too much to say, then, that a faithful Mormon is and has always been a performing Mormon.

Mormonism Meets Musical Theater

In many ways, American musical theater and the Mormon faith seem cut from the same cloth. Both the musical genre and the Church emerge in New York State in the early decades of the nineteenth century and, as uniquely American entities, both musical theater and Mormonism have served as useful lenses through which to analyze cultural trends and dispositions in the country at large. For this reason, it seems prudent and potentially fruitful to

follow the histories of musical theater and the Mormon Church and note their moments of intertwining as significant and productive moments of cultural analysis.

At least one Mormon-themed musical, *An Aztec Romance*, had had a six-performance Broadway run as early as 1912. But it took until 1951, when Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Lowe created a Broadway musical with a Mormon character, before Mormonism was auspiciously introduced to *The Great White Way*. Set in 1853 in the wilds of California, *Paint Your Wagon* follows the ins and outs of a miner, his daughter, and their neighbors—all men—living in a mining camp. When a Mormon man named Jacob Woodling moves into the camp, along with his two wives, the rest of the men demand that Woodling sell one of his wives, which he does for \$800. Woodling's importance in the plot—which was ancillary from the start, other than the story needing another woman to carry it through—ends there. The relevance of a polygamist Mormon in 1951 was a cultural stretch to begin with. So tenuous was the polygamist connection to Mormonism in post-war America that in modern revisions of *Paint Your Wagon*, the Mormon and his wives play a significantly diminished role.¹⁷

If the transition from Mormon representations in theater to musical theater hinged on tired polygamist rhetoric, the Church was already preparing a revision of a musical drama with a decidedly different purpose. In 1953, Harold I. Hansen, who was the artistic director of the Hill Cumorah Pageant in Palmyra, New York, visited a young doctoral student named Crawford Gates at the Eastman School of Music. According to Gates, Hansen “disclosed his own hopes and plans for the long-term development of the pageant. Before I knew it, he had informally asked me to compose the original musical score he had in mind.”¹⁸ Although the pageant had its first official performance in 1937, officials had undergirded the work by using existing music, such as material taken from Richard Wagner's operas *Lohengrin* and *Die Walkure* or Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony. Gates would go on to create an original score used from 1957 until 1987, then revising a new score in 1988 that is still in use today.

While the pageant tradition in Mormonism arguably derived from the children's pageants of Mormon Sunday Schools in the nineteenth century and modern Mormon temple-related pageants have cropped up at various sites—including the Mesa, Arizona, Easter Pageant; the Nauvoo, Illinois, Pageant; the Oakland “And It Came to Pass” Pageant; and the Manti, Utah, “Mormon Miracle Pageant”—the Hill Cumorah Pageant remains the flagship in that genre. Even the HBO television series *Big Love*, which follows a fictional family of polygamists living in suburban Salt Lake County, set an entire episode around the family's caravan across the country to visit the pageant. Meanwhile, when researching material for *The Book of Mormon: The Musical*, its creative team travelled to Palmyra to experience the pageant. Trey Parker recalls that he, Matt Stone, and co-writer Robert Lopez “went to the pageant, and we're like, wow, okay, we gotta make our musical better than this one, and they've been working on that one a long time.”¹⁹ The team found the story so compelling that they open both acts of the show with the story of Mormon, the golden plates, and Joseph Smith—“our own miniature version of the Hill Cumorah Pageant,” Parker adds.²⁰ And, as Michael Hicks has pointed out, the creators even borrow a musical fanfare from Gates's score and insert it into the song “I Believe,” which is the character Elder Kevin Price's witness-bearing moment of complete Mormon conviction.²¹

Mormons Make Musicals

There was an explosion of religiously themed musicals with a pop/rock score being produced both in America and abroad during the early 1970s, some with enormous success. The immediate triumph of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, evolving from a 1970 concept album to a 1971 Broadway production, seems to have encouraged the creation of other religiously-themed musicals (most notably *Godspell* in 1971), though it was not the first. It was more of the evangelical, rather than the popular humanist and quasi-satirical musicals, however, that mostly paved the road to Mormon success and interest in musical theater. Larry Norman, close friend of Ted

Neeley—whose later appearance as Jesus in the 1973 film version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* catapulted his career in theater—had been writing musicals and rock operas with a decidedly evangelistic bent since 1968. Lex de Azevedo, composer of the hit Mormon musical *Saturday's Warrior*, has written that attending a Los Angeles performance of his friend Ralph Carmichael's early Christian rock musical *A Natural High* gave him the idea to write "a 'contemporary musical' for [Latter-day Saints]." ²²

With these and other musical influences abounding, Mormons began creating musicals in 1970, dozens of which survive today, and most of which were written with a Mormon audience in mind. Zion Theatricals—a licensing company for Mormon plays and musicals—displays a lengthy, though not exhaustive, list of musicals written by and for Mormons. As of this writing, there are thirty-seven musicals listed on the company's website. ²³ In his short article "The Theatre as a Temple," Zion Theatricals owner and theatrical composer C. Michael Perry argues for the sanctity of the theater, going so far as to claim that "the theatre is the best place for the exploration of belief." ²⁴ Even more, Perry writes of the power of the theater and its particularly Spirit-filled place in building the Kingdom of God:

Theatre is one of the greatest missionary tools ever invented. Minds are enriched, hearts touched and spirits enlivened through the power of the spoken word on a stage. Seeing—witnessing—the experiences of others on stage brings us closer to understanding, empathy, and compassion in a non-threatening atmosphere. It is all a fiction. Nobody is in real peril. There is no real danger, immediate or otherwise, of someone really losing their testimony, or life, or principles. The stage is a supposition. The actors are players in a match of wits and wills. They are imitators of life, not life itself. This is the loving atmosphere we can create within the walls of the second type of Temple—a Theatre. ²⁵

After pointing back to the temple ceremony as a performance in itself and overlaying the theatricality of the Hill Cumorah Pageant with twelve-year old -Jesus' confounding of religious leaders in the temple, Perry concludes by asking, "What more of a Temple

experience is there than an audience seeking enlightenment, even if it is through the means of an entertainment?”²⁶

Perry’s high valuation of theater readily amplifies what has already been noted about Mormon reliance and love for the theater as a unique space for spiritual edification. He even refers to Brigham Young in the matter, quoting him as saying that “the stage can be made to aid the pulpit in impressing upon the minds of a community an enlightened sense of a virtuous life, also a proper horror of the enormity of sin and a just dread of its consequences. The path of sin with its throne and pitfalls, its gins and snares can be revealed, and how to shun it.”²⁷ As much as the temple is a space for instruction in matters timeless, the theater likewise complements the temple in that it creates a space where that instruction and the challenges of modern life can be easily negotiated.

Zion Theatricals, whose stated purpose is “enlightenment through entertainment,” thus offers Mormons a one-stop shop for wholesome musical theater. In addition to licensing various musicals and plays, the company also takes submissions for new works that are “Family Friendly, yet challenging,” further adding to the understanding of Mormons as both consumers and producers of musical theater.²⁸ With these rather loose parameters, the plots for such musicals have an understandably broad range. Some dramatize biblical or scriptural stories or draw upon patriotic themes as moralizing opportunities, while others focus on issues surrounding contemporary family life.

It is within this latter group that the Mormon sensation *Saturday’s Warrior* was born. Written in 1973 and then later released on film in 1989, *Saturday’s Warrior* follows the story of a group of children born into a Mormon family. Based on Nephi Anderson’s 1898 novel *Added Upon*, *Saturday’s Warrior* depicts a pre-mortal existence in which social relationships are formed, and where that same sociality then carries over into mortality. As the children prepare to be born on Earth, they make promises to keep true to the commandments and their convictions of the true Gospel so that, after death, they may be reunited in heaven. The oldest sibling, Jimmy, encounters temptation on Earth, however, and his

actions threaten to compromise his eternal place among the rest of his family. While much more could be stated about *Saturday's Warrior*, suffice it to say for now that its effects on Mormon culture have been substantial. Matthew Bowman attends to this best when he writes that *Saturday's Warrior* introduced "folk doctrine appealing to Mormons seeking assurance that divine intentions were deeply woven into their lives and that though these beliefs set them apart from the world they were indeed fulfilling God's plan."²⁹ Although the musical suggests a vision of pre-mortal life that was theologically unsubstantiated, its grip on Mormonism remains tight still today, with many members conceptualizing their familial and romantic relationships in terms introduced by *Saturday's Warrior*. And, with a new film adaptation scheduled for release in 2016, the musical seems positioned to gain traction for a new generation of Mormons.

Mormonism Enacted through Musicals

While *Saturday's Warrior* remains part of a long-standing cultural craze in Mormonism, it is, of course, only one of many Mormon musicals (e.g., *Open Any Door* [1972] and *My Turn on Earth* [1977]). But musical theater has taken root in Mormon culture in other, more localized ways. The ward roadshow, which has been described as "a mini-musical, a song-and-dance production," is a feature of local wards, often produced in contest with other wards in stake or multi-stake competition.³⁰ Evolving from impromptu musical performances that often cropped up along the westward trek across the Rocky Mountains, the roadshow has long been considered a means of uniting ward members in "an activity of unity, love, and cooperation."³¹ In her 1984 *Ensign* article "Get that Show on the Road: How to Stage a Roadshow," Kathleen Lubeck plays up the importance of the roadshow, offering the following advice to local roadshow organizers:

It's also important to base roadshows on wholesome values, and not to mimic the immoral or less-than-uplifting attitudes and styles often portrayed on television or in the movies. At the same time,

sacred topics should be avoided, so as not to trivialize the sacred aspects of the gospel. Roadshows should generate the positive value system that we as church members espouse, while at the same time not becoming didactic or preachy.³²

Anxiety about secular entertainment likely bolstered the importance of roadshows in contemporary Mormon life. Indeed, as much as Brigham Young encouraged song and dance while the Mormons trekked across the country often under harsh conditions, roadshows and other Church-sponsored cultural activities were designed to help keep the modern Mormon mind off the troubles of the world and focused on issues of greater worth, such as solidarity, cooperation, and wholesome entertainment. These activities also fostered proselytizing, as Pat David of the General Church Activities Committee said in 1983:

Much in the entertainment world is trying to pull people away from the gospel in subtle ways. Television, movies, music, rock concerts—all are being used as tools for the adversary, to some degree. The freshest faces tell us to be immoral; beautiful people tell us it's okay to do things we've been told all our lives we shouldn't do. Too often we've been so busy watching television in the front room that we haven't noticed Satan slipping in through the back door. This is one major reason that Church activities are so important. We can offer an alternative entertainment to our people. And very often, through the informal door of activities, we bring many people into the front door of the Church and to a testimony of the gospel.³³

Not only did roadshows bring people into contact with the Church, but their ubiquity offered members frequent opportunities to gather and enact a cultural performance of faith promotion. To this end, roadshows are perhaps the more pronounced experiences members have with Mormon musical theater, many Church members having been introduced to, and regularly involved with, the roadshows at a young age—and some under extraordinary conditions. In 1978, for example, the Los Angeles Ward for the Deaf placed first in their stake roadshow competition, despite having a

cast almost entirely composed of hearing impaired persons. The on-stage actors signed their lines, while offstage actors read those lines into a microphone. When the problems of bringing music and dance into the show became apparent, the solution was to place a hearing normative performer on stage to dance and thus visually align the music with the choreography for the rest of the cast. Although the Los Angeles Ward for the Deaf may have succeeded in their roadshow under unusual circumstances, one ward leader's reaction likely echoes what many Mormons might say about the lessons learned putting on their own roadshow: "When I saw the roadshow in performance, I said, 'Hey, that's no roadshow; that's a miracle!'"³⁴

Roadshows, like many children's pageants and, particularly in Utah, Pioneer Day pageants, help Mormons celebrate their heritage while also deepening their roots within their faith community. Mormons continue to maintain a rich legacy of musical dramas, only a few of which are mentioned here. Although early depictions of Mormonism occurred in the secularized space of the musical stage, Mormons have constructed an impressively rich and varied musical theater culture within their own cultural traditions, thus producing a relationship between faith and performance that is unique among American Christian faith traditions. From Donny Osmond's portrayal of Joseph in Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* to the recent and official Church productions *Faith—The Musical* and *Savior of the World*, Mormon resonances with musical theater remain strong. Yet this legacy of musical theater within the Church has, in recent years, provided fertile ground for various works of satire to emerge, clothed in the familiar garb of musical theater. As much as Mormons identify with the theatrical, and even filter their faith through drama itself, the theatrical is a serious means of dissent both within and without the Mormon ranks.

Taking Mormonism to the Stage

The 2008 debacle surrounding California's Proposition 8—which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman—

prodded the Mormon Church into the national spotlight when Church leaders encouraged its members to contribute time and resources to the campaign for the proposition's passage. The Church reeled from the public outcry against its role in the campaign, and its members suddenly became contestants in a fierce debate over the consequences of unpopular political involvement. When composer Marc Shaiman heard that Scott Eckern, the Mormon artistic director of the non-profit California Musical Theater, had contributed \$1,000 to support the campaign against gay marriage, he immediately set to work on *Prop 8: The Musical*. The musical theater community—heavily reliant on gay creators and performers—was outraged at Eckern's contribution, seeing it as an act of betrayal. Jeffrey Seller, a Broadway producer, was among those angered by Eckern: "That a man who makes his living exclusively through the musical theater could do something so hurtful to the community that forms his livelihood is a punch in the stomach."³⁵ For his part, Eckern eventually resigned from his position at California Musical Theater and, as a gesture of good faith toward the gay community, contributed \$1,000 to a gay rights group. Still, ties between Mormons and Proposition 8 were strong, and Eckern's position thrust musical theater into the mix in a satirical representation of religious infringement on civil rights.

Shaiman wrote *Prop 8: The Musical* in one day, filmed it with a cast of Hollywood regulars like Jack Black, Neil Patrick Harris, and John C. Reilly, and, through the site www.funnyordie.com, the video became an instant hit—what Shaiman later called a "viral picket sign." Although the musical is just over three minutes long, it characterizes the gay community as complacent and naively optimistic in the wake of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential election;³⁶ it also colors religious figures (who are dressed in various forms of religious clothing—the prominent dark suit, white shirt, and tie of Mormon men chief among them) as hateful and scripturally selective in their condemnation of homosexuality. When Jesus appears to the gathered multitude, he condemns the religious zealot's selectivity, telling them that if they are going to pick and choose, they should choose love instead of hate. Finally, Neil Patrick Harris enters the stage and

suggests to those gathered that there is money to be made in gay marriages, which finally unites the two divided groups in a common goal of using the surplus money from gay marriages to save the faltering American economy.

The drama surrounding Proposition 8 and the Mormon Church did not wane easily. After the outcome of Proposition 8 was overturned in the Ninth Court of Appeals, a new drama unfurled, though this time a staged one. Entitled *8*, the play was a direct reenactment of the court proceedings in the case *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*.³⁷ A Los Angeles performance of the play took place on March 3, 2012, and, as with *Prop 8: The Musical*, it featured a lineup of some of the most prominent stars in Hollywood, including George Clooney, Kevin Bacon, Brad Pitt, Jamie Lee Curtis, and, again, John C. Reilly. A lesser known actor also took the stage that night, but one already associated with playing out the difficulties of identifying as a gay man in a culture unready for change. Rory O'Malley, a Tony-nominated actor from the original Broadway cast of *The Book of Mormon: The Musical*, was primarily known for his role as Elder McKinley, the closeted missionary who sings of suppressing "gay thoughts" in order to avoid feeling sad. O'Malley provides just one possible hinge between the vitriol surrounding Proposition 8 and the crass jocularly of *The Book of Mormon: The Musical*. Indeed, given that *The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway precisely three years after Proposition 8 was up for vote, one could consider the parodying of Mormons on stage by a host of gay or gay-advocate performers a form of cultural retribution. If the Mormon Church had enough power to sway legislation against the gay community, then the musical theater community could do one better by imagining on stage a version of Mormonism where openly gay men could don the label of Mormon missionary, preach a particularly queer gospel of inclusion, and through the magic of musical theater challenge the power of one of the fastest-growing religions in the country.³⁸

How did *The Book of Mormon* accomplish that? In the comedic song "I Believe," for example, Trey Parker explains that the humor was not fabricated but rather comes from existing Mormon doctrine so unfamiliar as to seem outrageous. Comedic routines

are frequently done “on a rhythm of one, two, three, and three is always the joke,” and so with “I Believe,” “we just put the weirdest Mormon beliefs in the third slot and they become jokes even though they’re just facts.”³⁹ Thus in *The Book of Mormon*, the cosmology of the planet Kolob, the lifting of the priesthood ban in 1978, and the improbability of ancient Jews sailing across the ocean to America become punch lines. As Matt Stone relates, *The Book of Mormon* prods the necessarily ridiculous quality of faith which, by definition, does not assume plausibility. “There’s a catharsis in being able to really laugh at some of the goofier ideas of religion, without necessarily laughing at the people practicing them,” says Stone. “I think it feels good to in some ways acknowledge that certain aspects of religion are just silly. But whatever anybody’s religion is, we should be able to laugh at it and at the same time understand that we should accept people who believe and have faith, without dismissing their lives as unserious.” Stone later adds that he and Parker “never wanted the musical to pretend it had any answers. We wanted to be funny and put on great numbers and get some of our ideas out there.”⁴⁰ Stone and Parker’s satire, in other words, derives easily from the subject matter provided by Mormonism, its truthfulness self-evident and readily apparent.

Musical satires like *Prop 8: The Musical* and the stickiness with which the Proposition 8 campaign remains associated with Mormonism have exacted a cost on the Mormon experience of the last decade. Likewise, if the Mormon Church in 2011 had one wish, having a musical sharing the same name as its key religious book would likely be far from it. Nonetheless, the Church has found itself in the strange position of needing to distance itself from *The Book of Mormon* while also blushing from all the reciprocal media attention it brings. The same attributes that once made the Church easy fodder for faith-promoting Mormon musicals—the promised “enlightenment from entertainment”—have become digested by popular culture and excreted as a profane inversion of itself. Yet the fact that the Church continues to buy full-page advertisements in the playbill only adds another dimension to the odd relationship the Church maintains with its musical Other.⁴¹ Try as they may, Mormons seem perpetually attached to musical

theater in all its guises, even when the theater becomes the space for Mormon lampooning. How else could Michael Hicks have written about *The Book of Mormon* that, “even without the words, the show would feel like a Mormon musical”?⁴²

Musical Theater and “Exquisite Bufoonery”

So, now to return to Brother Jake. In addition to “I am the Very Model of a True Believing Mormon Dude,” Brother Jake has created two other satirical videos that use musical theater to tell the story. One, entitled “Meant Symbolically” and set to the tune of the song “Defying Gravity” from the hit 2003 Broadway musical *Wicked*, treats the traditionally literal interpretation of historical events in the Mormon past. For Mormons, history is so tightly woven with theology as to make the two nearly inseparable. In 2002, President Gordon B. Hinckley made this point very clear with his statement: “I knew a so-called intellectual who said the Church was trapped by its history. My response was that without that history we have nothing.”⁴³ As more evidence suggests that such tidy views of history are problematic, however, Mormons are faced with an impossible interpretive dilemma: either transform some of the literal past into a figurative one or jettison it altogether which, as Hinckley has stated, is tantamount to throwing out all of Mormonism. Brother Jake spoofs the dilemma:

This new approach is so exciting
 I feel a huge sense of relief
 Don't have to turn my back on reason
 In matters of belief. [. . .]
 I'll just say it's meant symbolically
 So I can justify it logically
 That way I'll reconcile all my beliefs
 And never be pinned down!

It seems fitting that Brother Jake chose to base his satire on “Defying Gravity,” a song with connotations of Elphaba (the green-skinned Wicked Witch of the West) breaking out of the confines of a judgmental society. As much as the Wicked Witch's delusions

of acceptance are betrayed by her eventual watery demise in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, so too might the Mormon conscience be pricked by the difficult position of defending theological notions rooted in a literal history no longer tenable. As with Elphaba, so too with Mormon history: a splash of pure insight threatens to melt it all away.

In another of his videos, Brother Jake satirically sings of the promises of correlation, which is the systematic quasi-normalizing of Mormon doctrine, policy, and theology that began in 1960 under the guidance of apostle Harold B. Lee. With his satire set to the tune of the title song from *Oklahoma!*, Brother Jake opines that correlation has been used by the Church both to whitewash troublesome aspects of its history and to choke out dissidence. With Church disciplinary actions against two prominent Mormon activists—Kate Kelly and John Dehlin—making headlines in 2014 and 2015, Brother Jake’s satire hits a particularly sore spot on the Mormon conscience. While images of Kelly and Dehlin flash across the screen, Brother Jake sings:

Correlation, where sharing doubts just doesn’t fly
And where every hour’s
Run by priesthood power
Which is really great if you’re a guy.

Brother Jake continues his unbridled critique of Church policy, concluding the song with the following lines:

But if you don’t know what to do
Just go pick up a manual or two
Cause when we say
Only white shirts on Sunday
We’re saying we could use some homogenization:
Correlation’s the way.
And if you say
“Hey, there’s a better way,”
Just remember we’re your only way to salvation,
So shut up and obey.

This sort of criticism may not be uncommon, or even unexpected, in a church of fifteen million members. It is the medium of musical theater, though, that seems to make Brother Jake's satire sting a little harder. Even more, such an association already seems so familiar. When asked why he uses musical theater in his video satire, Brother Jake gave a response that perhaps almost any American Mormon could agree with: Mormonism and musical theater "were both intimately intertwined in my upbringing." He continues,

Brother Jake is a character who operates in the Colbert-like nether space of imitating the heuristics of an ideological "in" group while taking no pains to soften or gloss over the harsher/more bizarre implications of the ideology itself . . . Musical theater, with its cheesy, cheery tone and generally straightforward messaging seemed like a perfect fit. It struck me as a great vehicle for taking something that externally appears harmless and marrying it with the uncomfortable, like playing "happy birthday" in a minor key.⁴⁴

This *modus operandi* fits easily within the general theory of satire, which P. K. Elkin argues is "a catalytic agent" whose function "is less to judge people for their follies and vices than to challenge their attitudes and opinions, to taunt and provoke them into doubt, and perhaps into disbelief."⁴⁵ "Satirists can provoke by challenging received opinion," adds Dustin Griffin. "They can also provoke by holding up to scrutiny our idealized images of ourselves—forcing us to admit that such things are forever out of reach, unavailable to us, or even the last things we would really want to attain."⁴⁶

Of course, these are dangerous qualities for an institution to tolerate and, as such, the Mormon Church in recent years has argued precariously that members have the right to voice opinions, but to not lead others into disbelief. Following her public campaign for the ordination of women, Kate Kelly's excommunication by her bishop was explained in his letter: it was not that she had wrong-headed questions or beliefs, but that "you have persisted in an aggressive effort to persuade other Church members to your point of view and [therefore] erode the faith of others."⁴⁷

Similarly, the stake president of prominent Mormon blogger and podcast host John Dehlin wrote in his letter of explanation regarding Dehlin's excommunication that "this action was not taken against you because you have doubts or because you were asking questions about Church doctrine." Rather, it was because of "categorical statements opposing the doctrine of the Church," widely disseminated online.⁴⁸

Ironically, it may be precisely this seemingly draconian attitude that births satire in the Church. Griffin has argued that "it is the limitation on free inquiry and dissent that provokes one to irony—and to satire," noting that if openly challenging orthodoxy were tolerated, then people would simply take their frustrations to the newspapers and debate openly there.⁴⁹ As has been the case with both Kate Kelly and John Dehlin, however, it is unclear where free speech ends and inappropriate criticism begins. To that end, satire emerges only in environments of repression and heavy-handedness, where conceptions of free speech are curtailed and uniformity expected. Shaftesbury put it well: "'Tis the persecuting Spirit has raised the bantering one. The greater the Weight is, the bitterer will be the Satire. The higher the Slavery, the more exquisite the Buffoonery."⁵⁰ Arguably, this is what Mormonism risks today and, until that risk dissipates, one can expect only more exquisite buffoonery and musical lampooning directed toward the Church from both within and without the ranks of membership.

Conclusion

In the inaugural issue of this journal, Eugene England shared these words:

A dialogue is possible if we can avoid looking upon doubt as a sin—or as a virtue—but can see it as a condition, a condition that can be productive if it leads one to seek and knock and ask and if the doubter is approached with sympathetic listening and thoughtful response—or that can be destructive if it is used as an escape from responsibility or the doubter is approached with condemnation.⁵¹

England wrote those words in 1966, a half-century ago. In that year, Walt Disney died, John Lennon proclaimed his band more popular than Jesus, David O. McKay was the president of the Mormon Church, and Crawford Gates's beloved score would be heard for only the ninth time at the Hill Cumorah Pageant. So much has changed since that time, yet the single issue plaguing Eugene England then remains unresolved now, and is playing out on an even grander scale on YouTube channels and theatrical stages around the world.

