

FOREWORD

My initial first-hand exposure to southeast Alabama's African-American Sacred Harp tradition was over 26 years ago, in March of 1977, when I traveled to Ozark, Alabama to attend the Dewey P. Williams 79th Birthday Singing. The church was full, the singing was robust with no fewer than 50 song leaders coming to the center of the hollow square and leading songs. Dewey Williams went on to celebrate 19 more birthdays before his death in 1996.

In 1980, we returned to Ozark with a Nagra reel-to-reel tape recorder on loan from the Library of Congress and recorded over ten hours of singing which resulted in the 1982 LP record *Wiregrass Notes: Black Sacred Harp Singing from Southeast Alabama*.

At the time of that recording, the African-American shape-note singing tradition of southeast Alabama was more than 100 years old. Having reached its zenith in the 1930s, the tradition's future was beginning to be of concern to many of the older singers, though summer singing schools still attracted dozens of youth and the annual singing calendar included some fifteen well-attended singings.

Now there are fewer than five singings a year, attended by a relatively small handful of mostly elderly, often infirm, singers, and the African-American Sacred Harp tradition is a relic of its past. As the number of African-American singers has dwindled, recent years have seen a degree of desegregation of the tradition, with some local whites attending and supporting the few remaining black singings, and a few black singers participating in select singings, specifically the National Sacred Harp Convention and the annual multi-book singings in Montgomery.

This new addition of *Wiregrass Notes* contains all the selections from the original 1982 LP, along with my original introduction and Doris Dyen's original song notes. Steve Grauberger, working with the original 1980 recordings, has added more than a dozen new selections and written song notes for these.

Though it is clear that, as a distinct tradition, African-American Sacred Harp singing will never again enjoy its former vitality, these recordings endure as testimony to community music traditions that continue to enrich the cultural fabric of Alabama.

Henry Willett

Director

Alabama Center for Traditional Culture

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TRADITIONAL MUSICS OF ALABAMA VOLUME 4
WIREGRASS NOTES REVISED



INTRODUCTION [with corrections/ revised from 1982 LP]

WIREFRASS NOTES:

BLACK SACRED HARP SINGING FROM SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

Editor/Folklorist: Henry Willett

Ethnomusicologist: Doris Dyen

Photography: Brenda McCallum

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"Sometimes an old Sacred Harp song will get on your mind in the middle of the night while you're lying in bed, and you'll just have to sing it over and over again in your head before you can go to sleep." To this octogenarian from Ozark, Alabama, Sacred Harp singing is more than a diversion—it is a way of life. On almost every Sunday between March and October, Dewey Williams joins with fellow singers at the County Line Church in Slocomb, or at the Mount Sinai Church in Henry County, or at any one of a dozen or so churches in Southeast Alabama, to form the "square" and sing "fa-sol-la" just as many southeast Alabamians have been doing for more than 100 years.

Mr. Williams' grandparents were slaves from Barbour County, Alabama and he remembers that they, too, sang from the *Sacred Harp*. A singing tradition characteristically associated with white culture in the Deep South, Southeast Alabama has enjoyed a vibrant, if rare, black Sacred Harp tradition for over a century. The black Henry County, Alabama Singing Convention celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary in 1980.



Melissa Springer

Dewey Williams in 1987



During a typical singing, the participants arrange themselves in a square according to voice part, the basses facing the trebles, and the tenors facing the altos. A song leader stands in the middle of the square leading the singers first through the notes to the songs and then through the lyrics, a practice emanating from the traditional singing school classes, where singers are taught to sing the notes and then the words.

The singing style takes its name from the hymnbook *The Sacred Harp*, first published in Philadelphia by B.F. White and E.J. King. The musical

style, however, predates the publication of the book. The itinerant singing-school master was a common phenomenon in colonial New England, and various masters competed in their efforts to devise an instructional system where congregations could be taught to sing "by note." By the mid-eighteenth century, religious songbooks were commonly employing shaped notes to indicate the sounds on the European musical scale of fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la-mi. From the fuguing tunes of William Billings to the popular melodies of Jeremiah Ingalls, religious songs found widespread circulation in hymnbooks such as William Walker's *The Southern Harmony*, which was popular throughout the South in the early nineteenth century.

The important innovation introduced into the singing school tradition in the "Second Great Awakening" years of the early nineteenth century was the idea, first utilized by New Englander William Law, of assigning different shaped note-heads corresponding to the fa, sol, la, and mi syllables. As the singing school tradition declined in New England, the new shape-note songbooks such as *Kentucky Harmony*, *Virginia Harmony*, *Union Harmony*, and *The Southern Harmony* gained widespread popularity in the South. It was in this setting that the *Sacred Harp* made its initial appearance in Georgia in 1844. Despite the rapid decline of four-shape tunebooks in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the *Sacred Harp*, in its various revisions, has maintained a popularity and currency in the South unequalled by any of the other shape-note hymnbooks.

There are three major revisions of the *Sacred Harp* that enjoy current usage. The White

revision, published in 1911 by J.L. White is now used only in a few isolated areas of north Georgia. The most recent revision, the Denson revision, published in 1935, is by far the most widely used of the Sacred Harp revisions. It is found at most Sacred Harp singings throughout Georgia, in North Alabama, and in parts of Mississippi and Tennessee.

It is the Cooper revision of the Sacred Harp, first published in 1902, that is used by both white and black singers in South Alabama. W.M. Cooper, from Dothan, Alabama, prefaced his edition with the statement "the selections are from the old Sacred Harp, remodeled and revised, together with additions from the most eminent authors, including new music."

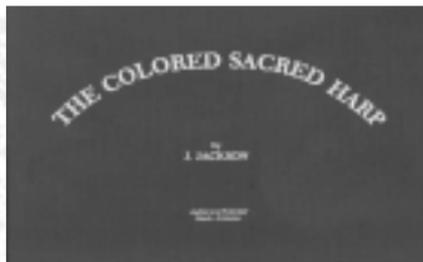
The "remodeling" he referred to was the transposing of a number of songs into a lower, more easily sung, key. The "revising" was the standardization of the alto part in all selections, a practice followed by the later revisers. Many of the melodies are adopted from traditional tunes including Celtic



jigs and dance tunes. Typical of folk tunes, they are often in the Ionian and Aeolian modes, and occasionally the Mixolydian and Dorian. The song texts are taken mostly from the verses of the popular eighteenth-century hymnists, most notably Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. The "additions" were a number of gospel songs and camp-meeting selections. The Cooper revision was again copyrighted in 1907, 1909, 1927, 1949 and 1960, and is currently published by the Sacred Harp Book Co., Inc., of Samson, Alabama.



In 1934 a most interesting Sacred Harp variant was published in Ozark, Alabama. *The Colored Sacred Harp* contains seventy-seven songs, all but one composed by black singers from southeast Alabama and northwestern Florida. Judge Jackson (1883-1958) is listed as the book's author and publisher. Jackson had first heard shape-note singing while a teenager in Montgomery County, Alabama and was



composing tunes of his own by his twenty-first birthday. In the 1920s Jackson had several of his compositions printed on broadsheets that he gave and sold to friends and acquaintances in Ozark and Dale County. In the 1930s a committee of the Dale County Colored Musical Institute and the Alabama and Florida Union State Convention offered the following recommendations:

First: That we will have a musical book.

Second: That the name of the book will be *The Colored Sacred Harp*.

Third: That four shaped notes will be used.

Fourth: That Bro. J. Jackson be author of the book.

We hope this little book may prove a great blessing and be the means of saving souls.

The committee report was signed by fifteen members, many representing families still prominent in the black Sacred Harp tradition.

In the Depression year of 1934, Jackson himself was forced to subsidize the publication in collaboration with Bishop J.B. Walker. Jackson's son Japheth (currently president of the Alabama-Florida Union State Convention) remembers accompanying his father in a mule-drawn wagon to pick up the one thousand paperback songbooks at the Ozark train station.

The original edition contained, in addition to its seventy-seven songs, the Committee Report, pictures of Jackson and Walker, and a request:

We ask your cooperation, both White and Colored, to help us place this book in every home. That we may learn thousands of people, especially the youth, how to praise God in singing.

The book, much to the frustration of Jackson, was not quickly adopted by the black shape-note singing community of southeast Alabama. It is not entirely clear why the book was not accepted, although the cause lies partly in the other county conventions' jealousy of the Dale County Convention, partly in Depression economics, and probably largely in the fact that the Sacred Harp tradition is conservative and only slowly adopts any innovations or new material.

Several songs, however, did catch the fancy of the singers. Among them are "Florida Storm," "My Mother's Gone," "Prosperity," and "The Signs of the Judgement," which are all sung with regularity at black Sacred Harp singings. As might be expected, more songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp* are sung at the Jackson Memorial Singing, which occurs annually on the third Sunday in April.

By 1970, most singers were singing selections from *The Colored Sacred Harp* by memory as many of the original paperback copies had not withstood the more than thirty-five years of use. In 1973, *The Colored Sacred Harp* was reprinted in a hardcover edition with assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama State Council on the Arts and Humanities.

On the day of a typical black Sacred Harp singing, the singers casually arrive in the late morning, seat themselves in the square according to voice part, and begin to sing and socialize. The dinner break occurs in the early afternoon, and the singers enjoy a covered dish "dinner-on-the-grounds" (or in the church basement) prepared by the women singers. The most intense and emotional singing usually occurs after the dinner break. Each singer takes a turn leading a song of his choice. He comes to the middle of the square, calls out his page number, and waits for the tuner to key the song. Singers are discouraged by the other singers from repeating a song that has already been sung or "used." This proscription is often dispensed with, however, if the singer is particularly young, particularly old, or if the song has special significance to the individual song



leader (perhaps the favorite song of a recently deceased relative).

Every singer is given an opportunity to lead a song if he chooses to do so. Often, older or infirm singers will request a younger singer to lead their song. The motions of the song leader are highly stylistic, and are generally more emotional and pronounced than the motions of white Sacred Harp song leaders. Young children are taught in singing school to mark time with their right arm while holding the book in their left.



Typically, a young singer will stand in place at the center of the square while leading the note singing. When he begins to lead the lyrics portion of the song he will often begin to “walk time,” rhythmically pacing from one side of the square to the other, being careful never to turn his back to the tenor section. As the singer grows older and more confident he develops his own distinctive leading style. During fuguing songs, in particular, he may gesture to each section of the square as its part joins in. Skilled song leaders often elicit applause or other emotional responses from the group. Occasionally, a singer might reach an emotional pitch to the point of “getting happy.” These episodes might include a personal testimony from the “happy” person followed by a repeat of the last verse or refrain from the previous song. The singers usually break up at around 5:00 P.M.. in time to go home and prepare supper.

With the exception of the annual state convention, which includes reading of minutes and committee reports, most singings are interrupted only by an opening prayer, dinner, and a closing prayer, and perhaps a special tribute speech if it is a singing in someone’s honor. Most singings are of one day’s duration (almost always a Sunday), except in the cases of the state convention and larger county conventions that cover an entire weekend. Most singings occur between the months of March and October—months which are more conducive to travel and outdoor “dinner-on-the-grounds.”

HENRY WILLETT

1982

SONG NOTES

ORIGINAL NOTES FOR TRACKS 1-12 AND 26 BY DORIS J. DYEN
NEW SONG NOTES TRACKS 13-25 BY STEVE GRAUBERGER

Track 1. AMAZING GRACE (Cooper, p. 45)

This late eighteenth-century hymn is, by any measure, the most popular song among black Sacred Harpers in southeast Alabama. The tune is used, in variant form, for several other songs in the *Sacred Harp*, and the black singers have these in their repertory also. In addition, most of the black singers know the song as a lined hymn from their church services. In the black Sacred Harp tradition, "Amazing Grace" may be sung at several emotionally important points in a singing: it is often either the first or the last song of the singing (the "opening song" or the "closing song"); if a song causes some of the singers or listeners to "get happy" (go into a trance state), "Amazing Grace" is sometimes sung, out of turn, as the next song while the affected person is recovering; it is also frequently sung, without the book, to accompany the taking of a collection during a singing.

As in the performance heard here, "Amazing Grace," even in its version as a Sacred Harp song, is usually sung with some rhythmic and melodic ornamentation and with prayer-style interjections, such as "Amen," or "Yes, Lord." The song also sometimes has, as in this case, an extra repeat of the last verse spontaneously added, chorus-like, to prolong the feeling generated by it.

Track 2. SHADES OF NIGHT (Cooper, p. 522)

This fuguing tune's words and music were written in the twentieth century, but its style is characteristic of many nineteenth century Sacred Harp songs. It is harmonically static with no modulation or tonal chord change. It is built over an A-major drone, with alternation between the major tonic triad and its relative minor (F sharp minor) a third lower. This type of harmonic structure seems to be a favorite one for black Sacred Harp singers, not only in terms of the songs they choose from the Cooper book, but also from its frequent use in songs in *The Colored Sacred Harp*. This performance shows some typical features of black singers' style in fuguing tunes as well: a slightly faster tempo than is normally used for homophonic spirituals or hymns, and heavy accents at the start of each measure.

Track 3. PROSPERITY (*The Colored Sacred Harp*, p. 4)

The text for this song from *The Colored Sacred Harp* is a fairly old one in the shape-note tradition, and probably dates from the late eighteenth century. In the *Sacred Harp* book, it appears as

the text for the tune “Whitestown,” attributed in the Denson revision to Thomas Howell, 1808, and in the Cooper revision to Ward, n.d.

The tune was composed by two members of the Alabama black Sacred Harp community, Rev. Haley Webster Wood, and Judge Jackson, the compiler of *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Collaborative composition seems to have been an important element in black shape-note singing, perhaps from the beginning of black involvement with the tradition: often in *The Colored Sacred Harp* there are songs in which one or more parts were written by someone other than the main composer and receive separate attributions. In this case, Wood wrote the lead or tenor melody, and Jackson, who was Wood’s singing-school teacher, wrote the harmony parts. Wood was active in shape-note singing, both four-shape and seven-shape, through most of his life. For many years, he was an important member of the Southeast Alabama and Florida Union Sacred Harp Convention, a county-level organization centered in Dothan, Houston County. He wrote a history of it in 1958. In *The Colored Sacred Harp* he is credited with having written two complete tunes, and he collaborated with Judge Jackson on twelve others.

The preexisting text of “Prosperity” is set in a partial fuguing tune format, with a four-voiced choral beginning, a reduction to two voices at the start of the second section, followed by a return to the full four voice-parts to end the song. The harmonic structure is similar to that of “Shades of Night” (Track 2) in having no tonal chord pattern, being built rather on a major-triad drone. As in the song “Florida Storm” (Track 26) there are peculiarities in the rhythm as written (for example, in the first few measures, the notes assigned to the text suggest a different barring). But, as happens with “Florida Storm,” these anomalies are ironed out in performance, as the singers change the accent emphasis to get across the meaning of the words.

Track 4. LIFE IS THE TIME TO SERVE THE LORD (Cooper, p. 28)

The sentiments of this piece are quite important to black religious belief in southeast Alabama, and there are several songs in black church practice and other repertoires that teach them. As in this performance, the song is traditionally sung very slowly, with a great deal of melodic embellishment, especially by the upper two voice parts and by the song leader. Both the tune (Wells), by Israel Holdroyd, and the text, by Isaac Watts, date from the early eighteenth century.

Although this song does not always produce strong religious feeling among black Sacred Harpers, it was sung at a point in the State Convention Singing when emotion was already running high. Because of this, the singers prolonged the song by repeating the tune a number of times and interjected many elements associated with “getting happy”: a-rhythmic, “falling out” clapping; shouts

of "Oh, Jesus;" and two short spontaneous sermonettes or testimonies followed by applause. This kind of reaction to a song is a common occurrence in a black Sacred Harp singing. Blacks allow and encourage more outward evidencing of religious fervor during a singing than do white counterparts, even though blacks and whites both see Sacred Harp singings as partly religious, partly social occasions. The second testimony, especially, interprets the text of the song: "If you ain't got your insurance paid in full (i.e., if you are not living in such a way as to assure you a place in Heaven), pay it today!"

Track 5. DESIRE FOR PIETY (Cooper, p. 76)

Another favorite song among black Sacred Harpers, and one which is often selected several times during a singing, "Desire for Piety" is looked on as a good "shouting song," with the words "Hallelujah" and "Cry, Amen" built into the written text. Although the song is attributed to B.F. White, the original compiler of the *Sacred Harp* in 1844, it shares many elements (both text and tune) with other black and white spirituals of the early and mid-nineteenth century revivals. Whether or not the present popularity of this song among black singers is directly connected to the nineteenth century black spiritual tradition, black Sacred Harp singers usually perform it with melodic and rhythmic ornamentation, and with handclapping. The syncopated anticipation of downbeats by the leader, for example, emphasizes the on-beat beginning by the other singers of important measures or phrases, a type of call-and-response. As in other black Sacred Harp renditions, the two upper voice sections (alto and treble) tend to improvise; in this case alternating on the 3rd and 5th of the tonic chord, rather than sing the written parts.

Since the song is relatively short and is homophonic, it is considered easy to lead, and is often performed in conventions where there are a lot of leaders to "be sung." Like the song "Life Is the Time to Serve the Lord," it does not necessarily produce strong emotional reactions, but did in this performance because of the point at which it occurred in the singing. The singers were additionally excited by the dynamic song-leading of a pre-teen boy. They insisted on an extra repeat of the chorus, and they and the onlookers applauded the song when it was over.

Track 6. THE SIGNS OF THE JUDGEMENT (*The Colored Sacred Harp*, p. 24)

A fuguing tune in the nineteenth-century style, this composition from *The Colored Sacred Harp* is attributed to J.E. Pettie, 1931. Pettie was an active singer in the Dale County Convention (to which his son, Y.Z. Pettie, still belongs). In addition to "The Signs of the Judgement," Pettie wrote most of the song "Home on High," a collaborative effort with Judge Jackson's daughter Dovie, who

contributed the alto line. Like most songs in *The Colored Sacred Harp*, this tune is in major mode, with rudimentary tonal harmony at the cadences, but with the drone-chord harmonic style through most of the piece. The text, also by the composer, is unrhymed, a kind of sermonette, which is typical of many songs in the book. The performance is fairly straightforward. Few of the songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp* usually elicit the intense emotion from black singers that songs from the Sacred Harp do. A small amount of rhythmic ornamentation (here, beat anticipation) occurs in the second section on the word “place,” to emphasize the downbeat of the measure.

Track 7. MURILLO'S LESSON (Cooper, p. 358)

Among both black and white singers in southern Alabama, this song is often spoken of as a “good singing-school song,” but one with “not much music in it.” What they mean is that the song is fun to sing, but, particularly in terms of the semi-religious nature of most Sacred Harp singing, the text is too secular in content. The song’s many rolling triadic major chords and scales give people a chance to practice their fasola patterns. The harmonic and melodic style of the piece is characteristic of late eighteenth-century American band music. The poetry derives from the years just after the Revolutionary War when euphoria over America’s recent emergence into nationhood was at its height. The sentiments are unabashedly chauvinistic, speaking of America (“Columbia”) as “the Queen of the World and the Child of the Skies.” Indeed, the entire piece reflects an earlier era in the singing-school tradition’s history—that of late eighteenth century New England. Before the swing back to more sober, religious-oriented music, when shape-note singing moved to the southern frontier, schools were often held in taverns or other non-sacred settings. A song such as “Murillo’s Lesson” would have been only one of many secular songs learned and performed in New England singing schools, along with the religious hymns, anthems, and sacred-text, fuguig tunes.

As happens frequently in black shape-note singing, the bass and tenor sections in this performance sing their parts just about as written, while the alto and treble are freer with theirs, borrowing from each other’s lines, improvising on the running eighth-note passages, and adding ornamental notes at cadences.

Track 8. I'M WANDERING TO AND FRO (Cooper, p. 393)

This nineteenth-century, camp-meeting song is a favorite of Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers’ leader, Dewey Williams. In black singing schools, especially those taught by Williams, the song is often given to children as their first song to learn. The words of the soprano-alto “duet”

describe the desolate wandering of the sinner (in camp-meeting terminology, the sinner is often pictured as a “mourner” or “wanderer”).

This section is answered by the full chorus which states reassuringly that this lonely condition endures only for a while, “and then we’re going home.” The camp meeting lasts for a brief time, after which participants go home to their daily lives; similarly, the sojourn in life itself (the “wilderness”) according to the song, is brief, after which believers “go home” to God. The theme implied in this metaphor is an important one to black religious thought.

In the typical black performance of this song, the duet is not sung by two women soloists, rather the soprano is sung by all the men, and the alto by all the women. This arrangement has the effect of altering the perceived harmonic structure by inverting chords. In the second section, the treble line merges with the alto, reducing the harmony to a three-voiced texture. As happens in this rendition, black singers usually sing this piece with strongly accented downbeats, but with little melodic or rhythmic ornamentation.

Track 9. MY MOTHER’S GONE (*The Colored Sacred Harp*, p. 19)

Both the text and the tune of this song are by Judge Jackson, compiler of *The Colored Sacred Harp*, but were written at different times in his life. The text was written in 1904, possibly shortly after the death of Jackson’s mother, Silvy Jackson, and thus the piece is described by him as the first song he ever wrote. He set the words to music in 1927, probably before the idea for putting songs into book collection had materialized.

This song is of the spiritual type, the words showing incremental repetition, with the first verse’s opening phrase being followed by a tag line, the chorus being composed of a different phrase plus the same tag line, and the first phrase of succeeding verses containing slight variants on that of the first verse. In the pattern of many spirituals (“Wayfaring Stranger,” “Trial and Judgment”) each verse mentions a different family member. The last person named here is Christ, who is seen, interestingly, as a brother, not a father.

As in some of the other songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp* (“The Signs of the Judgement”), this song has rudimentary tonal harmony in the V-I chord structure at the cadences, but, otherwise is built on an F-major drone chord. The style of performance is slow and deliberate, in a moderate tempo. The song is one of two, which appeared on a 78-rpm record made privately by Judge Jackson and several black singers about 1950. The existence of this recording, together with what the recording shows of the performing style wanted by the song’s composer, and the familiar spiritual format, have helped keep the song popular among black singers.



Judge Jackson author of *The Colored Sacred Harp*

Track 10. PISGAH (Cooper, p. 58)

This early nineteenth-century revival tune is in a homophonic hymn style, but has built-in grace notes and other melodic ornamentation in all parts. Black singers usually perform this song in a slow, very steady manner. It is a song that often produces “falling out” or “getting happy” at black singings. As happened in the convention singing with the song “Life Is the Time,” this highly emotional occurrence prompted several prayer-type interjections, as well as two spontaneous extra repeats of the chorus, to prolong the effect of the song. And, as happened in the other song, one singer here was moved to stand up and give an impromptu testimony, while the song leader remained standing.

Track 11. THE ROAD TO LIFE AND DEATH (Cooper, p. 38)

Known in other tunebooks as “Windham,” this tune and its text, by Connecticut composer Daniel Read, date from the late eighteenth century. The setting is in minor mode, in a powerful but simple hymn style. The song is, in fact, one of the few pieces in minor that black Sacred Harpers sing: most of the singers consider minor mode to be far harder to perform than major, and will not “page” a song in that mode during a regular singing unless they are sure that there are enough other experienced singers present to “carry” it. In this performance one can hear that the bass and tenor parts were strong, but there was little alto and no treble. For most black four-shape singers, the minor scale is conceived of quite differently from the major. The notes that make up the basic harmonies at the fourth and fifth (in minor, the “la’s”) are stable, but notes in between are flexible, subject to flattening or sharpening. One can hear an example of

this flexibility at the cadence in this piece when the leader, Dewey Williams, goes up a 3rd instead of the written half-step before descending to the tonic note.

Track 12. NEW JERUSALEM (Cooper, p. 299)

This early nineteenth-century fuguing tune by Jeremiah Ingalls is a favorite convention song among black Sacred Harp singers. It offers each voice part a chance to “sound,” and its words are easy to remember, with strong, visionary imagery. The song is considered a good one for “walking time,” a leading style emphasized by black singers, in which the leader of the song walks back and forth across the hollow square among the singers, cueing the parts in a dance-like fashion. As in many other black performances of four-shape songs in which the treble part is sung down an octave, the bass, tenor, and alto sound out most strongly, except in those places where the treble differs significantly from the others; for example, at the cadence, where the treble must fill in the 3rd of the chord.



Track 13. WE WILL SING WITH THE ANGELS THERE (Cooper, p. 572)

This song is often requested and has a similar makeup to others, described previously by Dyen (see Track 2, “Shades of Night”) favored by the Wiregrass singers. It has the drone-chord harmonic style and is set here over a G major drone with a time signature of 4/4. The actual pitch of the singing is closer to G sharp major. There is added interest of a relative minor chord (E minor) vocally sustained by the singers at the *sostenuto* (bird’s eye) near the end of each line. The recording exhibits a strong duet enjoyed by the bass and alto parts at the beginning of the chorus. Written by D.J. Givens in 1926, “We Will Sing With The Angels There” appeared for the first time in the 1927 Cooper edition.

Dyen’s remarks, taken from her 1977 dissertation, *The Role of Shape-Note Singing in the Musical Culture of Black Communities in Southeast Alabama*, stress that this song is sung by old people; it is often dedicated to the ill, old, or deceased, is used during the memorial period of a convention, and is also used as a closing song.

Track 14. TRUSTING JESUS (Cooper, p. 573)

Set in the key C major, "Trusting Jesus" has a verse/chorus lyric structure in common 4/4 time. In this recording, the song is pitched nearer to the key of B major. The song is sung freely in a straightforward manner without much emotion, thus, with few interjections, and at a moderately slow tempo. "Trusting Jesus" was heard at many singings this writer attended. Found on the page following "We Will Sing With Angels There," this example has a more modern harmonic treatment and is a good representation of the difference between the older repertory and modern additions (post 1900s) found in the Cooper Edition. The song is simple in its harmonic structure, but has an interesting addition of a D minor chord in the beginning of measure seven of each stanza. W.C. Givens wrote the song.

Track 15. COLUMBUS (Cooper, p. 67)

Set in F sharp minor, "Columbus" is pitched in F sharp minor as well. Due to the 6/4 time signature, a compound triple meter, one perceives a lilting rhythmic quality with the slow, two-beat, accented pattern of triplets. Few song leaders paged minor key songs (see Dyen's notes for Track 11, "The Road to Life and Death"); however, Barney Roberson (pictured) who often paged minor key songs, leads "Columbus" here. On other occasions, he would lead minor key songs, such as "Antioch" and "Exhortation." Mentioned before, Dyen's notes for Track 11 suggest that the "la's" (1 and 5 of the minor scale) are vocally stable while the "fa's," "sol's" and "mi's" tend to slide between



the intervals. George Pullen Jackson views "Columbus" as a variant to "Antioch." G.P. Jackson also notes that "Columbus" was one of the 80 most popular tunes he collected in the Southern four-shape tunebooks. The 1991 *Sacred Harp* (Denson ed.) attributes "Columbus" to the 1829 *Columbian Harmony*. "Columbus" was originally in *The Southern Harmony*. It was taken into the first *Sacred Harp* of 1844 and has been retained in all versions of the *Sacred Harp* since, including the 1902 Cooper book. The lyrics are attributed to Mercer's *Cluster of Spiritual Songs* (1823).

Track 16. PRAISE THE LORD (Cooper, p. 537)

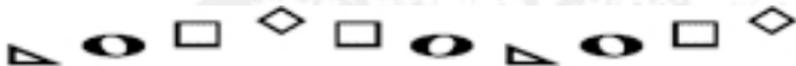
This song in 4/4 time is set to the key of F major and is actually pitched about a half step below in E major. It has a tempo similar to that of a march making it good for "walking time." The pulsing vocal rhythm suggests an echoing pattern that gives equal emphasis to each beat of the measure, thus keeping a steady driving beat similar to "Trusting Jesus." This song was written by Bascom Franklin Faust (1874-1946) who lived in Dale County, Alabama. Faust served as the Mayor of Ozark, Alabama from 1937 to 1940. Faust also wrote "God's Unchanging Hand" (p. 530, 1927), "Praise the Lord" (p. 537), "A Prayerful Heart" (p. 556), and "Child of Thine" (p. 567). Faust was the only white songwriter who had a song published in *The Colored Sacred Harp*. He contributed a minor key song called "Eternal Truth Thy Word" (p. 92, July 10, 1933). "Praise the Lord" is found only in the Cooper edition. In her doctoral dissertation, Doris Dyen mentioned that this song was one that was "chosen often by the same person or that person's relatives."

Track 17. HINDER ME NOT (Cooper, p. 355)

Found only in the Cooper Edition, this song is in the key of F major, with a 6/8 time signature. The actual pitch sung by the group is nearer to the key of D major. "Hinder Me Not" is a song which Dyen described in her dissertation as "of the core repertory black Sacred Harpers." She also remarked that this song is chosen mostly by old people, used as an opening song, and often elicited an ecstatic trance. (Dyen p. 208)

In this example, the singers do not sing the notes before singing the words. While this is ordinarily not the rule, reasons for singing without solmization vary. Possibilities might include a lack of time or that the leader may not be comfortable singing the notes. It is up to the song leader to ultimately decide whether notes will be sung or not. Since it is set in a 6/8 time signature, one again hears a lilting rhythmic quality in the music.

The composer Thomas Jefferson Allen was a musician and teacher, conducting singing schools in south Alabama. He wrote and composed hymns for Sacred Harp singers and published in *The B.F. White Sacred Harp* (Cooper Edition.) While this song is a more modern composition, it has the feel of an older Sacred Harp tune. Lyrics are taken from older hymnbooks. For instance, the lyrics can also be found in Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns* #188 where it is placed in the section called "Church Meetings."



Track 18. CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY KING (Cooper, p. 405)

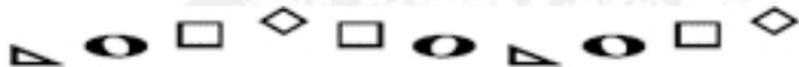
From the older Sacred Harp repertory, this song in 2/4 is set in the key of F flat major, but is sung nearer the key of E major. The singers' voices can be heard emphasizing the off beats, or every second beat of each measure, something more akin to song treatment in traditional black gospel singing. The harmonies are simple and there is, again, the harmonic alternation between tonic and relative minor chords (E flat—C minor) in the chorus, similar to many of the favored songs described previously by Dyen (see Track 2, "Shades of Night"). The verse consists of a single-chord drone with dominant chords just before the cadence. The chorus is similar to "We Will Sing With the Angels There" with the bass-alto harmonization blending in a partial-fuguing fashion. The song title is "Children of the Heavenly King," in all the Cooper books where it appeared in 1902, and in subsequent editions.

It is called "The Marcellas" in the 1860 *Sacred Harp* (its first *Sacred Harp* appearance) and the subsequent James, White, and Denson editions. The words are attributed to John Cennick (1718-1755) in 1742. Duman supplied the original three-part song; B.P. Poyner wrote the alto for the 1902 Cooper Edition.

Track 19. WINNING SOULS (Cooper, p. 469)

Set in the key of B flat major and in common 4/4 time, "Winning Souls" is pitched here nearer to the key of B major. The song is well received by the group and is sung with enthusiasm in a straightforward delivery at a moderate tempo. The dotted rhythms at the cadences allow the singers to add vocal emphasis at these points. Harmonically, it is another drone-chord example with a few relative minor chords thrown in the mix. Melodic embellishments are heard primarily in the higher vocal parts. (Refer to notes on Track 5, "Desire for Piety," Cooper, p. 76).

This song appeared in the 1907 edition and probably also in the first Cooper book of 1902. It is not found in the Denson Edition, but the lyrics are the same as those found in *The Southern Harmony* #131, "The Christian's Conflicts," having a different but similar melody. The author, D.F. Stevens, served on the Revision Committee for the 1907 Cooper book. Dyen remarked in her dissertation that old people often chose it or that a deceased singer's relation would choose it as a memorial. Ending exclamatory remarks by the group proves the example's popularity.



Track 20. THE DYING BOY (Cooper, p. 399)

Favored by alto Leola Whitehurst, this song is sung at an unusually rapid pace, exhibiting a bright and forceful delivery. The song, set in F major, is pitched about a half step above. As the song progresses one hears added melodic embellishments in the alto and treble voices similar to that noted by Dyen on Track 5, "Desire for Piety" (Cooper, p. 76). This song has a beautiful melody shown here in the vibrancy of the singing. Composer Henry Smith Rees(e) wrote a number of songs favored by the black Sacred Harpers, such as "Weeping Sinners," "The Golden Harp," "Jesus Is My Friend," "Fight On," "Cuba," and "Weeping Pilgrim."

