



Musings from the pen of Academician Mixie Lidyan...

#29 bottom TRIBULATION is a hauntingly beautiful song paired with Isaac Watts' incomparable words. Unfortunately our book only provides three vocal parts. Many altos have longed for their own part to sing when this gets called at a singing. Two of the old books have lovely altos, slightly differing from each other: *The*

Kentucky Harmony (1816), and *The Missouri Harmony* (1835).

Here's a blend of the two altos, with the treble. There's enough room in the book to pencil this in on the treble line, ready for the next time #29 bottom gets called. Something quite close to this alto is in the Cooper SH #184b

Treble and alto parts for #29b TRIBULATION. Trebles: note the raised 6th in your part

1. Death tis a mel-an-chol-y day To those who have not God— When

the poor soul is forced a-way To seek her last a-bode



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Today a few pitfalls awaiting unwary singers will be revealed: a variant for #59, an archaic alto still sung today, and some word pronunciations.

Let's begin with #59 HOLY MANNA. In the 1991 edition, the first phrase (which is bracketed by repeat symbols) ends with a whole note, and one observes the opening half rest when going back on the repeat. But in *The Sacred Harp Revised Cooper Edition*, this opening phrase is rendered with two endings and one skips the opening rest when going back for the repeat. (example 1) This variant is encountered at not a few Denson book singings so it is well for singers to be alert to what the leader will do.

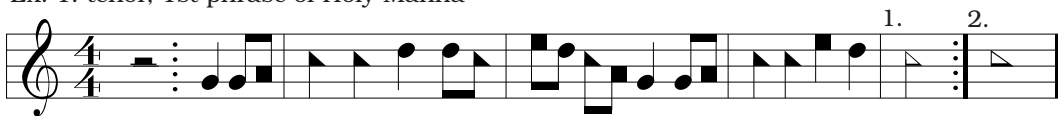
Our next pitfall is found in #99 GOSPEL TRUMPET. Earlier editions of our songbook

had the alto part tracking the basses in measure 3, as is still done in today's Cooper edition. (example 2) So altos need to be prepared to follow their neighbor if chance lands them next to someone who still adheres to the old ways. This can be heard on the recording **Sacred Harp Singing at the Old Country Church**.

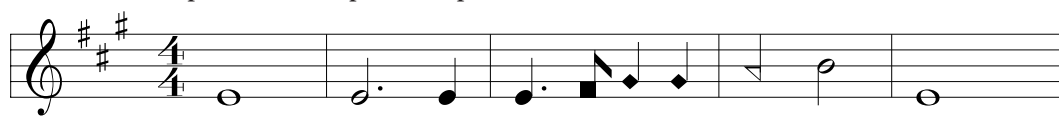
The words for today can be found in #101 top and in the many songs where **Jerusalem** occurs. #101 top CANAAN'S LAND has two pitfall words: **waft** and **deign**. Close listening to the older field recordings and to traditional singers reveals that **waft** has an "a" pronounced as in the word "at," i.e. "waaft" rhymes with "raft." **Deign** is given two syllables, something like "day-uhn" said quickly. (Another pitfall in this song is when singers sit too long on the half note just before going on to the second part of the song. This can be mitigated by "not breathing" there — something heard often.)

Most singers on the West Coast are accustomed to pronouncing **Jerusalem's** final syllable as "lem." Instead think and say "lum."

Ex. 1: tenor, 1st phrase of Holy Manna



Ex. 2: alto, 1st phrase of Gospel Trumpet





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Today we'll look at the tenor words on two fugal tunes.

First, #36 top AMERICA. Many tenors who've never sung this one before will launch bravely forth on the notes, think to themselves "hey, this is pretty easy" and then come to grief on the words. Here's how verse one is supposed to go for the tenors: "My soul repeat His praise, Whose mercies are so great, Whose anger is so slow to rise, So ready to abate, So ready to abate." Notice that the first phrase in the fuge is sung once, and the last phrase is sung twice. This pattern holds for all three verses. William Walker's *Christian Harmony* helpfully prints the words underneath the tenor notes making everything crystal clear.