Musical theater has thrived in Mormon culture for generations, and will likely continue to do so. What effects the impervious satire of musical theater exact upon Mormonism, however, remains to be seen. As Mormons confront satirical attackers they do so at a disadvantage, since the medium of musical theater seems so expertly chosen to cause the most damage. Inasmuch as musical theater has been for Mormons a balm and entertainment, a means of self-expression as well as identity, it has lately taken the shape of the legendary horse left outside the gates of Troy. The horse was the emblem of the city, Odysseus remembered, and could easily deceive with its flattery. If Mormon culture had an emblem, then perhaps it would be the musical stage and, like the horse of the Trojans, a means of understanding itself.

Destruction need not ensue, of course. It is the favorable environment for satire that chokes true discourse—discourse not left awash in a sea of falsely dichotomized conceptions of belief and doubt. “There was belief before there was doubt,” Jennifer Michael Hecht has eloquently argued, “but only after there was a culture of doubt could there be the kind of active believing that is at the center of modern faiths.”⁵²

The atmosphere that encourages the satirical is a polluted one and in need of refreshing. Given the connection between Mormonism and the musical stage, one can imagine things being quite the opposite: musical theater and its unique space for the humorous being a vehicle for healthy discourse about any number of particular prickly issues, rather than a site where the Church's penchant for damaged or quashed rhetoric forces the satirical hand. “Humor can serve as a release or escape by releasing accumulated

tension,” writes Davis Bitton. “Seeing different parts of life in juxtaposition, it can recognize incongruities and complexity. It is thus closely related to a sense of perspective. It is also akin to humility. And it is a way of defining problems so that they do not appear overwhelming.”⁵³ Musical theater, with all its rich ties with Mormonism, may offer just the means through which productive dialogue emerges, problems can be defined with less anxiety, and the air can be cleared of its pernicious impurities. At least it is one place to start.

Notes

1. See Smith’s “Dictionary of Correlation” and other writings on his blog, daymonsmith.wordpress.com.

2. Admittedly, this is one of the most popular parodied songs in popular culture, with references coming from as varied a group as television shows like *Frasier*, *Mad About You*, *Babylon 5*, and *Family Guy*; video games *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3*; and films *Never Cry Wolf*, *Kate & Leopold*, and the Veggie Tales film *The Wonderful World of Auto-Tainment*. Additionally, mathematician and musical theater composer Tom Lehrer has penned several songs based on “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General,” including his breakdown of the periodic table in “Elements Song.”

3. All lyrics taken from the videos on Brother Jake’s YouTube channel, “B. Jake.” https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0u7ZMWqkr7cKD_rvEXZUuQ. (accessed Jun. 25, 2015).

4. Matt Stone and Trey Parker, “Book of Mormon’ Creators on Their Broadway Smash,” Interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air from WHYY*, National Public Radio, May 9, 2011. <http://www.npr.org/2011/05/19/136142322/book-of-mormon-creators-on-their-broadway-smash>.

5. Harold I. Hansen, “A History and Influence of the Mormon Theatre from 1839–1869,” PhD diss. Brigham Young University, 1967, 5.

6. Kenneth Macgowan, *Footlights across America, Towards a National Theater* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1930), 233.

7. Davis Bitton, *Wit & Whimsy in Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), ix.

8. *Deseret News*, vol. 11, no. 37, Mar. 12, 1862 (quoted in Hansen, p. 49).

9. Hansen, 50.

10. Ibid., foreword.
11. John S. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre, or The History of Theatricals in Utah* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1905), 6–7.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 135:3.
13. “Early Theatricals in Utah,” *The Juvenile Instructor*, vol. 38 (1903): 290–91.
14. Megan Sanborn Jones, *Performing American Identity in Anti-Mormon Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 34.
15. Claudia Lauper Bushman and Richard L. Bushman, *Building the Kingdom: A History of Mormons in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xi.
16. Andrew Ehat, “‘Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?’ Sesquicentennial Reflections of a Sacred Day: 4 May 1842” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Books, 1994), 49.
17. Discomfort with the prospect of selling human beings likely played as significant a role in this change as any sensitivity surrounding Mormonism. In a 2007 production by the Pioneer Theatre Company, for example, Woodling and his wives only “pass through town but it’s a very quick appearance.” Artistic director Charles Morey added that the Mormon characters in the original production, “even for me, a non-Mormon, [were] off-putting.” Ivan M. Lincoln, “Some New Colors for ‘Paint Your Wagon,’” *Deseret News*, Sept. 23, 2007. Meanwhile, on *An Aztec Romance*, see Ardis Parshall, “‘Corianton’: Genealogy of a Mormon Phenomenon,” at <http://www.keepapitchinin.org/archives/corianton-genealogy-of-a-mormon-phenomenon/>.
18. Crawford Gates, “The Delights of Making Cumorah’s Music,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 13 nos.1–2 (2004): 72.
19. Steven Suskin, *The Book of Mormon: The Testament of a Broadway Musical* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2012), 48.
20. Suskin, 48.
21. Noting the transformative moment Elder Price experiences while on his mission, Hicks writes that linking the pageant’s score with Price grounds the missionary’s testimony within the framework of the pageant’s celebrated Mormon genesis: “As if to validate that transformation in ‘I Believe,’ each chorus begins by asserting the words ‘I am a Mormon’ to the five notes of the opening fanfare for the Hill Cumorah Pageant, the annual commemoration of Joseph’s excavating the plates.” Michael Hicks, “Elder Price Superstar,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 44, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 233.

22. “The Writing of *Saturday’s Warrior*—Part II,” posted on Saturday’s Warrior 2016—The Motion Picture Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/saturdayswarrior/> (accessed Jun. 25, 2015).

23. See www.ziontheatricals.com/alpha-listings-musicals/ for descriptions of many of the musicals.

24. C. Michael Perry, “The Theatre as a Temple,” www.ziontheatricals.com/the-theatre-as-a-temple/, Jul. 21, 2014, (accessed Jun. 25, 2015).

25. Perry, “The Theatre as a Temple.”

26. Ibid.

27. Quoted in Perry, “The Theatre as a Temple.”

28. See www.ziontheatricals.com/submit. (Accessed Jun. 25, 2015).

29. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (London: Routledge, 2012), 208.

30. Kathleen Lubeck, “Get That Show on the Road: How to Stage a Roadshow,” *Ensign* (August 1984): <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1984/08/get-that-show-on-the-road-how-to-stage-a-roadshow?lang=eng>.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Quoted in Kathleen Lubeck, “Activities That Change Lives,” *Ensign* (Aug. 1983): <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1983/08/activities-that-change-lives?lang=eng>.

34. Kim R. Burningham, “Heard through the Heart,” *New Era* (Nov. 1978): <https://www.lds.org/new-era/1978/11/heard-through-the-heart?lang=eng>.

35. Quoted in Jesse McKinley, “Theater Director Resigns Amid Gay-Rights Ire,” *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/theater/13thea.html>.

36. Shaiman originally toyed with the idea of basing the musical around the poppy field scene in *The Wizard of Oz*: “I said, ‘Well, maybe that first section should be all of us on a hill, with poppies, and it snows and we’re put to sleep, and then the Proposition 8 people are looking through the crystal ball, like the Wicked Witch of the West in ‘The Wizard of Oz.’ Because that’s what happened. We stupidly allowed ourselves to be lulled into a sense of, everything’s fantastic now, look—everything’s changing. And this couldn’t possibly be voted into law. This is just like some little pesky thing that we’re swatting at, and it will go away immediately.” Quoted in Dave Itzkoff, “Marc Shaiman on

“Prop 8—The Musical,” *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 2008. http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/marc-shaiman-on-prop-8-the-musical/?_r=0.

37. *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (later changed to *Hollingsworth v. Perry*) was the federal case that resulted in Proposition 8 being ruled unconstitutional. The plaintiffs were same-sex couple Kristin Perry and Sandra Stier, who in 2009 were denied a marriage license in Alameda County, California, because they were gay.

38. *The Book of Mormon* was not the first time Trey Parker and Matt Stone musically lampooned Mormonism. In 2003, their *South Park* episode, “All about the Mormons” musically dramatized Joseph Smith’s First Vision, subsequent visits from the angel Moroni, and Smith’s methods of translating The Book of Mormon using seer stones tucked inside his hat. As off-camera voices narrate the story, the continuous trope “Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum” is eventually revealed to be a homonym for “dumb.” The off-camera voices thus are conceptualized as a singing Greek chorus, moralizing the errancy of Smith’s claims and the naiveté of his early followers.

39. Trey Parker and Matt Stone, interview by Terry Gross.

40. Suskin, 55.

41. These advertisements frequently feature representative images of men and women with the words “You’ve seen the play . . . now read the book,” “The book is always better,” or simply “I’ve read the book,” followed by an image of the actual Book of Mormon. In 2011, Liza Morong became the first convert to the church directly resulting from the musical and, as at least one article pointed out, missionaries patrolling outside theaters have found an engaging and curious audience of theater-goers eager to meet real Mormons. See Danielle Tumminio, “Don’t Judge a Book of Mormon by its Cover: How Mormons are Discovering the Musical as a Conversion Tool,” *Huffington Post*, May 13, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danielle-tumminio/dont-judge-a-book-of-mormon-by-its-cover-how-mormons-are-discovering-the-musical-as-a-conversion-tool_b_3267252.html.

42. Hicks, 228.

43. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Marvelous Foundation of Our Faith,” *Ensign* (Oct. 2002): <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2002/10/the-marvelous-foundation-of-our-faith?lang=eng>.

44. Personal email correspondence with the author, Mar. 5, 2015.

45. P. K. Elkin, *Augustan Defence of Satire* (Oxford University Press, 1973), 201.

46. Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 60.

47. See link to pdf of the letter in “Ordain Women Releases LDS Bishop’s Letter Giving Reasons for Kelly’s Excommunication,” *Deseret News*, Jun. 23, 2014, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865605659/Ordain-Women-releases-LDS-bishops-letter-giving-reasons-for-Kellys-excommunication.html?pg=all>.

48. See pdf link to full letter in “Mormon Stories Founder Dehlin’s Spread of ‘False Concepts’ Results in Excommunication from LDS Church,” *Deseret News*, Feb. 11, 2015, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865621576/Mormon-Stories-founder-Dehlins-spread-of-false-concepts-results-in-excommunication-from-LDS.html?pg=all>.

49. Griffin, 139.

50. *Characteristics*, edited by J. M. Robertson (London, 1900), 1:50–51.

51. Eugene England, “The Possibility of Dialogue: A Personal View,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 10.

52. Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: A History: The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation from Socrates and Jesus to Thomas Jefferson and Emily Dickinson* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), xxi.

53. Bitton, vii.

**the vulture-ism of the world
(((since god isn't here)))**


Lara Candland

muted to inspiration
since god isn't here


snow on the sabbath mountain
(this morning
 attests to water)
since god isn't here

morning morning the very morning
god will appear
since god is not here

for me the fear

of god hearing ((()))

& nature abhors a vacuum
without a god in it

& our current ways of seeing ((()))
stops us from noticing
which gods are not here

o hear

Lara Candland

o here
lord—here
is a platter of treats & refreshment
in that high priest's hands—
a wild assortment—
a forest of sugar & sacrament—
& the spirit gives utterance
on a sugary cloven tongue
a word forest a non-sense
that everybody here mostly gets or thinks they get—
 we get it—
 don't we?

easter sunday:::thinking of you all the way

Lara Candland

*(in which mormons worldwide, on easter 2015,
do NOT have church service or partake of god's flesh & blood)*

Hsie T'iao** writes a complaint near the Jade Stairs:

*she lowers her pearl screen/ fireflies in the garden flit & pause
this long night, stitching silk, thinking of him, she believes will never end*

And Hsiao Kang** writes:

one wild goose calls, 'where am i going?'
if he had known he'd lose his flock
he would have begun his journey alone

ℳ ::::

had i known i would lose my congregation
or that i would be lost in that midst
a dark goose in a light gaggle
& no trumpet no solo

Oye Como Va

Sarah Duffy

I had no rhythm that day on the bench
sitting in shade, under the oaks and palms.
My thighs stuck to the green bars,
legs going numb.
I wanted to stop thirsting.

It was so hot, I didn't know what
I was reading anymore.
People passed on
the sidewalk and I kept looking.

Nevermind.
I don't want to tell . . . (Think *Hopeless*
Romantic tattooed underneath—
one word on the back of each thigh,
in cursive.)

I waited, a fool for a philosopher—
a pedant who writes in riddles,
who eats tiny purple flowers instead of giving
them to me.

But, I'd grown tired
of waiting.

A black and yellow butterfly
fluttered in front of me.

It circled the court and caught
my attention in the leaves,

moving in frantic waves to the music
blasting from the college yard.
The flutter, the rhythm of this
tropical arthropod was off.

Until Santana played—

Oye como va, mi ritmo!
Bueno pa' gozar, mulata!

That butterfly!
full of flavor
in the sunlight—

showing me
the true rhythm
a body knows.

Drum Major

Elizabeth Garcia

—for *Hardy Hatcher*

The church's framework swayed in the air.
Inside, big women with big grief
swayed with all their weight inside, and sang
big songs to bloom big flowers

of big women. Their big grief filled
the room, on fire with moaning
big songs to bloom big flowers,
orange on a white casket.

The room burned with moans
of HOLy SPIrit, flaming blossoms,
orange on a white casket, and
we raised our four white hands

with HOLy SPIrit, white-hot blossoms
wilting on black boughs, but
we raised them (only four white hands),
knowing private grief is not enough.

I wilted there against a big black bough,
too distracted to grieve—
Private grief is not enough!
SINGas GOT to SING!

too distracted for grief:
PREACHas GOT to PREACH!
SINGas GOT to SING!
and USHas GOT to USH!

PREACHas GOT to PREACH!
with their elbows, snapping fingers,
and USHas GOT to USH!
couldn't remember him alive,

with his elbows, fingers snapping
music, until I was alone. Then:
I could remember him, lively,
all in white, calling out the tempo,

alone with the music. Then he
swayed with all his weight aside, a song
in white, scrawling out the tempo,
swaying, framing churches in the air.

Legacy

Timothy Liu

A horse-drawn carriage
passes by in another

age—leaves of ash

and birch pressed
into the pages of a book

your grandmother will

never read again
as she pumps the pedals

of a player piano—

“Come Come Ye Saints”
drifting out the windows

of an Arts and Crafts

bungalow—tea roses
in the garden drooping

over the day’s abyss—

Resolve

Marilyn Nielson

One bird often whistled the notes, not the words, of the beginning of Swanee River—"Way down upon the Swa . . ."—without ever feeling inclined to add "... nee River," even after hearing the whole phrase practiced hundreds of times on the piano.

—"Why You Can't Teach a Starling to Sing," David Rothenberg

"The music keeps going and never stops,"
I tell my son—"Until the bar line?"
Of course, until the bar line.
He moves his fingers into place with effort,
As if moving in the third person;
As if they are thin sausages on sticks.

I tell him the story about Mozart slipping
Out of bed, darting downstairs, unable
To let a truncated cadence dangle
And suffocate, incomplete, in the air. "How
do you know when it is finished?" he asks,
and I play the changes, those deliberate roads.

In the mornings, above my bed, the insistent wrong
Of his notes buzzes like a trapped fly.
Slower! I croak, or *And again!* The generations
Coalesce into singularity: a chorus of mothers
And correction, layered like paired mirrors
Around this moment, this music, these words.

The years slip off in sheets, whispering.
In the practice room, I would close my eyes
To better place the music, and awaken later,
Having descended through a jangling
Sleep, head on the fallboard, breathing
In and out the slices of surrounding song.

“It’s more than theory,” my teacher said.
“It’s doctrine. Listen—” and he played us through
Fields and rivers, one light shining starlike
Down the long path, and at last the open door.
“Without the dominant,” he told us,
“Nothing can go home.”

My own practice comes in pieces now, or in the cocoon
Of night, as I progress through phrases—interrupted,
Always interrupted. At the broken cadence, no one
comes running to resolve. For now, fragments of chord
Move haltingly, waiting for the dominant, looking
for the road home, knowing they are not enough,
Themselves.

How to Be Alone with a Flute

Will Reger

Do not think of your suffering.

Release it
through your breath
into the flute.

Let your fingers lengthen
or shorten the air flow,
make it live, speak
something real—

if only for a moment:
that moment when a deer
fades back among the trees

that moment when a flame
flickers in and out

that moment of a heartbeat,
finite, irretrievable.

That moment when a pure note
cuts through silence—

and your pain eases
back into its wilderness,
beats its time, flickers out.

That moment I call joy.

Now Let Us Revise

I asked five diverse scholars to answer the question: What would you change in Mormon musical practice? Here are their replies. —Editor

Brian Jones

“How did that even happen?” he asked me. We were both musicology grad students. He’d heard I was from BYU, was Mormon, and had played in a punk band. He himself loved punk rock and had left the Orthodox Jewish culture of his youth. He couldn’t conceive of a strict religious community like the one in which he’d been raised allowing teenage kids to remain in both the faith and punk culture. He interrogated me about this for a good ten minutes.

I guess the incongruity had never really hit me that hard. Admittedly, my teenage identification as a punk had been modest. I collected a few patches and T-shirts, wore high-top Chuck Taylors, and had a respectably varied punk- and ska-based CD collection. Sure, the radical politics and crassness of punk didn’t jibe with Mormonism writ large. But I’d always been attracted to the “weirder” bits of Mormon history and theology anyway.

Looking back, though, I can see why punk and Mormonism might have resonated in tandem. After all, I’d never found as much inspiration in the black-and-white rightness of Nephi as in the utter bad-assery of Samuel—an outcast who defiantly stood on the wall of a hostile city to scream against the wickedness of an entrenched power structure. Or in the story of Alma, standing on a hilltop outside of town, preaching to the poverty-stricken rejects of a self-righteous society. Clearly, neither punk

nor Mormonism held a monopoly on this peculiar embrace of social marginality, assertive physicality, and moral confidence.

I also think there's a more apt connection between the two sensibilities—one that relates to an aspect of Mormon music through which I've personally found deep conviction. A couple years back, as I was teaching a class on punk and hip-hop aesthetics, I came to a realization: I, for myself, couldn't decide whether punk rock was really about standing out or fitting in. About asserting your own subjectivity as an individual or falling in line with the group. The punk experience for me had always been about a sort of *communitas* with the scene, even if its ideology depended absolutely on a sense of individualistic liberation.

Music in Mormonism works somewhat the same. In an age where recording technologies have made music (often beautifully) objectified, portable, and personal, Mormon worship music finds its space among a collection of congregants sitting in a room, singing in harmony to the sincere-but-ragged accompaniment of an amateur organist and the meandering gestures of a nominal chorister. That's the setting for many of our most profound experiences of introspection and personal sacrament. Even if the core of the ritual is one of individual communion with deity, only the interpersonal fellowship of a corporate body of Saints can enable it.

That's when Mormon music means the most to me. A social, participatory action that enables discovery within the self. Which brings me to the original prompt for this essay: What one thing would I change about music in the Mormon church? I'll admit I find the question difficult to get my head around. Still, one experience distinctly comes to mind.

Soon after I arrived as a missionary in a modest town in northern New Zealand, I met a wonderful middle-aged woman who had just been baptized. One Sunday afternoon, a few weeks after her baptism, my companion and I dropped by her home. As we approached, we could hear muffled pulsing from an overdriven stereo within. We saw her through her front window, singing and dancing and alight with energy. Her feet bounced as if on hot coals, and her hands moved from high above her head to

down below her knees in a constant flittering motion. When she noticed we were there, she turned down the music and greeted us with an embrace, her cheeks still wet with tears. She proudly explained that the music we heard was from her previous Pentecostal church. “As much as I love the Lord and His true Church, I still need those moments of musical praise to keep me close to Him.” Her unfettered act of devotion warmed my heart, even as it made me a little sad that she couldn’t find anything even close to this experience in her new religious home of Mormonism. Her sincere communal praise to God, it seemed, had been relegated to a solitary, mediated reenactment.

So, while I don’t know how I’d want to go about *changing* music in the Mormon Church, I do wish we made room for more diverse modes of religious musical experience. Mormonism’s wholesale rejection of the Christian liturgy should allow musical flexibility in meetings and ritual, but it seems to have gone the opposite way into an atmosphere of narrow prescription. Joseph Smith saw the Church and its doctrines as universal. To me, that universality should afford ways that all sorts of people can gather together, worship, and commune with the divine.



Ellinor Petersen

The religious ideal and practice that I believe is ready for retirement is the notion that brass instruments and percussion have a “less worshipful sound” (the explanation in the handbook as to why we don’t presently enjoy them in our worship services). That’s because worship has very little to do with timbre, and very much to do with the spirit with which an instrument is played. It is as possible to perform music as a singer or a pianist or string player with a “less worshipful sound” than what is desirable in a Church setting, such as in sacrament meeting, if the performer is trying to bring attention to him- or herself, rather than bring glory to God, as it is with a brass instrument or percussion. (Speakers

at Church can also miss the point of a "worshipful sound" by not inviting the Spirit, or trying to be clever instead of bringing people closer to God).

It is also worth noting that we have various references to trumpets in the scriptures: we find trumpets as a sound that will be used in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52), that have been used to sanctify a fast and call a solemn assembly (Joel 2:15), and that provided the aural context for revelation—"the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" (Exodus 19:19). That the prominent sound of trumpets should be incompatible with worship seems utterly false in the light of those scriptures. In fact, trumpets seem to have brought (and will bring) man and God together in remarkable ways.

Trumpets have often been used in times of war, and in 2 Chronicles there is a wonderful recounting of a battle, where the people of Judah looked back and saw that "the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets" (13:14), thus signifying that the trumpets were helping them trust the Lord to assist them in the battle. Of course, trumpets were not only used by the covenant people of the Lord, thus showing that the instrument can be sounded with a worshipful intent, but also simply to rally people to combat.

In 2 Samuel 6:15, we read that "David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet," demonstrating how trumpets were associated with some of their holiest acts. In Leviticus 25:9, it is specified that the trumpet would announce the jubilant sound of the Day of Atonement throughout the land. It even appears that to be ready to serve the Lord, it is sometimes required to be able to make a sound through a trumpet (Revelation 8:2, 6, where all the angels are given trumpets, and prepared to sound). The sound of the trumpet has played the role of solemnizing events, bringing attention to holy events, and perhaps only those who can play it will be ready for certain important tasks in the Millennium.

In Psalms 150:3, David encourages us to "praise him with the sound of the trumpet," specifically identifying trumpets as

a proper sound for praising the Lord. And of course, we have Moroni playing his trumpet at the top of most temples. It is time we also hear some trumpets in our worship services.



Aleesa Sutton

It is interesting that the current grassroots advocacy for change in the Mormon Church is, for the most part, not focused on revolutionizing things, but instead restoring practices of former times. This is true whether the subject is a call for greater responsibility and priesthood participation for women or a call to return our focus to Joseph Smith's groundbreaking theological assertions (e.g., Heavenly Mother), including even a broader definition of marriage (see: polygamy). The same call for restoration needs to apply to our music.

Our sacrament meeting music (and that of most other LDS meetings) is all of a particular type and aesthetic: either hymns from our own hymnbook¹ or a very small number of other pieces, i.e. the unofficially sanctioned songs of living Mormon composers like Janice Kapp Perry and Kenneth Cope. As long as the song is slow, piano-based, and extremely emotive, the thinking seems to go that it is okay for church. Because of that sameness, our music fails to reflect the diversity of our membership. A return to a more inclusive musical canon needs to be made. We need, for example, to bring back classical music, once welcome in sacrament meetings, yet now all but forbidden. What is more urgent, though, is to broaden our essential vision of what our contemporary church music could be.

We are, thanks to steady growth in the last decades, a world-wide Church—one in which we say we value inclusion. Since there is room for everyone, as Dieter F. Uchtdorf has assured us,² there must be room for more kinds of music. That includes music written and performed by individuals representing more of the spectrum of human experience—more women, more people

of color and diverse cultures, LGBTQ-identified people, and so forth. Ideally, the church experience is about reaching people spiritually through diverse avenues. Paul reminds us that each part of the body is necessary and has something to contribute. Or in Uchtdorf's words: "The diversity of persons and peoples all around the globe is a strength of this Church."³ Surely that sentiment is applicable to our music and musicians. The church experience is about fulfilling our mandate to seek after anything lovely, of good report or praiseworthy . . . wherever it may be found.

We Mormons tend to have a rather myopic focus on those within our fold, whether we are talking about truth in the written word or in music. In seeking enlightenment, we very often neglect the rich tradition of writers, philosophers, composers, and saints who have lived and enhanced lives in every place and age. Yet no religion, not even Mormonism, can single-handedly capture all truth about God or the lived experience of seeking him. As John Taylor reminds us, "There were men [and women] in those dark ages [and other periods] who could commune with God, and who, by the power of faith, could draw aside the curtain of eternity and gaze upon the invisible world."⁴ Surely our Mormon worship could benefit from incorporating more works from these kinds of individuals. Instead of finding comfort in the familiar, content with what we already know, we must open ourselves to more. This can only enhance our own spiritual growth. As Joseph Smith reminds us, "Thy mind, O man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss."⁵ This is as true of our musical experiences as it is of our theology.

I think the state of music in the Mormon Church reflects the state of the religion in general. Each Church hymnbook (there have been at least eight iterations in English thus far) reflects the time in which it was produced, serving the needs of its own generation of Saints.⁶ Some of the music in our current—thirty-five-year-old—hymnal remains inspiring, beautiful, and pertinent. Some of it, however, is similar to various long-standing cultural

practices that have ossified into dogma: assumed to be necessary, but actually irrelevant, unhelpful, and distracting from the task of living ever more Christ-like lives.

This stubborn adherence to long-established tradition does not leave much room for growth or alternative viewpoints. And without that space, as we have already seen, people we love are leaving the Church—in alarming numbers. Not since Kirtland has an exodus occurred like the one we are seeing now.⁷ In particular, we are losing many of the very artists, writers, and musicians who could provide the illuminating and exciting new kinds of music and other art we need. I fear this will continue unless there is more room made for diverse thinking and diverse expression in all aspects of our worship.



Kevin L. Barney

One Sunday about eight years ago, I plopped down in my regular pew for sacrament meeting and opened the program to see who was going to be speaking. At first I felt disoriented: I didn't see any names of speakers. I wondered if I'd forgotten it was a Fast Sunday. But it was the middle of July, so it couldn't be. And as I looked at the program more closely, I realized we were about to hold a musical testimony meeting.

I had heard of those things before, always with a twinge of envy, but never personally experienced one. My testimony is mediated more through music than anything else, so I had always wanted to participate. I plotted a couple of possibilities in case there happened to be a lull, as I didn't want to waste any time just sitting there. The two I came up with were "Be Still My Soul" (which we actually got to sing, as someone else picked it—I love the haunting Sibelius tune) and "Press Forward Saints" (I went to a fireside in Wilmette, Illinois, once and that was the opening song, and it was as if I had heard it for the first time, it was so powerful). But there was no need. It was a little bit slow getting

started, but then there was a rush as people went up to announce their selections and why they were meaningful to them.

Some of the many songs I remember us singing were “Love at Home,” “I Am a Child of God,” “Praise to the Man,” “Oh My Father,” “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” and “How Great Thou Art.” People kept going up to the stand, so the bishop stood up and said that only those already seated on the stand could make selections, and then we would close the meeting (we went about fifteen minutes over as it was). There were then about four people left; one was a brother who had gone up to give the selection of a disabled sister sitting on the back row, who was unable to go up and suggest it personally.

One of those last few people on the stand was a Primary girl, the daughter of our Ghanian Stake Presidency counselor. She very shyly approached the podium, pulled the microphone down so that we could hear her, and tentatively asked whether we could sing “If You Could Hie to Kolob.” And so, of course, we did.

I loved the service and so, being a blogger, I promptly wrote a blog post about the experience.⁸ The post received ninety-five comments. The early comments were mostly from people enthusiastically sharing their own experiences with such meetings. After a while, though, some comments began to suggest that at least some General Authorities did not approve of these kinds of meetings and via leadership training sessions had sought to put a stop to them.

I simply couldn’t imagine what the problem might be. My first guess was that they didn’t want these meetings taking the place of a regular fast and testimony meeting. But since ours had been mid-month, I figured we were good.

But no, some folks indicated they had received specific instruction against these kinds of meetings. One person even posted notes of the instruction that came in an email from their Area Seventy.

This is the email we received. It was sent from Elder [Name Redacted] to the stake presidents who forwarded it to my bishop who forwarded it to the ward council.

Presidents,

During a conference call for Area Seventy and Mission Presidents, Elder Oaks provided instruction that came from the Twelve to the Seventy concerning deviations in Church practices. Would you please help the bishops and branch presidents understand that these practices are not in harmony with Church policy?

Deviations and Innovations:

The Church program as officially outlined is wonderful and adequate. Deviations and innovations are not approved and can become distractions to the program. Some current tendencies are:

- Postlude hymns by choir or congregation following sacrament meeting.
- A choir prelude to sacrament meeting.
- Instruments accompanying the choir. A flute or a violin may be acceptable. Orchestras and large ensembles are not.
- Hymnimonies: (Singing your testimony.) Try not to embarrass people, but discourage this practice.
- Money Dances: (Dancing with the bride or groom to give them money, and similar practices.)

Thank you for your faithful service.

Elder [Name Redacted]

The reference to “Hymnimonies” seemed to be referring to a different practice altogether, of individuals during a regular fast and testimony meeting approaching the podium and singing in lieu of bearing testimony. I had never seen such a thing, but I live in the Midwest and who knows what goes on in the Great Basin? So I figured that musical testimony meetings were fine.

Sometime in the following year, however, I received notes from an Area Seventy training meeting that confirmed that at least some leaders did not approve of musical testimony meetings:

1. Bishoprics should stop having “hymnody” sacrament meetings. This is where one member gets up, tells why they love a certain hymn, the congregation sings that hymn, and then another member gets up and talks about another hymn, etc.
2. The congregation should not be asked to stand during the sacrament meeting rest hymn.

(My contact who passed this intelligence on to me added the following personal aside: “I organized this kind of sacrament meeting twice when I was in the bishopric—the meetings were deeply spiritual, and everyone loved them.”)

I was completely flummoxed as to why high Church leaders would have a problem with these kinds of meetings. I’ve come up with two (admittedly speculative) possibilities.

First, it is quite possible that the reference to “Hymnimonies” from the e-mail quoted above was indeed meant to refer to musical testimony meetings, and someone who didn’t quite understand the concept simply garbled the description. The linguistic form of the neologism is reminiscent of similar words that have been coined in the past to describe less than ideal forms of testimonies, such as “thankimonies” or “travelmonies.” In the comments to my blog post I wrote: “I think part of the reason that I find these testimonies especially meaningful is not just the music, but people don’t feel limited by the normal rote formulae. They tell great, moving stories about the significance these hymns have had for them.” For me the lack of rote formulae (“I know the Church is true,” “I know Joseph Smith/[current president of the Church] is a prophet,” etc.) made these meetings attractive. But perhaps leaders who disapprove of them find that troublesome.

Second, I cannot help but wonder whether it might be the grassroots, non-hierarchical origin of these kinds of meetings that galls certain leaders. These types of meetings were not a correlated program that came down from on high, but rather something that circulated and grew in popularity from the ground up. And it is possible that some leaders are just insecure enough to resent that the idea for these meetings, however spiritually powerful they may be, did not come from them.

Correlation was supposed to promote uniformity of practice in the Church, but the sentiment against musical testimony meetings has not been memorialized in the handbook itself. It remains a part of ad hoc leadership training from certain leaders only. And so we have a situation where there is a patchwork of compliance with the sentiment some leaders have expressed against musical testimony meetings. The one I experienced eight years ago has not been reprised. But I have no idea whether that is due to a leadership directive from above or because my local leaders simply have not thought to plan another one.

And so musical testimony meetings join other issues, such as allowing *only* hymns to be performed at Church (even by choirs and soloists), where the lack of a correlated, formal, written policy has resulted in a patchwork of different practices across the Church, depending on a spin of the roulette wheel as to whom one's Area Seventy's file leaders happen to be.



Brad Kramer

If I could wave a wand and change how Mormons use music for devotional purposes, I would conjure a change that draws deeply from existing patterns of LDS worship (especially in its more performative modes) while pushing into very unfamiliar aesthetic territory.

I take the public testimony as my model for worship here. Bearing testimony carefully balances general, culturally (and even literally) scripted forms with spontaneous particularity. Participants in a very real sense improvise within the constraints of a fairly tight performative model, not unlike jazz or other aleatoric forms. Testimony bearers adhere to standardized patterns of organization and verbiage, yet fill in the not-rigidly-scripted space of performance with highly personalized, situation- and context-specific content. Testimonies are reserved for a designated time and space, yet are not to be planned specifically in

advance. Speakers do not know what they will say, yet have a strong general sense of what they will say and know the specific performative constraints on how they will say what they only vaguely know to say.

It is a community ritual in the sense that it is enacted according to prescribed patterns, patterns to which participants are enculturated and trained through repetitive encounters with similarly constrained performances, but in which they also slowly develop a kind of effortless virtuosity through carefully attentive practice, usually from a very young age. The standards are shared, and occasionally articulated in the form of explicit, formal rules, but mostly they are implicit, sustained only through mutual attention, approval, and intelligibility. Testimony is a genre that forms a textbook example of those potent cultural phenomena that perfectly combine structural constraint with individual agency. We improvise, using the performative raw materials we have slowly mastered through practice, and within the generic and formal restraints and prescriptions that define the genre.

LDS musical devotion is never balanced in this manner. Musical performance-as-worship is more like the Sacrament prayers—with every element meticulously scripted and scrupulously followed in performance—than it is like a borne testimony or a public prayer. This is likely a function of aesthetics rather than ideology or doctrinal imperative. Music is the art form in Mormonism that is perhaps least welcoming to the modernist and post-modernist developments of the past century. Dedicated spaces of LDS worship might have room for a little Kirk Richards or Brian Kershishnik, but the angularity and patterned dissonance of contemporary concert music and New Music run glaringly against the aesthetic grain of Mormon sacred music, grounded so overwhelmingly as it is in the aural and performative sensibilities of the Anglican polyphonic tradition with occasional gestures to American Protestant hymnody.

What I am suggesting is not necessarily that the musical language of sacrament meeting worship be altered to incorporate the soundworlds of Ligeti or Mingus, but rather that new space be created for the purpose of encouraging and cultivating

a music-worship aesthetic grounded in the performative norms and values of testimony: collaboration, practice, formal structure balanced against individual improvisation. I'm thinking less in terms of jazz and more along the lines of the prose scores and highly involved, effervescent, meditative, collaborative, situationally particular, emergent works of, say, Karlheinz Stockhausen or Pauline Oliveros. Where the formal structure might be defined by a kind of script, or might just be the thing that emerges over time, like the quasi-script of the proper testimony. But a form nonetheless, one to which participants are gradually attuned over time, through careful attention and practice, in a context where the structure is filled in with spontaneous, individual and group performances, and where the raw psychic force of collaborative musical performance is channeled into a powerfully focused spiritual experience.

More than anything, I am calling on us to build something new together, to collectively participate in the emergence of a form, an aesthetic, and a power that is at once all new and distinctly, recognizably Mormon.

Notes

1. The 1985 hymnbook has a comparatively paltry selection of music (340 hymns compared to the Baptists with over 650, the United Church with over 700, and the United Methodist winning the contest with over 900). While our hymnbook does contain an assortment of music—pioneer songs, simple American hymns, and English tunes courtesy of early converts, to name some—it is also limited compared to the range of other religions' hymnals.

2. D. F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/come-join-with-us?lang=eng>.

3. Ibid.

4. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: Franklin D. Richards and Samuel W. Richards, 1851–86; repr. Salt Lake City, 1974), 16:197–98.

5. Letter from Liberty Jail, Missouri, 25 March 1839, in Manuscript History of the Church (Church History Library), C-1, pp. 900–06, 907–12.

6. M. Moody, "Latter-day Saint Hymnbooks, Then and Now," *Ensign* (Sep. 1985): <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1985/09/latter-day-saint-hymnbooks-then-and-now?lang=eng>.

7. P. Henderson and K. Cooks, "Mormons Besieged by the Modern Age," Reuters, Jan. 31, 2012, retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/31/us-mormonchurch-idUSTRE80T1CM20120131>.

8. Kevin Barney, "Musical Testimony Meeting," By Common Consent (Jul. 15, 2007), retrieved from <http://bycommonconsent.com/2007/07/15/musical-testimony-meeting/>. The description of the meeting above is adapted from that blog post.

Spencer Kimball's Record Collection

Michael Hicks

I should keep a journal. If I did I could look up what year this happened. Or exactly why I drove to Ed's house and knocked on his door. Or what time it was when he phoned me up weeks later to make his offer. But it all happened. I've got the proof on my shelves. Well, some of it, anyway.

Ed Kimball lives up in the foothills behind the Provo Temple, a few blocks north of what they call "Indian Hills," a place with the names of Native American tribes on block after block of street signs. Fitting, I thought as I headed up the shaded gravel driveway of this son of the twelfth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If William J. Clinton was our country's first black president, as we used to say, Spencer W. Kimball was our Church's first Indian president. An Arizona desert-raised son of a missionary to over twenty nations of Native Americans—"Lamanites," in Mormon parlance—Kimball focused his vision on these indigenous peoples more than any Mormon apostle before or since. As president of the Church, he'd moved thousands of Native Americans off the reservations for schooling, deepened the bank accounts that funded Lamanite scholarships at BYU, and generally jacked up the top-level rhetoric about white Mormons' duty to those with browner skin.

