

An Overview of the Major Developments in Early American Choral Education Methods:
Notation-Centered Versus Sound Before Symbol

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Abstract

For the American choral music educator, knowledge of the beginnings and major developments of choral music education is valuable for both instruction and context. This project seeks to fill a gap in the resources available to choral music teachers by providing a brief yet comprehensive overview of the major developments in choral music education in the United States from the establishment of the Jamestown settlement in 1607 to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. The discussion will focus on the major figures, pedagogues, published works, and educational philosophies for singing instruction that promoted either notation-centered or sound before symbol teaching methods.

An Overview of the Major Developments in Early American Choral Education Methods:**Notation-Centered Versus Sound Before Symbol**

Since America was founded by the Pilgrims who brought the rich musical traditions of Europe to the new world, styles and methods of teaching singing have emerged that are distinctly American. But what are the major events that led to the development American styles of teaching choral music, and what were the major factors and figures involved in the development of early choral music education and instruction? A comprehensive examination of the history of American choral music education reveals two primary methods of music instruction: notation-centered and sound before symbol. Choral educators who use a notation-centered method focus primarily on teaching the individual components of music and fostering music reading skills. By contrast, teachers who use sound before symbol methods emphasize skills such as modeling/echo singing, solfege syllables, and audiation. Both types of methods are used widely in American choral music classrooms, and some educators utilize elements from both. For the modern American music educator, an understanding of the effectiveness of both methods in early American choral instruction is vital in order to decide which elements to include in his or her classroom. In addition to a discussion of the historical development of these two styles of music teaching, the educational philosophies that impacted both methods will also be discussed.

Music in the New World (1607-1700)

The first English colonists arrived in the new world in 1607 and founded the settlement that became known as Jamestown, Virginia. In 1620, a group of English protestants known as the

Pilgrims established the colony of Plymouth, Massachusetts.¹ The colonists in both settlements brought music traditions with them from England, in addition to psalm books and devotional books.² In the new world, the Pilgrims developed their own methods for music instruction.

The Puritans

The Pilgrims' theological and musical beliefs were a direct result of the Protestant Reformation, which took place in reaction to the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church in England.³ Those who disagreed with the practices of the church of England fled the country, only to return once again during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First (1533-1603), calling for new forms of worship.⁴ Many protestants disagreed with the elaborate style of worship in the church of England, which was often inaccessible for the common man.⁵ These Protestants called themselves *Puritans*.⁶ They believed that music ought to be simple and consist primarily of singing Psalms in the church.⁷ This simplistic nature of Puritan church music reflected their beliefs about worship. As one author writes, "Many of the English Protestants who settled in North America were driven to immigrate, at least in part, by a desire to worship in an

¹ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 21.

² Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education: Third Edition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2007), 56.

⁵ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 20.

⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 57.

⁷ Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music: In England and New England* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1934), 253.

environment where no state church existed.”⁸ It is clear that the Puritans’ return to monophony and musical simplicity was partly in reaction to the elaborate traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Introduction of Psalm Books

The English Puritans believed that the most suitable form of worship in the church was the singing of psalms.⁹ Congregations used Psalm books before the creation of hymnals or notated sheet music for the church in the new world. Before the Jamestown colony was established in 1607, the primary psalm book used by English puritans was *Sternhold and Hopkins*, named after its co-authors, and contained nineteen psalms.¹⁰ Like many of the later psalm books, *Sternhold and Hopkins* was often revised and went through a series of editions, each time adding more psalms and sometimes simple musical accompaniments.¹¹ While this psalm book was used widely before the Puritans traveled to the new world, a new book soon emerged in the colonies as the popular choice for corporate worship. In 1612, pastor Henry Ainsworth (1571-1622) published a new psalm book, known as *The Booke of Psalmes, Englished Both in Prose and Metre; with Annotations Opening the Words and Sentences by Conference with Other Scriptures, by H. A.*¹² This book was also known as *Ainsworth’s Version*

⁸ Crawford, *America’s Musical Life*, 20.

⁹ Scholes, *The Puritans and Music*, 253.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 255-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 257-8.

of the Psalms, and one author describes it as a “manual of Psalmody.”¹³ Different colonies in the new world preferred different Psalm books. For example, Plymouth utilized Ainsworth’s *The Booke of Psalmes* more frequently, while the Massachusetts colony preferred *Sternhold and Hopkins*.¹⁴

As more congregations adopted either Ainsworth’s *The Booke of Psalmes* or *Sternhold and Hopkins* for corporate worship, several problems emerged. First, the *Sternhold and Hopkins* Psalm book contained translation errors from the original Hebrew into English, which slightly changed the meaning of some of the Psalms.¹⁵ Additionally, both books contained fifteen or more different meters for each of the Psalms, which was confusing for singers in the congregation.¹⁶ As the number of churches continued to grow, reverends across the colonies expressed a need for a new Psalm book, one that was needed to simplify and clarify the method of singing Psalms in the church.