A similar sort of thing happens with #36 bottom NINETY-FIFTH, that is, tenors feel confident until they go to sing the words and then they wonder what to do. There are two variant streams among the different shapenote books. *Christian Harmony* tenors will sing: "When I can read

my title clear, To mansions in the skies, I'll bid farewell, I'll bid farewell to ev'ry fear, And wipe my weeping eyes." Sacred Harp teacher Richard DeLong, however, will firmly correct tenors he hears doing this. *The Sacred Harp* way is: "When I can read my title clear, To mansions in the skies, to ev'ry fear, I'll bid farewell to ev'ry fear, And wipe my weeping eyes." In other words, the tenors sing the same words the basses are singing at the point the tenors enter the fuge. This pattern is universal among southern Sacred Harp singings, though a few northern singings (perhaps due to inexperience) waffle back and forth from singing to singing.

How would Academician Lidyan resolve the issue? She recommends following the example set by *The Christian Harmony* when attending Christian Harmony singings, and following Prof. DeLong's strictures when attending *Sacred Harp* singings regardless of geography, thus maintaining the ancient dignities of the two songbooks' traditions.



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A problem plaguing nearly all the Sacred Harp singings in the West is the dearth of male tenors and male trebles. Basses seem to be in plentiful supply, so this lack is not simply due to male disinterest in Sacred Harp singing. While searching for a fresh grant proposal for yet another government handout of public tax dollars, and also mulling over the sparseness of male tenors and trebles, one of the recently re-released recordings from the Sacred Harp Publishing Co. was placed in the CD player.

Noticed right away was that the keying of the songs on the recording was markedly lower than is usual at singings on the West Coast; and further that the baritone in the next room was humming along on the tenor part without strain... Hmm...

Hypothesis needing grant money to research: *Lowered keying will result in more males sitting in the tenor and treble sections*

Let's see how this might work out: A whole bunch of notes that used to just barely lie in the baritones' range will now be too low for them. But happily, the high

notes of the tenor part that used to be too high are now reachable. So perhaps as many as half of the "basses" will be encouraged to move over to the tenor section. Hooray!

Tenors might elect to stay in the tenor section, or they may now discover that the treble part is more exciting for their personal vocal range in these new keys.

Many of our female trebles have voices that are too low to be a true soprano (those A's and G's come out squeaky soft if at all) but too high for most of the alto notes and so the lowered keys will feel better to them. And the second sopranos sitting in the alto section will now feel that their part is too low and will be impelled into another section, possibly the tenor, which can always use more voices. The remaining altos will revel in the increased opportunities to boom out notes in their "chest voices."

How can one discover the keys used by the singers on the old recordings if not gifted with perfect pitch? One way is to have a keyboard handy while listening to the CD and to match the tonic note given out by the keyer, or match the last note sung by the basses.

Until Academician Mixie gets her grant money, (the wait estimated to be about as long as it will take Hades to freeze), some of our West Coast singings might elect to test the hypothesis on their own, (in a non-scientific non-academic way, of course), and report their results in this journal?



Musings from the pen of Academician Mixie Lidyan...

Today's nit-pick look is at #48 top DE-
VOTION as it is sung at singings on Sand
Mountain and Lookout Mountain in Ala-
bama.

Many of you have listened to the
Wootten Cousins recording and heard
them sing #48 top. Perhaps you won-
dered what it was that they were doing
differently, for what they sing and what's
printed is not the same! There are sev-
eral variants to notice: the "no breath-

ing" between the two halves of the song
(i.e. over the heavy bar in the center of
the song); the very definite pulse and ac-
cent to the song given by beating it in a
dignified "four beats" using the "Sand
Mountain L" pattern; and the variant alto
notes, which make an important differ-
ence to the overall harmonic sound.

Here's what those altos are actually
singing:

