

Radio scripts

What is Sacred Harp?

Sacred Harp in Southeast Georgia (a brief history)

Singing Schools

Singing as a way of life: religion, social, community, family

Continuity and Change in Hoboken style

Date: Fri, 15 Sep 2000 12:47:17 -0700  
From: Mauri Small <maurismall@mindspring.com>  
Reply-To: maurismall@mindspring.com  
X-Accept-Language: en  
MIME-Version: 1.0  
To: lsommers@valdosta.edu  
Subject: Pulse of the Planet scripts

Hi Laurie,

Here are the four scripts I've written on Shape-note/Sacred Harp. We may run three programs rather than four, and if so it will be the first three. Please have a look and let me know if there are any inaccuracies. The text that's in quotes is the excerpts of David, while the other copy is the announcer's script.

We've decided that the music you sent gives us plenty to work with, so I won't ask you to send more.

These shows are going into production within the next few days, so please get back to me soon. (In fact today would be great!)

Best wishes,  
Mauri  
(914) 478-4388

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Shape-note Singing: Intro

music Canaan Land

The hymn we're listening to is being sung in a style called "Shape-note" or "Sacred Harp". It's a way of reading music and singing that started in New England, 200 years ago. And today, in southeastern Georgia, they're not only still singing Shape-note, they're living it. I'm Jim Metzner and this is the Pulse of the Planet, presented by DuPont.

"Shape-note singing is a way of life, it's a way of communicating."

David Lee of Hoboken, Georgia, is a fifth-generation Shape-note singer.

"We sing anywhere that we're together, whether it be a funeral, a wedding, a baptism, a group of people around a dining room table, in the kitchen, beside the river, or at formal announced sings, where we either meet at someone's home or we meet at a public place like the schoolhouse."

"Shape-note" is so-named because of the unconventional way the music is written-- for singers who can't read music.

"Each note on the scale is given a different shape so that we can tell the difference in 'em. There's eight notes on the scale, the first one is a triangle called fa, or the key note. And then we also have a round note called sol and a square note called la and a diamond shape called mi. Each of those shapes tells us where we are on the scale, so all we have to do is read the shape to know how to sing together."

And, he says, singing Shape-note together is what it's all about.

"This style of singing requires that you have more and more people, and the more people that you can have there singing together, the better it sounds."

We'll hear more Shape-note singing, in future programs. If you'd like to hear some of your favorite Pulse of the Planet programs again online, please visit [nationalgeographic.com](http://nationalgeographic.com). Pulse of the Planet is presented by DuPont, bringing you the miracles of science, with additional support provided by the National Science Foundation. I'm Jim Metzner.

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## Shape-note Singing: David Lee

music David Lee singing

This hymn is called "Show Pity Lord", and this is the way they sing it in southeastern Georgia. It's a style known as "Shape-note" or "Sacred Harp" singing, and for David Lee, it's been a family tradition for longer than anyone can remember. I'm Jim Metzner and this is the Pulse of the Planet, presented by DuPont.

music "Canaan Land"

"My children are sixth-generation Sacred Harp singers. Great-great grandpa John was singing Sacred Harp, so says Aunt Rachel. That would've taken our family back into the middle 1800's. Everybody in our family sang, everybody."

In Shape-note singing, the written notes have different shapes so they can be sung by people who don't read music. The singers face each other in a circle or square and always sing a cappella. It's a style of hymn-singing that most people have never even heard. But for David Lee's family in Hoboken, Georgia, Shape-note is a way of life.

"Because we're Primitive Baptists, we didn't have any other kind of music. I was raised in a home without radios and without televisions. I remember singing on the front porch, when the men were sitting around before or after supper, and the women would come out on the porch to help 'em. I remember singing by the water's edge by the river during baptism, when I was a boy. I can remember, of course, singing at funerals as a boy, and being affected by it, and then, being in church and singing."

David and his cousin Clark used to sing for their supper after church on Sunday.