Ed, Spencer's third son, co-wrote with his nephew the whiz-bang biography of Spencer that knocked us flat in 1977 for its candid, full-blooded look at a sitting Church president's life to that point. Is this how biographies would be written in the Church now, we wondered? (The answer was . . . sort of, sometimes, maybe.)

When I went to Ed's house, I asked him questions about his dad and music and specifically if there was anything in Spencer's diaries about Jay Welch's firing from the Tabernacle Choir.

He graciously looked up some dates for me. Not much there. When I asked about the couple hundred LPs on the shelf near where we sat, Ed told me that, yes, those were his dad's. Could I look through them, I asked? Sure, he said. Did he want to sell any of them? No, but if I wanted any of them, I could have them.

Now, I had been collecting records since I was nine. By this point in my life, records seemed to wash up on my shore from the strangest places. But this was the unlikeliest: the record collection of one of my heroes, samples free for the taking. Still, the historian in me—along with a dime's worth of tact—made me focus on the content of the collection, what it might reveal about its owner, and be sparing about what I grabbed up.

Many of the records were gifts to Spencer. The usual, expected "official" gifts, of course: records by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the Mormon Youth Symphony and Chorus, M.I.A. conference choirs, Temple pageant casts, and so forth. Most of these LPs were still sealed and had a note on them gifting them to President Kimball. There were also gifts from ad hoc Mormon choirs I'd not heard of: The Mormon Expo Choir, the Detroit Mormon Concert Choir, the Indianapolis 4th Ward Choir, etc.

But many other gift records came from Native American soloists and groups, inscribed by their makers with love and thanks and all else one might expect from citizens of a Mormon nation of tribes that lionized Kimball. These I gingerly started to pull off the shelf to take home, though I had impure motives. I'd sold some limited-pressing Native American records on eBay, including one I saw here in better condition, and thought I might put some (read: all) of these up for auction, too.

I saw a few international records—Mexican mariachi bands, Russian Orthodox church music, Greek dance records, British organ recitals. There was classical, mostly "Best of"-type collections, 25 Most Beloved Melodies, and the 1941 Music Lovers Chest of Records set. There was even some pop, ranging from Jim Reeves to ELO to Gene Cotton to Simon and Garfunkel to

Bob Dylan. In all fairness, Ed assured me, some of these probably got stuck on the shelves by grandchildren.

I asked him about his dad's listening habits. While working at his desk at home, Ed said, Spencer liked to listen to Hawaiian music. Before becoming president of the Church at the end of 1973, Spencer "went to the symphony with some regularity." But after he took the Church's top post, that stopped. Too busy. What was the main thing that governed Spencer's record-buying habits? "He was thrifty," Ed said. That was why two-thirds to three-fourths of the records in his collection were gifts.

Besides the Lamanite records, I took one or two others and headed out to the car. I shouted thanks to Ed from my window as I drove away.

I did sell that one record I'd sold before on eBay. Most of the others I crammed into the "LDS" corner of my collection, a fat row of LPs between a three-high-shelf and a two-drawer file cabinet.

A few weeks later the phone rang and it was Ed. "How would you feel about just taking all of Dad's records?" he asked.

"Hmm." I said. My heart raced in two directions: I loved the thought of getting this collection, but didn't love the thought of having it. Because (a) I wasn't an archive or storage facility, (b) there wasn't much of musical interest in these discs, and (c) I didn't know the provenance of some of the more interesting records. My greed and savvy both kicked into gear.

"I'd take them on the condition that you understand most of them will end up at the D.I.," I said. ("The D.I." is how Mormons refer to Deseret Industries, the Mormon equivalent of Goodwill or the Salvation Army.) I explained my reasons for wanting to get them but not keep many, how I'd sort them, and such.

"That's okay," he said. He could use the room. And they weren't being used. Like most people, he'd shifted to FM and CDs when he listened to music at all. So these foot-wide black vinyl discs were just trinkets of a life and relationship from which he had much more intimate and more usable trinkets already.

I drove to his house, parked my red '93 Taurus close to the front door, and knocked. He let me in and we started looking for boxes to pack up the records. When we'd filled a few boxes,

he said, “There’re more records downstairs.” We walked into his basement and the first thing that caught my eye was the tall bookshelf of binders: all of Spencer Kimball’s looseleaf diaries. I wanted nothing so much as to spend the rest of the day—the rest of the month—leafing through them and taking notes. But I was on a mission. And besides, though you wouldn’t think this of me, I was bashful. “Those are his diaries, huh?” was all I said. “Yes,” he said. And that was that.

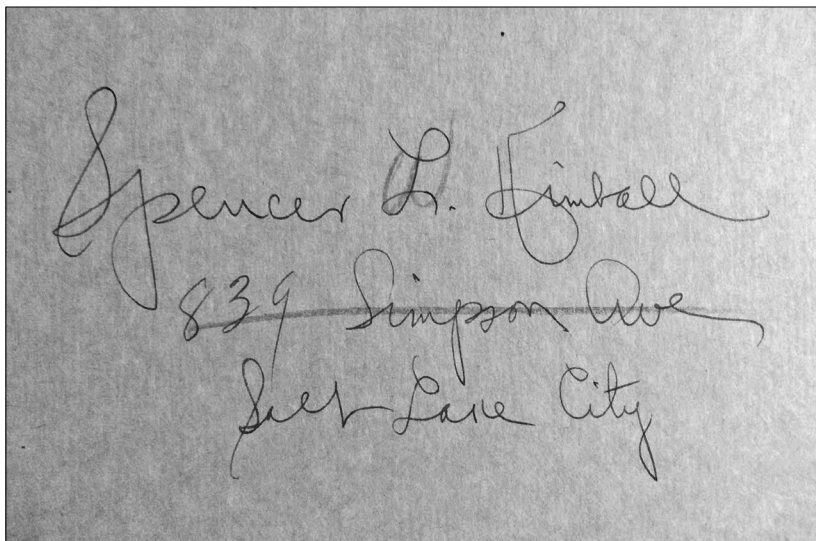
He asked me if I wanted an old dictaphone his dad had used, but I didn’t. Too clunky. Then he showed me what turned out to be the treasure. Second-hand treasure, that is. Two boxes filled with 12-inch classical albums—78 rpm albums, that is, sets of several discs each, bound into an actual hinged album to yield, say, a single symphony. “Those were my brother Spencer’s,” Ed said. “But when he moved back east to go to school, they were too heavy and breakable to take with him. So he left them with Dad.”

Now I thought I was getting somewhere. They were all classical and fit better with what I thought a prophet should be soaking up. “Did your dad listen to them?” “Some of them. You can tell the ones he liked by looking inside the front cover. This one, for example, was one of his favorites.” He handed me the 1950 five-disc Victor album of Pierre Monteux conducting the San Francisco Symphony in the Franck Symphony in D Minor—one of my favorite pieces when I was in high school. I opened the cover and saw the inscription on the left, written in black ballpoint:

Spencer L. Kimball
839 Simpson Ave.
Salt Lake City

In red pencil someone had crossed out the street address and written a “W” over the “L.” “That’s how Dad showed which ones he was claiming for himself,” Ed said. “He crossed out the address and wrote his middle initial over my brother’s.”

After flipping through all the albums in these boxes, I carried them and the other boxes out to the car, putting half in the trunk and half in the back seat. I thanked him again, then drove home.



How Spencer Kimball adopted his namesake son's albums. Photo by Michael Hicks.

When I got there, Pam was home and I told her all about what had just happened. Then I started to sort through the records.

Even before I'd picked up the discs at Ed's, I knew the three categories: records I wanted to keep, ones I wanted to give to the BYU library, and ones I was hauling to the D.I. I worked quickly and within a couple of hours I had the basic sorting done.

There were only a few of this new batch that I wanted to keep: a Mötley Crüe album (obviously a grandkid stray), Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, a few more LDS artists and pageant soundtracks for my Mormon music corner and, no surprise, the Franck. I picked out a batch of records I thought might make a nice mini-archive in BYU Special Collections: unusual records owned by a Church president, which included the other re-initialed albums and a couple of one-off 7-inch field recordings of tribal singing, presumably given to him by a missionary or Lamanite admirer. All the rest: the D.I.

A few days after my donation, I was in the D.I.—I used to go at least once every day back then—and saw that these records had just come out and were in the racks. Two women with British accents were admiring one dark blue box set from the batch, the

1975 BYU centennial 4-disc *Sounds of a Century* commemorative set of speeches. This set only rarely appeared at the D.I. and I knew from this one's condition and a couple of distinctive marks that it was indeed the one I'd brought from Kimball's shelf, the complimentary copy BYU had given him.

I had to say something. "I know this sounds weird and you'll probably think I'm making this up, but I know for a fact that that copy you're holding belonged to President Kimball."

Their eyes widened and before they could say more than "Really?" I told them the whole story and how I knew this was his personal copy. They both said that this was a treasure they would love to take back to England. Cost? One dollar.

"If you want, I can write you a certificate of authenticity and sign it so you have something to back you up." One of the women found a grocery receipt in her purse and I wrote my ad hoc certificate on the other side of it. They thanked me over and over and I thought maybe I should just stay around for awhile and tell people when they picked up a Kimball record. But the impulse quickly passed and I drove home.

As for the BYU records, I found out later that they didn't all stay together, as I'd hoped. The titles got processed like any other donation, duplicates probably got sold off or given away, including the initialed 78s. The Lamanite 7-inchers are in Special Collections, but you have to know their names to find them. And, truth be told, who knows if President Kimball listened to them at all, let alone liked them? From some of his sermons, I'm pretty sure he thought Lamanite music was as savage as, well, the Book of Mormon Lamanites.

As for the ones I kept, understand the situation: all of my 7,000+ records stand in eighty-some shelf cubicles, or perch on top of the shelves, or lean against walls, or sit in bins in an oblong room above our garage, a mini-warehouse that also holds stereo components, rock posters, art prints, books on cartooning and Persian rugs, my large Annette Funicello collection, hundreds of rare and bargain basement pop CDs, dozens of horror DVDs, and VHS tapes of B-movies and interviews with poets, cassette mix tapes I made for my wife's old aerobics class, binders full of movie stills and promo



The cover of one of Kimball's favorite classical albums. Photo by Michael Hicks.

photos and postcards, file drawers stuffed with book contracts and folders of articles I'll probably never read again, piles of mailing supplies, and, stuck in spaces here and there, autographed pictures of everyone from Joey Bishop to Anna Nicole Smith. Amid all that, the record collection—and my memory—has swallowed up the few Kimball records I stowed there.

There are just two things in plain view in this room that remind me of President Kimball. One is that Franck album, which sits at the front of a thick group of about eighty albums leaning crosswise on another long stretch of about two hundred



The all-purpose box I cherish. Photo by Michael Hicks.

sitting on top of a pressboard shelf. The cover is one of the real works of art in the room: a flag-draped rifle bayonet in front of a ghoulish hand reaching up from a pool of blood inside a flame tongue rising from a burnt-out cityscape. It's quite extraordinary: a semi-kitschy outtake from the Nazis' "Forbidden Art" hall of shame. It reminds me of that mongrel post-war era when both a cheery Apostle Kimball and post-Holocaust dread flourished side by side in this country.

The other, far gentler, mark of his presence is not a record at all. It's one of the boxes I carried his records home in. Ed and I had scrounged around in the basement till he asked me if this one would be okay: a large, lidded cardboard cube covered with

color photographs of sky and clouds. A gift shop oddity from the '70s, I'd say. A tourist-class disposable prop. It's breezy and chic. It's the flip side of the Franck.

I've used the box for years to haul toys from floor to floor or to stow books for Mormon research or, now, to hold up my cassette deck because the cord that runs from it to my Denon receiver isn't long enough for the deck to sit on the floor, where I'd prefer it to be. I'm looking at the box right now, a firm but hollow foundation for an outdated technology I still insist on using. Though partly cloudy, the box shines: beams from wherever it sits. And it has sat in every room in our house over the years since I got it from Ed's house. Where will it be in a month? I don't know. And that, I guess, is the continuing revelation of it, this portable, smiling souvenir of a prophet.

The Brick Church Hymnal: Extracts from an Autobiography

Christian Asplund

New York, 1988–90: DIY

In 1988 I completed my bachelor's degree in music composition at BYU and moved to New York where I began a graduate program in ethnomusicology. I became disillusioned with the state of classical composition as I knew it at the time and felt that, although I wanted to continue to pursue my lifelong dream of being a composer, I would realize that dream more fully by enriching my musical study with music I had not yet encountered from other cultures. New York had the advantage of an underground jazz scene about which I knew as much as one could learn in those days from hanging out in the imports sections of record stores and reading esoteric music 'zines.