George Pullen Jackson in *Spiritual Folksongs of America* speculated that the lyrics of "The Dying Boy" are a parody of William Haines Lytle's "I'm Dying, Egypt, Dying." Dyen remarked in her dissertation that "The Dying Boy" is a popular song chosen often by children to lead, used as a singing-school teaching song, and is often used as a dedication to a deceased person or during a memorial period in a convention.

Track 21. CUBA (Cooper ed., p. 401)

Set in G major, this song is sung here nearer to the key of G sharp. Musical attributes show some vocal embellishments of the written notes, a fairly fast delivery, and handclaps punctuating portions of the song. The lyric structure is very similar to many black spirituals; a single line repeated three times with the fourth lyric line the same in both the verse and the chorus. The music is the same for each stanza. "Cuba" is almost entirely hexatonic (6 tones g-a-b-d-e-f sharp) melodically, save a passing C major chord in the fourteenth measure of each stanza. Again, one finds the familiar pattern of alteration between the tonic to relative minor harmonies. Because of this, even though it is in a major key, the melody has a very minor melodic feel. "Cuba" is a song sung frequently at both black and white conventions.

The Rev. Henry S. Rees(e) co-composed the song originally in 3-parts with J.H. Bolen for the 1860 *Sacred Harp*. It thus was taken into both the Denson descendants and the Cooper books. There's a Denson alto and a different alto in the Cooper book written by Wilson Marion Cooper's daughter, Anna L. Cooper (Mrs. R.D. Blackshear). In Dyen's dissertation, she mentioned that this song was chosen often by teenagers, by old people, and was used as a request song.

Track 22. WE'LL MEET OVER THERE (Cooper, p. 345)

Set in the key of A major in 4/4 time, it is also pitched in A. J.L. Picard wrote the song with the alto by Cooper's daughter, Mrs. R.D. Blackshear. "We'll Meet Over There" is more harmonically diverse, using a wider variety of chords in the song structure. The music is a single

line repeated. While only one lyric verse is sung in this short example, the configuration of the lyrics in each stanza is repetitive and could be compared to a common, black spiritual, lyric formula that adds different family members in each different verse. In the first verse we meet our fathers. In the two successive verses we meet our mothers and then our brothers. In Dyen's dissertation she described this song as being commonly requested and used as an event closing song.

Track 23. THAT SWEET HOME (Cooper, p. 549)

Set in A major, this song is interesting because it is one of the songs in the Sacred Harp repertory, like "Shades of Night" (Track 2), "David's Lamentation" (p. 239), "My Home Above" (p. 524), "A Golden Crown to Wear" (p. 521), "God's Wondrous Love" (p. 504), "Gospel" (p. 174), "The Christian's Song" (p. 240) and "Consecration" (p. 543) where the time signature changes within the song's progression. The verse is in 3/4 and the chorus in 4/4 time. The actual pitch is sung closer to the key of B flat. In the 3/4 section the beats are accented on 1 and 3. In the 4/4 section the rhythm is quickened comparing the time length of each quarter note.

This song was written by Robert (Bob) Wilson and his daughter Vera Wilson Weeks. She also wrote the song "Wilson" (p. 502). Her sister, Leila Wilson Wilkinson, also co-wrote a song with their father, "Peaceful Shore" (p. 528). "That Sweet Home" came first to the Cooper tunebook in the 1927 edition.

Track 24. FOREVER BLEST (Cooper, p. 577)

This last song in the Cooper book is set in C major, but pitched in this recording nearer B flat major. While it is in 4/4 time, it is sung quickly with accents on beats 1 and 3, or sung more like a song 2/4. This vibrant rendition of the well-loved song exhibits attributes of melodic ornamentation, hand clapping, interjections of praise, and spontaneous repetitions of the chorus. One may refer to Dyen's notes on Track 5, "Desire for Piety," for similarities. Lyrics of verses one through three are also found in the Cooper edition of p. 285b, "Land of Rest." The fourth verse is John Newton's, commonly found in the song "Amazing Grace" ("New Britain" in the Denson Edition). In her dissertation, Dyen remarked that this song was chosen by old people, chosen by the same person or that person's relatives, used as a closing song, commonly requested, and called "too hard for children."

"Forever Blest" first appeared in the 1927 edition with a footnote referencing that it was composed at Shawnee, Oklahoma in 1912. Arnold J. Galloway, the author, was a friend of W.M. Cooper. Both were insurance agents. Galloway wrote for a newspaper in Dothan called the *Wiregrass Siftings* using the pen name of "Old Blue."

Track 25. AM I A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS (*The Colored Sacred Harp*, p. 3)

A favorite song from *The Colored Sacred Harp*, "Am I A Soldier of the Cross," is sung at virtually every singing class or convention where *The Colored Sacred Harp* is used. It is the first song in the book and was written by Judge Jackson on December 20, 1933. The song is set in 4/4 time in the key of F major. Japheth Jackson said his father thought it was fitting for the first song of the book. It was commonly used as the opening song by Judge Jackson during times allotted to sing from *The Colored Sacred Harp*. The lyrics are attributed to Isaac Watts and can also be found in the Cooper Edition, p. 283, "Christian Soldier" and (among other places) in Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns*, p. 310, #396.

Written in the key of F major, the song is sung nearer to the key of A flat. The rhythm as sung appears to be somewhat inconsistent when comparing it to the written notation. Composed in 4/4 time, the song heard is sung with two accented beats per measure and with a feeling of triplets

between each accented beat. It is sung more like a song written in a 6/8 time signature. Harmonically it is written in the same vein as other favorites mentioned previously, with the use of a tonic drone-based, intervallic progression throughout and the sparse use of relative minor and dominant chord references interspersed. The well-loved song is sung with feeling and fervor by the songsters showing a reverence for the lyrics.



Track 26a. FLORIDA STORM (*The Colored Sacred Harp*, p. 87)

This song is probably the most popular piece from *The Colored Sacred Harp* among black singers. It is one of the two songs preserved on the privately pressed 78-rpm record from about 1950, with the composer, Judge Jackson, leading. Jackson wrote the tune in 1928 using a preexisting broadside text by Frank Spencer commemorating the 1926 hurricane that scourged much of southern Florida. The music,

with its lively dotted rhythms and triadic harmonic structure is more representative of seven-shape gospel composition than four-shape style. As written, it presents some difficulties in sight-reading because it is barred so that the downbeats of the measures do not fall in places logical to the text. But, performance practice passed through oral tradition and corroborated by Judge Jackson's own leading of the song on his record, corrects for this problem. The song is performed in a staccato style with clear articulation of the rhythm. Dewey Williams can be heard anticipating beats to emphasize important points in the song, and adds melodic ornamentation. Black singers look on this song as a cautionary tale, and, as occurs here, often interject brief sermonettes between verses of it.

Track 26b. GIVE ME JUST A LITTLE MORE TIME (*Silver Gleams*, p. 115; *Stamps-Baxter*, 1958)

Composed by white gospel songwriter Albert Brumley, this seven-shape piece has long been popular with black shape-note singers in much of the Deep South. It appears regularly at seven-shape singings in Georgia and Florida, as well as in Alabama. Because the book in which it was published is old by seven-shape standards (most seven-shape books are in paperback, and new ones appear several times a year, making those of even a few years back obsolete), it is now often sung mainly by memory. In southeast Alabama, many prominent black four-shape singers, such as Dewey Williams, are also devotees of seven-shape music; thus, through oral tradition, this song has become a favorite at four-shape singings as well, usually sung at the end of a singing and always without a book. It echoes the sentiments expressed in such four-shape songs as "Life Is the Time to Serve the Lord," and in other gospel songs such as "Give Me My Flowers While I'm Living" (also well known among blacks in that area of Alabama). Because of Dewey Williams' fondness for the song, it has become a kind of signature tune for the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers, used as their last song in performances in TV, radio, and in concerts. Black shape-note singers generally agree that the songs which have the greatest emotional effect on listeners and other singers are those sung from memory. In the performance here, the singers inject syncopation in the middle section which does not appear in the written version of the song, and which black singers in other areas of the South do not put in.

Track 26c. CLOSING PRAYER (Dewey Williams leads)

It is traditional for all black shape-note singings to have both an opening and a closing prayer. Usually such a prayer is either preceded or followed by a specially chosen song that may be repeated without apology elsewhere during the regular sessions of the singing. (Usually, songs are not repeated during any one singing or convention session, unless there is a stated reason.

Typical reasons given are that a particular song is the next leader's "favorite," perhaps only, song; that the leader who has paged the song is a child; that the song was specially requested by an absent, ill singer; that the song is being sung as part of a memorial service within the singing.) Opening prayers are often led by a kneeling man who chants a portion of it. Closing prayers at a singing are said with all participants standing, their heads bowed. The prayer is improvised by the prayer leader or either the appointed convention chaplain, or the chairman of the singing, or some qualified designated person, usually a man. Although, as in this case, they sometimes include topical references to specific events at the singing, their main purpose usually is to praise the efforts of all the singers, and to wish all participants a safe journey home.



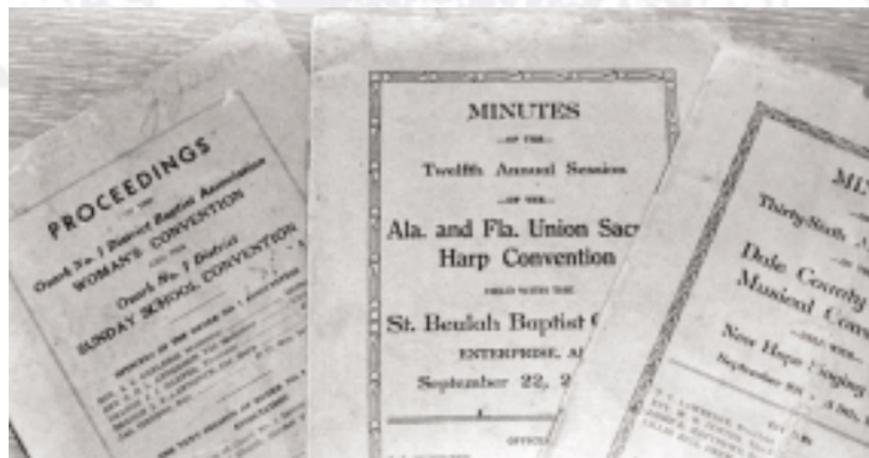
The original master tape for this CD was recorded at Alabama and Florida Union Singing Convention at Greater Old Salem Baptist Church in Dale County, Alabama on September 26-27, 1980, and at Ozark City Library, Ozark, Alabama, on October 4, 1980. Recordist: Stephen McCallum.

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