"The ladies' that were in there cookin', we were their entertainment. They'd ask for Clark and I to come in there and sing to 'em. The one thing that it guaranteed us was that we were the favorites of the lady,

and so that we got the biggest and the hottest biscuit, and we got the biggest piece of cake or the first piece of cake."

David Lee now leads a monthly singing school to make sure a lot of folks remember how to sing Shape-note.

"It's a way of life to me. And it's the way that our people have always gone."

Pulse of the Planet is presented by DuPont, bringing you the miracles of science, with additional support provided by the National Science Foundation. I'm Jim Metzner.

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Shape-note Singing: Hoboken

music "Canaan Land", Hoboken style

Across the southeastern United States, there are places where people sing hymns in a tradition known as "Shape-note". But in one small town in Georgia, they have a style all their own. I'm Jim Metzner and this is the Pulse of the Planet, presented by DuPont. Shape-note music or Sacred Harp, as it's sometimes called, is an a cappella form of hymn-singing that's been popular in Hoboken, Georgia since the mid-1800's. But the folks there only recently discovered that their style of singing Shape-note is unique.

"The way other groups sing that song is (sings)...and here's the way we sing it (sings) and so forth" :20

David Lee is a fifth-generation Shape-note singer in Hoboken, in southeastern Georgia.

"Hoboken is sung slower, and it allowed for more time to do more things with your voice between the notes."

music David demonstrates Hoboken

David Lee says the folks in Hoboken developed their own style of Shape-note because they never heard other people sing.

music "Canaan Land", Hoboken style

"The closest group of singers we know are a couple a hundred miles away. We had no reason to go there, and we were perfectly content with what we had at home, because the entire community was involved in our singing. And because of that isolation, we developed a completely different way of singing this music. "

Shape-note singing in Hoboken is also unique because of what they call "walking time".

"When we sing together in a formal, organized group, we sit in what we call a hollow square. In the middle is where the leader stands. The leader in our group walks time, meaning that he steps to a particular pace that fits that song, and goes around and around the square as he walks time. Some people think the leader is dancing, but it's not dancing. We are Primitive Baptists, and we don't dance (laughs), but it's a way of establishing the beat of the song."

Pulse of the Planet is presented by DuPont, bringing you the miracles of science, with additional support provided by the National Science Foundation. I'm Jim Metzner.

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Shape-note Singing: Meaning

music "Not Made with Hands"

When people join together and raise their voices in song, something very special can happen. That's why one man is doing everything he can to preserve a centuries-old tradition called "Shape-note." I'm Jim Metzner and this is the Pulse of the Planet, presented by DuPont. "Shapenote" or "Sacred Harp" is an a cappella style of hymn-singing that dates back to colonial New England and is still popular today in the southeastern United States. David Lee is a fifth-generation Shape-note singer in Georgia.

"When we're singing together, we are either standing around the dining room table, facing each other, or we are sitting in a circle, in a family room, facing each other, or we are standing in a semi-circle at

the river's edge, during a baptism, facing each other and the person in the water. Or at a formal sing, we're sitting in a square, facing each other. I think the common theme is that we're facing each other while we're singing. We're always singing to each other and for each other."

"Shape-note singing is a way of communicating. Our people can sing their love for each other, in ways that they can't talk about it. There's another place that we go when we're singing, and I don't know how to get to that place, except to go there by singing, The singing that we do with each other is bigger than we are. This singing is not anything that I could invent, or discover. There's things that takes place at these sings, there's power exhibited that people can't contrive. There is something here that had to come from above. We can't make this up. "

David Lee holds Shape-note singing schools in southern Georgia and across the country. Pulse of the Planet is presented by DuPont, bringing you the miracles of science, with additional support provided by the National Science Foundation. I'm Jim Metzner. music

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filename="maurismall.vcf"

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Bryant Lee: I feel a sense of importance. This is someteing that's been in our family for genrations. I'm a seventh generation Sacred Harp singer and it's just a sense of pride, you know.It's something I tell people about, and I enjoy doing it. TriState, Oct. 2000

Jenny Steuver, It makes me feel really good because singing is one of the things I really love and it makes me feel very good all over."