I arrived in New York and took up residence in a tiny windowless apartment owned by the university that was literally in Times Square. This was the pre-Disneyfication, red light version of said Square. After a year of 1,000-page a week (by such authors as Malinowski and Levi-Strauss) seminars, I realized that there was little room in this rigorous and demanding discipline for a person with my artistic aspirations. I was also unsuccessful in getting gigs, or in hooking up with similar-minded musicians. So, after getting married, I dropped out and worked for the next year as a bike messenger and a temp word processor while my wife completed her undergraduate degree. In one long-term temp

job, I found I had a lot of time with little to do but look busy at my computer. This was long before the internet or computers with graphical interfaces, so I had to come up with something to keep my fingers and eyes busy. I began doing things like designing staff paper, writing poetry, and typing, formatting, and printing the writings of others. I realized that in an office with computers, printers, photocopiers, and binding machines, I had everything needed to produce, even to publish, collections of writing and/or musical notation. All the infrastructure associated with publishing for centuries seemed to melt away. One heard about “desktop publishing” quite a bit in those days. It all seems so quaint now, but it appeared to me that we were on the cusp of a new DIY era. In recorded music, cassettes had eclipsed records owing to their relative cheapness, and portability (both of the media and their playing devices). It was easy to produce homemade cassettes and with a dual cassette deck, one could cheaply “mass” produce a cassette “release” on a small scale.

Nevertheless, the first cassette release of my own avant-garde jazz music garnered little interest and did not allow me to penetrate the downtown music scene. My wife, Lara Candland, was writing fascinating minimalist poems and stories, many of which were accepted for publication by Gordon Lish of *The Quarterly*. This pioneering journal shut down before it was able to put out the bulk of what Lish had accepted of her work. She continued to submit her work elsewhere, but had less success being taken seriously by other, more aesthetically timid journals.

I had also been going through my father’s (C. Thomas Asplund) unpublished and published poetry, typing it, and archiving it in computer files. He published poetry in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*, but had pieces rejected by them. I was fascinated and a little perturbed by the very detailed rejection letters that betrayed a lack of openness to work that challenged hardened aesthetic and genre definitions and assumptions. Lara’s rejection letters, though much shorter, contained similar messages: “We liked your work, but weren’t sure how it fits in,” or other words that seemed to say, “We’re not sure this is poetry,” etc. I had

certainly experienced the same with my own music in trying to share it with others. It seemed that getting published or getting gigs required creating the “right” stuff, stuff that fulfilled certain orthodoxies. Moreover, it seemed that the only non-official Mormon periodicals were scholarly and somewhat dissident in nature, while I had little interest in intellectual resistance but a great deal of interest in artistic expression that was radical in form and texture. I began to realize that I was part of a scattered group of marginalized Mormon artists—marginalized within the Mormon learned and artistic groupings because of geography and because of the orthodoxy of the oppressed, and within the larger secular community because of our identification with a weird religious minority. I also realized that most of the artists that I admired through history were similarly out of the mainstream. In fact, the history western music is mostly that of composers who had great influence over generations that followed, but who were out of the mainstream of their own time. Moreover, many of these artists practiced what we now call DIY. Two of my favorite poets, Blake and Whitman, are good examples.

During this time of searching and discovery, our Manhattan ward had a kind of crafts expo, where members set up booths or tables to show off things they did or made. I decided to “desktop publish” a prospectus of a new Mormon arts periodical called *The Brick Church* and drum up subscriptions at the expo. We got about twenty subscribers and ended up producing and distributing two issues of the journal, the first being a 'zine containing poetry and fiction, the second a cassette of eclectic independent music. The first issue was prefaced by something of a manifesto for Mormon DIY art that cited the home production movement during Brigham Young's administration and recent technological advances that, among other things, suggested a path for a more vibrant Mormon artistic flowering that did not seek legitimacy or precedent from the mainstream.

In my New York sojourn, I also encountered Michael Hicks's excellent *Mormonism and Music*,¹ which introduced me to Boyd K. Packer's talk at a 1976 BYU fireside that spoke directly to LDS

composers. The talk was, and continues to be, controversial among LDS musicians and artists in that it chides them for various reasons, including the age-old sin of bringing too much artifice into the liturgy. I particularly remember Hicks citing Mormon composer Merrill Bradshaw, saying that the talk “chopped the philosophical feet out from under me,” because Bradshaw saw his role as a composer to bring together the musical discoveries of all ages in the same way that the dispensation of the fullness of times was bringing together spiritual truths from all of human history. I found Packer’s talk as troubling as anyone, but I was also strangely inspired by certain statements such as “the greatest hymns and anthems of the Restoration are yet to be composed.” Also, “If I had my way there would be many new hymns with lyrics near scriptural in their power, bonded to music that would inspire people to worship.” And, after saying that inasmuch as the most impactful works of Mormon art, such as the sublime panels of C. C. A. Christensen and “I Am a Child of God” were created by artistic outsiders, he expected that precedent to continue. However, “the ideal, of course, is for one with a gift to train and develop it to the highest possibility, including a sense of spiritual propriety. No artist in the Church who desires unselfishly to extend our heritage need sacrifice his career or an avocation, nor need he neglect his gift as only a hobby. He can meet the world and ‘best’ it, and not be the loser. In the end, what appears to be such sacrifice will have been but a test.”²

This felt like a worthy challenge for a Mormon composer. I had experienced “composition” as it existed in my world to that point as the writing of esoteric, intricate scores to be played often poorly by oft-grudging technicians if they were played at all. A composer seemed to be judged by the extent to which his or her music embedded some kind of inscrutable cohesiveness within gratuitously incoherent or unappealing musical textures. This may seem unkind or disloyal to a discipline and a group of people that I love. I have since come to a much better appreciation of the scene and its aesthetic ethics. Nonetheless, the atonal hegemony within the American academy was still pretty strong at that time.

Packer's implicit challenge interested me in its directness and boldness. Could one simultaneously utilize *and* transcend conservatory training to produce pieces of music that had both the transformative musical power of the modernist music I was trained in and loved and the brevity, simplicity, and appeal of the great hymns of the restoration?

San Francisco/Oakland, 1990–93: Composer's Books

In 1990 we moved to the Bay Area where we began masters' degrees at Mills College, long a bastion of experimental music. Seminars were quite different. The emphasis was on giving students space to develop their own (sometimes very unusual) artistic voice. Often classes required virtually no outside work. During one such a class, the great Alvin Curran told us about a project he worked on during a period when he was not receiving commissions. He decided he would keep a book of compositions, that he would add a new composition each week. The pieces would be mostly flexible in their potential realization and rather simple, certainly not requiring virtuoso performers. The pieces were written principally to fulfill a work regimen and to fill a book, rather than for specific performances. Performances would occur later for which he could easily adapt pieces from the book. I also encountered Cardew's *The Great Learning* and other similar self-collected anthologies by Zorn, Billings, Braxton, Ashley, and Wolff.

Each of these composers created a book or books of compositions without specific performances in mind. The audacity and faith of these acts of creation were very inspiring to me. They provided a model for me to approach the challenges given by Packer and Kimball.³ I began composing hymns as an artistic and spiritual practice, rather than for specific academic assignments or performance opportunities. This gave me the freedom to write whatever I wanted or felt inspired to write. While in California, I continued to temp whenever I had free days, to make whatever money I could. After my coursework was done, I spent an entire year working as a secretary, squeezing in composing and rehearsing at odd hours when I wasn't working or commuting.

Seattle, 1993–1999: The Brick Church Hymnal

We then moved to Seattle where I began doctoral study at the University of Washington. After initially registering with a temp agency in Seattle, I began to feel that any more secretarial work would adversely affect my longer-term goals. I felt inspired to make a vow that inasmuch as I wrote a hymn each week, I would be delivered from the necessity of secretarial work. Lara and I were blessed for eight years with stipends and (non-secretarial) employment sufficient to sustain us until I obtained a full-time, permanent teaching job, after which I felt inspired to discontinue my vow and to write hymns only as inspiration came.

This has been my practice now for fifteen years. I have organized and self-published hymns I've written since 1990 in four volumes. Among my composer colleagues I was one of the last to adopt notation software. This is illustrated in these volumes. Volume 1 was released in 1994, volume 2 in 1998, both of which contain only handwritten notation. Volume 3 was completed in 2005 and reflects my gradual adoption of notation software as it contains a mix of handwritten and engraved hymns. Volume 4, completed in 2014, contains only engraved scores. I invoked our earlier publication, *The Brick Church*, in naming my first and subsequent *Brick Church Hymnals*. I'm currently two hymns into volume 5. Each volume is quite different and the nature of the hymns has changed with time. During the first two volumes, I was very interested in resetting hymn texts from forsaken and forgotten LDS sources, including the Emma Smith Hymnal. As I ran out of these, I began setting more scriptural texts and writing textless hymns. Volumes 3 and 4 contain considerably more songs for accompanied solo voice than 1 and 2, which contain mainly four-part choral textures. The collections contain some oddities such as songs that I heard in dreams, but that bear little resemblance to any music that I would compose, and items that are more like spiritual exercises than pieces of music. This issue of *Dialogue* includes samples of my settings of texts from the first Mormon hymnal compiled by Emma Smith. PDFs of all four volumes are freely available at:

<https://cfaccloud.byu.edu/index.php/s/5c709b2bb7fe3bbd6869ac5520e3ab62>

<https://cfaccloud.byu.edu/index.php/s/78275b4e02a0b781d7ec44084cc3each>

<https://cfaccloud.byu.edu/index.php/s/4b3a55690585d62691132b766b6eacb0>

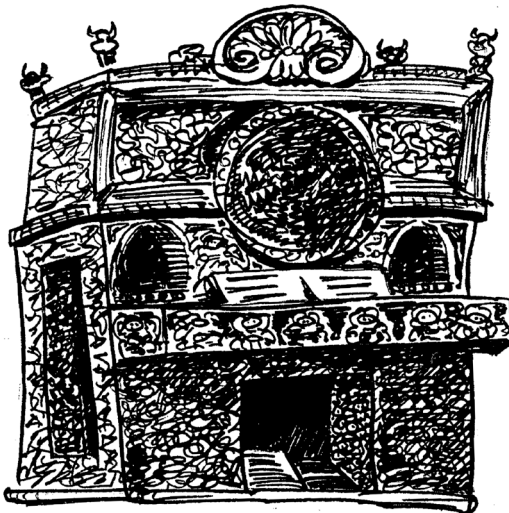
<https://cfaccloud.byu.edu/index.php/s/0fe524acdd20361f7c6453539a96e632>

Notes

1. Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

2. Boyd K. Packer, “The Arts and the Spirit of the Lord,” Feb. 1, 1976, available at https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/boyd-k-packer_arts-spirit-lord/.

3. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Gospel Vision of the Arts,” *Ensign* (July 1977): <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1977/07/the-gospel-vision-of-the-arts?lang=eng>.



Redeemer of Israel

Text: W. W. Phelps
Music: Christian Asplund

1. Re-
2. We
3. How
4. As

dee-
Know
Long
Chil-

mer
He
We
dren

of
Is
Have
of

Is-
Co-
wan-
Zi-

Israel
ming
dered
on,

Our
To
As
Good

3

On-
Ga-
Stran-
Ti-

ly
ther
gers
dings

De-
His
In
For

light,
Sheep
Sin,
Us:

On
And
And
The

Whom
Lead
Cried
To-

For
Them
In
kens

A
To
The
Al-

6

Bles-
Zi-
Des-
rea-

sing
on
sert
dy

We
In
For
Ap-

Call,
Love's
Thee!
pear.

Our
For
Our
Fear

Sha-
Why
Foes
Not,

dow
In
Have
And

By
The
Re-
Bie

9

Day
Val-
joiced
Just,

And
ley
When
For

Our
OF
Our
The

Dil-
Death
Sor-
King-

lar
Should
rows
dom

By
They
They've
Is

Night,
Weep
Seen,
Ours.

Our
Or
But
The

(Redeemer of Israel) - 2

12

Kings
In
Is-
Hour

Our
The
rael
of

De-
Lane
Will
Re-

li-
Wil-
Short-
demp-

ver-
der-
ly-
tion

Our
ness
Be
Is

#5
All.
Rove?
Free.
Near.

CTA 7 July 1994

Empty musical staff lines.

Empty musical staff lines.

Empty musical staff lines.

Empty musical staff lines.

Empty musical staff lines.

Empty musical staff lines.

Redeemer of Israel

Text: W. W. Phelps
Music: Christian T. Asplund

(♩ = c. 105)

1. Re-
2. We
3. How
4. As
5. Re-
6. He

dee-
Know
Long
Child
store,
Lakes!

mer
He
We
dren
My,
And

Of
Is
Have
Of
Dear
Ten

Is-
Co-
Wan-
Zi-
Sa-
Thou-

rael,
ming
dered
on,
vior,
sands

Our
To
As
Good
The
of

On-
Ga-
stran-
Ti-
An-

ly De-
ther His
-gers In
dins For
of Thy
gals Re-

light,
Sheep
Sin,
Us.
Face;
jace;

On
And
The
Tny
And

Whom
Lead
Cried
To-
Sul-
My-

For
Them
In
kens
cheer-
ri

A
To
The
Al-
read-
y

Bles-
Zi-
Des-
read-
Com-
Wait

-sing
-ent
-ant
-fort
For

We
In
For
Ap-
Im-
His

Call,
Love;
Thee
Pear-
parts;
Word;

Our
For
Our
Fear
And
He

Sha-
ving
Kiss
Not,
Let
Speaks

How
In
Have
And
The
And

By
The
Re-
Be
The
Sweet
E-

Day
Fall-
joiced
Just,
Long-
ter-

And
Our
ley
When
Our
For
The
ing
ni-
ty,

Our
OF
Our
The
The
Filled

Our
By
shall
rows
dom
is
Hol-
y
With
His

Night
Weep
Seems
Ours.
Place
Voice,

Our
Or
But
The
Bring
Re-

King
In
is-
Hour
Hope
e-

Our
The
rael
OF
To
choes

De-
lone
Will
Re-
My
The

I
Will-
short-
demp-
De-
Praise

Our
der-
ly
tion
so-
late
OF
The

Our
ness
Be
is
late
OF
The

All!
Rave?
Free.
Near
Heart.
Lord.

Awake! O Ye People, the Savior Is Coming

Words: William W. Phelps

Music: Christian Asplund

ff 1. A- wake! O Ye Peo- ple, The Sa- vior Is Co- ming; He'll
 2. To- day Will Son Pass And That Un- known To mor- row May
 3. Be Rea- a- O Is- lands, The Sa- vior Is Co- ming; He'll
 4. A Voice To The Na- tions In Sea- son Is Gi- ven; Pre-

5. Sud- den-ly Come To His Tem- ples; We Hear; Re-
 Leave Ma- ny Souls In A More Dread- ful state Than
 Bring A- gain Zi- on, The Pro- phets De- clare; Re-
 pare, O Pre- pare For The King- dom's New Birth, To

9. pen- tance Is Nee- ded Of All That Are Li- ving; To
 Came By The Flood Or That Fell On Go- mo- rah- yea,
 pent OF Your Sins, And Have Faith In Re- demp- tion; To
 Call The E- lect From The Four Winds OF Hea- ven; For

13. Gain Them A Lot OF In- he- ri- tance Near.
 Wee- ping And Wai- ling When Grief Is Too Late.
 Gain You A Lot OF In- he- ri- tance There.
 Je- sus Is Co- ming To Reign U- pon Earth.

Before The Earth From Chaos Sprung

Text: Sacred Hymns (LDS 1835)

Music: Christian Asplund

1. Be-fore The Earth From Chaos Sprung, Or Mor-ning
 2. Those Ho-ly Men Mi-nute-ly Told, What Fu-ture
 3. He Pro-phet-sied Of This Our Day, That God Would
 4. He Like-wise Did Foretell The Name, That Should Be
 5. Ac-cord-ing To His Ho-ly Plan, The Lord Has
 6. The Keys Which Peter Did Re-ceive, To Re-ar A
 7. Then None Need To His Neighbor Say, Know That The

Stars To-ge-ther Je-ho-vah
 A- ges Would Un- told, Scenes God Had
 Un- to Is-rael Say, The Go-spel
 Gi- ven To The Same, His And His
 Now Raised Up The Man, His Lat-ter
 King- dom God To Please, Have Once More
 Lord, This Is The Way, For All Shall

Saw What Would Take Place In All The
 Pun- posed Should Take Place, Down To The
 Light You Now Shall See, And From Your
 Fa- ther's Should A- gree, And Both Like
 Day Work To Be- gin, To Ga-ther
 Been Con-ferred On Man, To Bring A-
 Know Him Who Shall Stand, Both Old And

(Before The Earth) - 2

7

Vast Ex - tent Of Space.
 Last Of A - dam's Race.
 Bon - dage Be Set Free.
 His Should Jo - seph Be.
 Scat - tered Is - rael In.
 -bout Je - ho - vah's Plan.
 Young In All The Land.
 be

9

He Spoke; This World To Order Came,
 But We Will Pass Those Ancients By,
 He Said God Would Raise Up A Seer,
 This Seer Like Moses Should Ob - tain,
 This Seer Shall Be E - steemed High,
 The Key Of Knowledge Long Since Lost,
 Now Let The Saints Both Far And Near,
 And Men He Made Lord Of The Same,
 Who Spoke And Wrote By Pro - phe - cys,
 The Hearts Of Ja - cob's Sons To Cheers,
 The Word Of God For Man A - gain;
 By Joseph's Remnants By And By,
 Has Virtue Still As At The First,
 And Scattered Israel, When They Hear

11

Great Things To Them He Did Make Known,
 Un - til We Came To Him Of Old,
 And Gather Them A - gain In Bonds,
 A Spokesman God Would Him Prepare,
 He Is The Man Who's Called To Raise,
 To Bring To Light Things Of Great Worth,
 This News, Re - joice In Is - rael's God,
 Which Should Take Place In Days To Come.
 E'en Jo - seph Whom His Brethren Sold.
 In Latter Days U - pon Their Lands.
 His Word When Written To De - clare.
 And Lead Christ's Church In These Last Days.
 And Thus With Knowledge Fill The Earth.
 And Sing, And Praise His Name A - loud.

What Fair One Is This?

From 1835 LDS Collection
(Emma Smith, ed.)

Christian Asplund
Norman, OK: January 2001

Steady and peaceful

Voice

1. What fair one is this, from the wil - der - ness tra - veling, -
2. There is a sweet sound in the go - spel of hea - ven, And
3. A bles - sing, a bles - sing, the Sa - vior is co - ming, As
4. The name of Je - ho - va is wor - thy of prai - ing, and

Piano

Voice

Loo - king for Christ, the be - lo - ved of her heart? O, this
peo - ple are joy - ful when they un - der - stand. The
pro - phets and pil - grims of old have de - clared; And
so is the sa - vior an ex - cel - lent theme; The

Pno

Voice

2

What Fair One Is This?

10

Voice

Pno

De-
To
And

13

Voice

Pno

Which with ev - ery I - dol is wil - ling to part. While men in con -
- ter - mined by good - ness, to reach the blessed land. Old for - mal pro -
come to the feast for the righ - teous pre - pared. In the de - sert are
call on all na - tions to come to the same: These el - ders go

ppp

17

Voice

Pno

ten - tion are con - stant - ly how - ling And
- fes - sors are cry - ing "de - lu - sion," And
foun - tains con - tin - ual - ly spring - ing, The
forth and the go - spel are prea - ching, and

What Fair One Is This?

3

21

Voice

Ba - by - lon's bells are con - tin - ual - ly tol - ling. As though all the craft
 high - min - ded hy - po - crits say "'tis con - fu - sion," while grace is poured out in
 hea - ven - ly mu - sic of Zi - on is ring - ing; the saints all their tithes and their
 all that will hear them they free - ly are tea - ching, and thus is the vi - sion of

Pno

L.H. *mp*

24

Voice

of her mer - chants was fai - ling,
 bles - sed ef - fu - sion,
 of - fe - rings are bring - ing;
 Da - niel ful - fil - ling;

Pno

mf dim. *mp dim.*

27

Voice

And Je - sus was co - ming to reign on the earth.
 And saints are re - joi - cing to see priest - craft fall.
 They thus prove the Lord and His bles - sing re - ceive.
 The stone of the moun - tain will soon fill the earth.

Pno

p dim. *pp*

rit.

CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTIAN ASPLUND {christianasplund@gmail.com} is a Canadian-American composer-performer and professor of music at Brigham Young University. His music explores the liminal areas between composition and improvisation, speech and music, content and context, and boundaries and continuities. His writings have appeared in *Perspectives of New Music*, *American Music*, Illinois University Press, and University of Washington Press. His scores are published by Frog Peak Music.

KEVIN L. BARNEY {klbarney@yahoo.com} studied classics at Brigham Young University (BA) and law at the University of Illinois (JD) and DePaul University (LLM in Taxation). He is the managing partner of the Chicago office of Kutak Rock LLP, where he practices tax-exempt finance law. He has published several articles with, and previously served on the board of, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. He and his wife Sandy have two children.

LARA CANDLAND {laracandland@gmail.com} is a prize-winning poet, performer, and librettist. She is the creator of eight operas with composer Christian Asplund, a co-founder of Seattle Experimental Opera, and the author of *Alburnum of the Green and Living Tree* (BlazeVox). She has been published in numerous literary journals and is a member of the duo Lalage with Asplund, a band working with poetry, voice, and live electronic looping and manipulations.

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She has worked as editor for *The Reach of Song*, the anthology for the Georgia Poetry Society, and serves on the Segullah poetry board. Her first chapbook, *Stunt Double*, is now available through Finishing Line Press. She spends most of her time being mommy to two toddlers and keeping up with Walking Dead episodes with her husband in Acworth, Georgia.

JEREMY GRIMSHAW {jeremy.grimshaw@gmail.com} is an associate dean in the College of Fine Arts and Communications at Brigham Young University, where he also teaches courses in contemporary and world musics and directs Gamelan Bintang Wahyu, BYU's Balinese percussion orchestra. He is the author of two books, *The Island of Bali Is Littered with Prayers* (Mormon Artists Group, 2009) and *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of La Monte Young* (Oxford University Press, 2011). He holds a PhD in musicology, along with a Certificate in World Music, from the Eastman School of Music.

MICHAEL HICKS {michael_hicks@byu.edu} is a dilettante masquerading as a polymath. He has authored or co-authored five books for University of Illinois Press, the latest of which is *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography* (2015). Still, his favorite book might be the self-published *Street-Legal Version of Mormon's Book*, which he wrote soon after four years of editing the bigtime musicology journal *American Music*. Unfortunately, he has no degrees that qualify him for this stuff, just a DMA in music composition, which he uses less than the degrees he doesn't have. He is in the front end of his fourth decade as a professor at Brigham Young University. So there's that.

JAKE JOHNSON {jvjohnson@ucla.edu}. Jake Johnson's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Journal of the Society for American Music*, *Tempo*, *Echo: A Music-Centered Journal*, *This Land Press*, *The Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music Studies*, among others. Having previously taught at Oklahoma City University and DePaul University, Jake is now a

PhD student in musicology at UCLA where he is writing a dissertation on Mormonism, voice, and American musical theater. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, two children, and their standard poodle named Alice.

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ELLINOR PETERSEN {ellinorpetersen@gmail.com} graduated from Brigham Young University with a Bachelor of Music Composition and a second major in Theatre Arts Studies in 2007. She subsequently moved back to her home country of Sweden, and completed an MLIS from the University of Borås in 2010. She has composed many works involving trombones and trumpets, some with voice, which was her primary instrument at BYU. Several have been premiered at the University of Maine, including the trombone quartet *I Will Take Care of You* (2011), *Probably Alright Now* for brass ensemble (2012), and *Magnifikat* for trombone choir (2013). She and her family currently reside in Springville, Utah. To hear recordings of some of her compositions, visit www.ellinorpetersen.com.

WILL REGER {wmreger@gmail.com} began writing poetry in 7th gym class and never quite stopped. He is now a poet and a historian and flautist, living with his family in Champaign, Illinois.

EMILY SPENCER {belcantare@yahoo.com} currently serves as Music Director of the Tri-State Choral Society. She received her Master of Arts degree in Choral Conducting and Pedagogy from the University of Iowa and her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from Brigham Young University. She has served as adjunct music faculty at Clarke University, Loras College, and the University of Dubuque. Her writings have been featured at the James F. Jakobsen Graduate Conference, where she was a finalist, and online via blogs such as Rational Faiths and the More Good Foundation. Emily has appeared as a concert soloist with numerous professional and community orchestras, focusing especially on the works of Bach, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart.

Solo concert credits include J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion*, *Magnificat*, and *Jesu, meine Freude*, BWV 227, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* and *Mass in Time of War*, Mozart's *Vesperae solennes de confessore*, and Brahms's *Neue Liebeslieder*. In 2010 she was profiled by The Mormon Women Project. She resides in Dubuque, IA, with her husband and four children.

ALEESA SUTTON {aleesas@sfu.ca} graduated from Brigham Young University with a BA in music. She is also an associate of the Royal Conservatory of Music. She is currently pursuing an MA in counselling psychology at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Her memoir, *Diary of a Single Mormon Female*, was published in 2013.

