

About Shape-Note Singing

The first music I read was as a youngster in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The Mennonite hymnals were printed in shape notes. That was the music I knew, and I readily latched on to those seven shapes as an easier way to read the "do re mi."

When using shape notes, someone sight-reading a new song does not have to determine the distance of a note in lines and spaces from "do," the keynote. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and ti each has its own shape. This aids the visual aspect of sight-reading. The ear still must hear where that shape/pitch is in relation to the keynote, but the overall learning of the song has been found to be faster.

Shape notes were useful in the churches and singing schools of early America. Settlers from the learned circles of western Europe brought with them classical music techniques. But many of the hymn writers/collectors and singing school masters created a singing style that reflected the brawn and vigor of American pioneer living. The sound was not refined in terms of choral polish or rules of harmony. However, it was spirited and energetic, important values on their own.

William (Singing Billy) Walker (1809–1875) of Spartanburg, South Carolina, was one such hymn writer, collector, arranger, and publisher. His *Southern Harmony* of 1835 and its editions that followed used a system of four shapes for the notes. There were three voice parts: treble, tenor (the tune), and bass. Women and men often doubled each other's parts at the octave, especially the trebles and tenors. Walker's *Christian Harmony* of 1866 employed the more popular seven shapes and added a fourth part specifically for altos.

Some of the shape-note hymn sings that exist today continue the old tradition of singing the pitch names the first time through. In "The People Called Christians" I began in that manner. Walker's three parts from *Southern Harmony*, 1854 edition, are there, plus an alto part I added.

–David Seitz
Mishawaka, Indiana
June, 2020

The People Called Christians

for SATB voices divisi unaccompanied

The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion, 1854
compiled and edited by William Walker (1809–1875)

Tune: THE SPIRITUAL SAILOR
arr. David A. Seitz

Moderately ♩ = 60 with robust 19th century American vigor

mf la mi do la sol la mi mi re re do ti la ti la
 SOPRANO
 ALTO
 mi mi mi fa mi mi sol sol la fa sol la sol mi
mf mel. la mi la la ti do ti do la la sol fa mi mi
 TENOR
 BASS
 la la mi re mi do mi mi re re do ti la mi la

5 do do la ti la mi mi do la do re mi mi
 la la mi mi mi sol sol mi fa sol sol mi do
 la mi la ti do ti do la la sol la ti la la
 mi mi la ti do mi mi la la mi mi la la

9 do la do la mi re do la do ti la la mi re
 mi do mi fa sol re re do sol sol la mi do re
 do la do re mi re fa mi do ti la mi mi sol
 mi mi do re mi re re mi mi sol la mi la sol

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A bit slower

♩ = 52

mp

13 do re do mi re do la la mi fa sol la
 mi sol la la sol mi fa re mi mi mi
 la sol mi do ti do la la so la ti la
 mi sol mi do re do re re mi mi la

The

17 *smoothly, expressively*

peo - ple call - ed Chris - tians have man - y things to tell a -
smoothly, expressively
 a -

21

mf

bout the land of Ca - naan where saints and an - gels dwell. But
mf
 bout

25

f

here a dis - mal o - cean en - clos - ing them a - round, with its
f

29 *mf* *rit.* *p* *a tempo*

tides still di - vides them from Ca-naan's hap - py ground. The

mf *rit.* *p* *a tempo* *mf*

33 Ah

p *mf* *f*

Ah be - hold the

ev - er - last - ing gos - pel has launched the deep at last; be -

mf The gos - pel has launched the deep at last;

37 Ah

p *f*

sails ex - pand - ed a - round the tow - er - ing mast. A -

hold the sails ex - pand - ed a - round the tow - er - ing mast.

p Ah

41 long the deck in or - der the joy - ful sail - ors stand,

mf A - long the deck see the joy - ful sail - ors stand,

A - long the deck the sail - lors stand, *ff* cry - ing

mp sail - ors stand, *mel.* cry - ing

45 *ff* *rit.* *mf* *a tempo*

Ho! we go to that hap - py land! The
 Ho! we go to Em - man - uel's hap - py land! *a tempo*

Ho! here we go to Em - man - uel's hap - py, hap - py land!

49 *p.* *the mel.*

pas - sengers u - nit - ed in or - der, peace, and love; the wind
 pas - sengers in ord - er and love

53 *ff* *mp* *ff detached*

wind is in our fav - or, how swift - ly do we move!
 is in our fav - or, how swift - ly do we move!
 How swift - ly, how swift - ly do we move! Though

How swift - ly, swift - ly move! Though

57 *f detached* *mf smoothly*

Oh, if tem - pests and bil - lows roar,
 tem - pests should as - sail us and rag - ing bil - lows roar, we shall
 tem - pests should as - sail us and rag - ing bil - lows roar, we shall

61 *mp* smoothly *p*

Ah

mel. *B1* *rit.* *p*

sweep through the deep till we reach fair Ca - naan's shore.

Slowly, freely ♩ = ca 84 **Primary tempo** ♩ = 52

wistfully *pp* 65 *rit.* *p*

mi sol la sol mi do ti do la la re re mi The
la la sol la ti la

pp *rit.* *p*

mi sol la sol mi do ti do la la re re la

69 *smoothly, expressively*

peo - ple call - ed Chris - tians have man - y things to tell a -
smoothly, expressively

a -

73

bout the land of Ca - naan where saints and an - gels dwell. No
bout

77 *mf*

more a dis - mal o - cean en - clos - es them a -

mf

80 *mp* *p*

round, nor its tides still di - vide them from

mp *p*

83 *rit. to the end* *pp*

Ca - naan's hap - py ground.

Ca - naan's hap - py, from Ca - naan's hap - py (py) ground.

rit. to the end *mp* *pp*

Ca - naan's hap - py ground.

pp

duration: 3'40"
arr. 2000 and 2020