## sacred harp

The singers still use as their main book *The Sacred Harp*, a tunebook compiled originally in 1844, which contains a mixture of hymns, revival spirituals, fuguing tunes, and anthems, some of which date to the 1700s. African Americans also sing occasionally from *The Colored Sacred Harp* compiled in 1934 by the black composer, Judge M. Jackson, a native of Montgomery County, Alabama. The songs usually are sung first with the syllables ("fa-sol-la-mi") which correspond to the printed shapes IN THE TUNEBOOK. The group then repeats the tune with words. Words are usually religious in nature, but sacred harp singing does not occur within a regular church service but rather at a "sing." S

THE SACRED HARP SINGING STYLE ORIGINATED AS A MEANS TO TEACH CONGREGATIONS TO SING. SINGERS USE 'FOUR-SHAPE' TUNEBOOKS IN WHICH THE TRADITION BEGAN IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND AND EVENTUALLY MOVED SOUTH TO APPALACHIA AND THE DEEP SOUTH.

## SACRED HARP

84 narration

8 intro

34 I don't feel like

33 I WANTED THEM TO HAVE WHAT I HAD

24 Love Divine Chesser

24 Love Divine 1997

59

intro 30.01-30.09 "To me, this sacred harp tradition, this sacred harp is a living tradition. ....going to change and evolve."

DAVID AND CLARKE LEE OF HOBOKEN ARE REVIVING A TRADITION THAT GOES BACK AT LEAST FIVE GENERATIONS IN THEIR FAMILY. THE SACRED HARP OR SHAPE-NOTE TRADITION FEATURES THREE OR FOUR-PART SINGING WITHOUT INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT. THE SONGS ARE SUNG FIRST WITH THE SYLLABLES (FA, SOL LA MI) WHICH CORRESPOND TO THE PRINTED SHAPES IN THE TUNEBOOK.

BROWN OR SHOW PITY LORD syllables and first verse

THE SACRED HARP TRADITION OF THE OKEFENOKEE REGION HAS CERTAIN UNIQUE QUALITIES. SINGERS NOT ONLY BEAT TIME WITH THEIR HANDS--A TECHNIQUE COMMON TO MOST SACRED HARP SINGERS--BUT THEY ALSO WALK TIME WITH THEIR FEET. TEMPOS ARE SLOWER AND MELODIES ARE MORE ORNAMENTED, CHARACTERISTICS WHICH REFLECT A STRONG INFLUENCE FROM PRIMITIVE BAPTIST HYMN SINGING. BUT BY THE 1990S THE TRADITION WAS DYING. THERE WERE FEWER SINGS AND LESS PEOPLE. THAT'S WHEN DAVID AND CLARKE LEE DECIDED TO DO SOMETHING. THE SINGING IS COMING BACK, BUT IT HAS CHANGED. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW STYLE IS MOST AUDIBLE IN TEMPO.

THIS FIRST RECORDING OF "LOVE DIVINE" WAS MADE IN 1944.

31.33-31.51 LOVE DIVINE, CHESSER QUARTET

THIS SECOND RECORDING WAS MADE IN 1997:

32.10-32.35

THE LEES SOMETIMES REGRET THE CHANGES. BUT THEY ARE PRAGMATIC. THEY WOULD RATHER HAVE A DIFFERENT SACRED HARP THAN NONE AT ALL. FOR THEM, SACRED HARP IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT THEY WANT TO PASS ON TO THEIR CHILDREN:

30.58-31.29 "I wanted them to have what I had....my daddy."

I wanted them to have what I had. I wanted them to grow up in a sacred harp singing family, in a house that sang sacred harp, going to these sacred harp sings. You learn more from music than just how to pitch your voice. You learn how to stroke and involve your emotions. There's



sometimes when singing relaxes you, excites you.... then when you add the text, there's a lot of comfort. I believe what's in the words, I live that, that's my faith. Spiritual part is what I'm trying to say. And those are the kind of lessons that I want to pass on to my children. Because those were the ones that were handed to me. Those were the ones that were handed to my daddy. ..

LOVE DIVINE till close

SINGING SCHOOL

68 NARRATION

8 intro

67 singing school

35 My dad....go home

33- He was called

69 Let's sing "Amazing Grace"

Intro: (time?) shape scale going up

DAVID LEE IS THE 5TH GENERATION OF LEES TO TEACH SACRED HARP SINGING SCHOOL IN AND AROUND HOBOKEN, GEORGIA. THE SACRED HARP AS A SINGING STYLE ORIGINATED AS A MEANS TO TEACH CONGREGATIONS TO SING. BY THE MID-1700S, ITINERANT SINGING SCHOOL MASTERS WERE USING RELIGIOUS "FOUR SHAPE" TUNEBOOKS IN WHICH DIFFERENT SHAPED NOTE HEADS WERE ASSIGNED TO THE EUROPEAN MUSICAL SCALE OF FA, SOL, LA, AND MI. SINGERS DO NOT LITERALLY READ MUSIC, BUT RATHER LEARN THE INTERVAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NOTES OF DIFFERENT SHAPES.

43.34-44.43 "Singing school....easier to sing."

THESE DAYS, DAVID LEE HOLDS AN HOUR-LONG SINGING SCHOOL DURING THE MONTHS OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY, AND MARCH. A GENERATION AGO SINGING SCHOOL STARTED AFTER THE CROPS WERE IN AND TOOK PLACE EVERY WEEKEND FOR SIX WEEKS. TOLLIE LEE'S FATHER, SILAS, WAS A POPULAR SINGING SCHOOL TEACHER FOR MANY YEARS:

46.18-46.28 "My dad taught...when I was growing up."

46.31-46.56 "They usually met in the old country schools....go home."

[SINGING SCHOOLS DID MORE THAN TEACH SACRED HARP. THEY WERE AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL OCCASION FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. A POPULAR TEACHER WAS IN HIGH DEMAND.

47.01-47.34 "He was called by the community...People wanted it."]

DAVID LEE WENT TO A SINGING SCHOOL LED BY HIS FATHER, JOHNNIE. AND JOHNNIE LEE LEARNED FROM HIS UNCLE SILAS. THIS NIGHT, AT THE SINGING SCHOOL IN HOBOKEN, DAVID'S CLASS INCLUDES A SIXTH GENERATION OF LEES. HE INTRODUCES THE RUDIMENTS OF SACRED HARP WITH AN OLD FAVORITE HYMN:

45.02-46.11 "Let's sing....Amazing Grace...."

[LATER THAT EVENING, AT THE COMMUNITY SING IN THE HOBOKEN SCHOOL, DAVID LEE'S NEWEST PUPILS JOIN IN THE SINGING OF "AMAZING GRACE."]

(AMAZING GRACE COMPLETE AS NEEDED)mu

Date: Wed, 20 Sep 2000 11:20:49 -0700  
From: Mauri Small <maurismall@mindspring.com>  
Reply-To: maurismall@mindspring.com  
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MIME-Version: 1.0  
To: lsommers <lsommers@valdosta.edu>  
Subject: Re: Pulse of the Planet scripts

Hi Laurie,

Here is what I transcribed. It's not complete, but I hope it's helpful. Where there are ( ) it means there are a few words or sentences that are not transcribed.

By the way, we are going to run all four of the shows I sent you scripts for.

Mauri

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Sacred harp singing

room tone 6:00

David Lee  
Route 1, box 40  
Hoboken, GA 31542

912-458-2493

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8:00 "It's a style of singing that includes as many people as are available to sing, w/o any kind of instruments to accompany the singing, in a style that will allow for any quality of voice. Everybody can participate, and make an unusually rich and strong and beautiful music." :20

Why called shape-note?

8:40

"A couple a hundred years ago, a system was designed to allow people to read music without having to know all those things, and the way they did it was by assigning each note on the scale a particular shape. Then all you have to do is teach people which shape gives which pitch of sound, and all we have to do in order to read the music is read just the shapes themselves, each shape will put us on the right pitch, and the same pitch together, so we're all singing the same note at the same time."

9:36 "Each note on the scale is given a different shape so that we can tell the difference in 'em. There's eight notes on the scale, the first one is a triangle called fa, or the key note. And then we also have a round note called sol and a square note called la and a diamond shape called mi. Each of those shapes tells us where we are on the scale, so all we have to do is read the shape to know how to sing together." :25

10:00

"We sing anywhere that we're together, whether it be a funeral, a wedding, a baptism, a group of people around a dining room table, in the kitchen, beside the river, or at formal announced sings, where we either meet at someone's home or we meet at a public place like the schoolhouse."

They also sing the same hymns in church, the Primitive Baptist Church, out of a word book only -- more slowly and in a more ornamented style than at the sings. The shapenote book, is not the hymnal. The style of singing is a little different, more reverential.

Sacred harp is sung coast to coast but only recently spread beyond S.E. U.S. in last 15 years.

14:29

"In the late 1700's, shape note system started in New England in early 1800's was done in South

They sing out of a shape note book published in the mid-1800's.

17:09 "My children are sixth-generation Sacred Harp singers. Great-great grandpa John was singing Sacred Harp, so says Aunt Rachel, who is his baby daughter. That would've taken our family back into the middle 1800's." :20

17:42 "My earliest memories go back to when I was sittin' in a chair and my feet were stickin' out in front of me. I wasn't big enough for my feet to touch the floor. And holdin' a book in my lap, singing by myself." :15

18:26 "I remember singing on the front porch, when the men were sitting around before or after supper, and the women would come out of the porch to help 'em. I remember singing by the water's edge by the river during baptism, when I was a boy. I can remember, of course, singing at funerals as a boy, and being affected by it, and then, being in church and singing. We were barely old enough to look over the back of the bench to see where the singers were, but they were all around us." :25

19:40 the book is only a starting point, we're singing from the heart

20:47 "Everybody in our family sang, everybody." they learned from their elders and once a year they'd have a singing school at school

SINGING FOR THEIR SUPPER -- he and his cousin Clarke

22:00 "After church on Sunday, we would go by somebody's house in the community, that had been at church that day and they would prepare a big meal and a lot of people would go by and enjoy being together. Clarke and I, as young men, would be called into the kitchen, where the lady of the house was preparing the meal, and since none of us had radios and none of us had televisions, I guess we were her entertainment, or the ladies' that were in there cookin', we were their entertainment. They'd ask for Clarke and I to come in there and sing to 'em. And that was all we needed, was a good excuse to sing, because we loved singin'. And so we would cooked and bustled about the kitchen, Clarke and I sat there and sang from memory, or we'd gather up the books we needed and sing out of the hymn book or sing out of the shape note book. The one thing that it guaranteed us was that we were the favorites of the lady, and so that we got the biggest and the hottest biscuit, and we got the biggest piece of cake or the first piece of cake." 23:06

There are regional differences in this style of singing. But the books are the same.

24:39 "Hoboken-style singing became what it is because we were totally isolated from all the other singers in the country. We never sang with anybody except ourselves. And because of that isolation, we developed a completely different way of singing this music. () We grew off in a different direction because we did not mix with those people. Other singers around the country sang together from time to time and they

visited back and to from time to time, and so they sound more similar."  
25:25

25:46 "Hoboken was isolated from the other singers first by geography, because the closest group of singers we know are a couple a hundred miles away. We had no reason to go there, and we were perfectly content with what we had at home, because the entire community was involved in our singing."

26:52 "Hoboken is sung slower, it's sung lower, we never had alto. () Our treble and tenor are the lead part, and the bass were the only three parts we used in our music. And then because we sang slower, we sang at a more deliberate pace, and it allowed for more time to do more things with your voice between the notes."

the other people sing faster, more accurately, more precisely

27:48 "I know when I'm hearing our people sing and when I hear anybody else sing." tho we've been visiting for a few years now, we're starting to sound more like them in some ways, but still different.

Demonstrates difference -- ornamenting

29:32 "The way other groups sing that song is (sings)...and so forth"  
:20

walking time

30:21 "In Hoboken, when we sing together in a formal, organized group, we sit in four sections, all four sections are facing in, () in what we call a hollow square (). In the middle then, in a square that's about ten by ten or twelve by twelve, is where the leader stands. The leader in our group walks time, meaning that he steps to a particular pace that fits that song, and goes around and around the square as he walks time. () It's just a little practice that we have down here that we don't know of anybody else that does it. () Some people think the leader is dancing, but it's not dancing. We are Primitive Baptists, and we don't dance (laughs), but it's a way of establishing the beat of the song."

it was taught in singing school

there's also marking time by clapping hands, which they also do

34:13 "We didn't have any other kind of music. I was raised in a home without radios and without televisions. () Because we were Primitive Baptists, we did not partake in instruments of any kind.

34:43 "The only style of music that we had anything to do with was our style of singing, our style of Sacred Harp. I never () had anything to do with any other kind of music.

would only happen to hear radio or see tv at a friend's house when visiting

now owns a tv just to watch sacred harp singing videos

39:43 "When we're singing together, we are either standing around the dining room table, facing each other, or we are sitting in a circle, in a family room, facing each other, or we are standing in a semi-circle at the river's edge, during a baptism, facing each other and the person in the water. Or at a formal sing, we're sitting in a square, facing each other. I think the common theme is that we're facing each other while we're singing. We're always singing to each other and for each other." 40:30

placement of the singers helps create the sound

40:50 "Typically the tenor would stand at the head of the dining room table, and at the foot of the dining room table. And then we would put the bass on one side of the table and the treble on the other, so that they're across from each other, so that you can a better blend of the music that way. You can hear the treble section when you want to hear it, and you can hear the bass section when you want to hear it. I think if we scattered the different parts random among all the people, you wouldn't get the same effect." same in a formal sing

the parts:

The tenor is the melody, sung by men, women and children. The treble is sung by men and women, high harmony. Bass the foundation, men only. Recently they've added a fourth part, alto's, women only. They sing another harmony, between bass and treble.

43:20 "Shape-note singing is a way of life. And it's a way of communicating. Our people can sing their love for each other, in ways that they can't talk about it. () This style of singing requires that you have more and more people, and the more people that you can have there singing together, the better it sounds. () When we sing together, it's a language or a way of us describing our love for each other, in a deep and a heart-warming way. It's a way of life to me. And it's the way that our people have always gone."

44:47 "The singing that we do with each other is bigger than we are. We sing to each other out of a profound respect for a supreme being, for our Lord, that controls our people and our way. This singing is a gift, this singing is a spiritual gift, this is not anything that I could invent, or discover, or make up. () There's things that takes place at these sings, there's power exhibited that people can't contrive. It's a gift from above, because I've never seen any other music () that could create this feeling just on a whim, just by themselves. There is something here that had to come from above. We can't make this up. ()

48:13 "There's another place that we go when we're singing, and I don't know how to get to that place, except to go there by singing, that's the only way I have of getting there. And it's an understood there, it's not something that when a child gets a certain age we sit 'em down and say now you're gonna start singing and this is what you're gonna accomplish. "

He wants to re-establish this as a source of pride for the community, he wants to teach the children and teenagers that they have a precious heritage. He's getting it recorded, it's now in the Library of Congress. He leads sings around the area. (other areas of the country too?)

50:57 "We have a distinctive style of singing."

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