The Bay Psalm Book (1640)

In order to make the process of singing psalms in church more unified, a committee of thirty ministers met to discuss a need for the first book ever printed in the colonies in the new world: *The Bay Psalm Book*.¹⁷ The book’s full title was officially *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre. Whereunto is prefixed a discourse declaring not only*

¹³ Lloyd Frederick Sunderman, *Historical Foundations of Music Education in the United States* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1971), 10.

¹⁴ Scholes, *The Puritans and Music*, 258-9.

¹⁵ Michael L. Mark, *A Concise History of American Music Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 10.

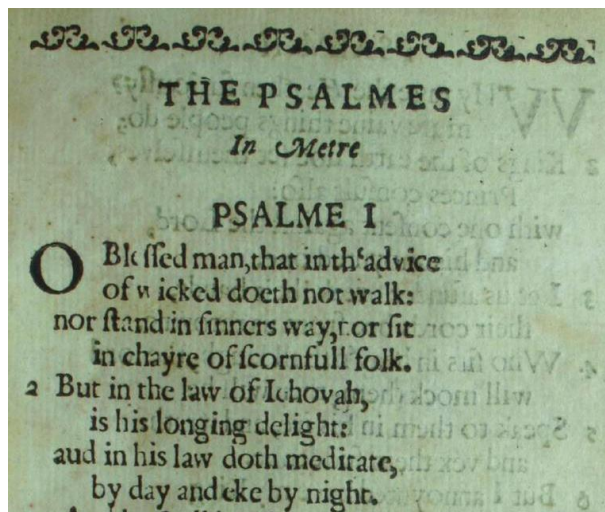
¹⁶ Mark, *A Concise History*, 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

the lawfulness, but also the necessity of the heavenly Ordinance of Singing Scripture Psalmes in the Churches of God.¹⁸ The following image is a photograph of a scanned copy of *The Bay Psalm Book*, demonstrating the metrical arrangement of the Psalms arranged within before music was added.

Figure 1.

The Bay Psalm Book, page 46, Psalm 1.¹⁹



The Bay Psalm Book was distributed widely across the colonies. Because of its consistent six meters and corrections from the previous Psalm books, it greatly simplified the process of congregational singing.²⁰ The book was written and compiled by Richard Mather (1596-1669), John Eliot (1604-1690), and Thomas Weld (1595-1660). Like both Ainsworth's *The Booke of Psalmes* and Sternhold and Hopkins, *The Bay Psalm Book* was also frequently revised. At first

¹⁸ Mark, *A Concise History*, 10.

¹⁹ Richard Mather, John Eliot, and Thomas Weld, "The Bay Psalm Book," in *The Digital Bay Psalm Book: A Virtual Reconstruction of the New World's First English-Language Book*, ed. Ian Christie-Miller, Wilberforce Eams, and Kevin Cattrell, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 46.

²⁰ Mark, *A Concise History*, 10.

the book was published without music, but with the verses arranged metrically to make the Psalms easy to sing.²¹

The Tradition of Lining Out (1640s-1700)

At the time when the churches in the New World relied heavily on Psalm books for corporate worship, there were two main methods for congregational singing. The first was known as the *regular way* and consisted of reading music.²² This type of congregational signing qualified as learning through a notation-based system. Because most people in New England could not read music and the Psalm books often did not include notated music at all, the more popular method of corporate worship was known as *lining out*.²³ In this process, the lead singer or deacon read the first line of a Psalm and the congregation sang each line back to him.²⁴ Lining out was the first American music teaching method in which the sound of the music is introduced to the singer before the notation. While this method was at first effective for a unified method of singing in the church, several problems emerged. First, depending on who was leading the congregation in worship, either the key or the tune of the Psalm could be unclear.²⁵ Additionally, with the various demands of work and farming, people had little time in their everyday lives to practice singing skills.²⁶ And finally, because of the room for embellishment in performance, the tunes for each Psalm were often completely different in churches across New England.²⁷

²¹ Scholes, *The Puritans and Music*, 256; 259.

²² Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 68.

²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁴ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 25.

²⁵ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 69.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

Some reverends even expressed their concerns that the oral tradition of lining out was not aiding in the growth of music literacy across the colonies.²⁸ Without a consistent method of music instruction and learning, singing from psalm books was often confused and inconsistent between churches. Over time, it became increasingly clear that a purely oral tradition of learning music caused more problems than it solved. In 1698, a new version of *The Bay Psalm Book* was published, this time including notated music utilizing the solmization system.²⁹ New methods of instruction were necessary to aid congregations who could not read music and had difficulty following the tradition of lining out.

The Age of Singing Schools (1700-1730)

At this time in early American history, many reverends and ministers advocated for singing instruction for their congregations, primarily because the quality of singing had dramatically declined in the church. Written records survive from the time when ministers wrote about how dire the need was for a change, claiming that the Psalm singing in their churches was muddled, chaotic, and lacking in skill.³⁰ The lining out method, an early form of sound before symbol music learning, was ineffective partly because it was so inconsistent. In addition, the more traditional methods of music instruction that focused on teaching notation first were ineffective due to a lack of knowledge. Instructors were needed to teach musically illiterate working communities how to sing. Because early Americans spent so much time working to feed

²⁷ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 25-26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

²⁹ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 74.

³⁰ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 12-13.

their families, many had no time to devote to music lessons. As Sunderman writes, “A majority of the population was more interested in subduing the frontier than in learning how to sing.”³¹ The solution, proposed by a number of ministers, most notably the Reverend Thomas Symmes, was to form *singing schools* across the colonies.³² The main proponents of establishing singing schools were Cotton Mather, Thomas Walter, John Tufts, and Thomas Symmes around the year 1720.³³

The First Singing Schools (1720s)

The first singing schools in America were established between 1717 and the 1750s.³⁴ The singing school was not a school in the traditional sense, with a classroom and textbooks for different subjects. Instead, the classes met wherever there was a free space in town, took place in the evening, and lasted for weeks or months, depending on the singing master’s schedule.³⁵ Instructors often taught several singing schools in different communities, made their living leading classes, then moved on to a new community when the singing school finished.³⁶ Prominent early singing school instructors included James Lyon, Francis Hopkinson, William Billings, Andrew Law, Thomas Hastings, Lowell Mason, and William Bradbury.³⁷ Some

³¹ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 13.

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

³³ Stephen A. Marini, “The New England Singing School: Ritual Change and Religious Culture in Revolutionary America,” *Religion Compass* 5, no. 6 (2011): 248, <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00276.x>.

³⁴ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 19.

³⁵ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁷ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 20.

historians point out that the traditions of singing schools eventually contributed to the formation of early American choirs.³⁸ The main focus of the singing schools was to improve the singing of congregation members by teaching them the *singing by note* method.³⁹ This method was a notation based system that focused on teaching musical symbols and concepts first, unlike the previous tradition of lining out.

The schools also provided the students with other opportunities besides choral instruction such as socialization, which made the singing school events attractive to young people.⁴⁰ Over time, the singing school as an institution continued to be popular across the colonies and new cities. Influential singing school instructors such as Andrew Law and William Billings continued to further streamline methods of singing instruction into the 1800s.⁴¹ Singing schools are also mentioned in popular American literature from the 1880s. In the autobiographical novel *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957) describes how her suitor Almanzo Wilder took her to the singing school in their town: “He had paid tuition for two and bought a singing book. The class was already there, and Mr. Clewett was seating them. He placed the bass singers in a group, the tenors in another, and sopranos and altos in groups. Then he taught them the names and values of the notes...”⁴² Her description details the concepts taught in singing schools in America between 1700 and the late 1800s, and further demonstrates how the singing schools served as both social events and opportunities for musical learning.

³⁸ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 32.

³⁹ Mark and Gray, *American Music Education*, 77-78

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴¹ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 21-22.

⁴² Laura Ingalls Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years* (New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc., 1971) 203.

Reverend John Tufts (1721)

Of the reverends and ministers who called for a new method to teach singing, the most influential was the Reverend John Tufts (1689-1750), who revolutionized the world of choral education. Tufts not only advocated for musical literacy and singing schools across the colonies, but he also wrote what is considered by many to be the first American music textbook: the *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, most likely published in 1721.⁴³ In the beginning pages of his book, he describes a solmization method utilizing Fa, Sol, La, and Mi, represented by the letters F, S, L, and M.⁴⁴ A similar solmization method appeared before his book in the ninth edition of *The Bay Psalm Book*, published in 1698.⁴⁵ Instead of traditional note shapes, his notation method utilized the four solfege syllables (F, S, L, and M) and flats and sharps to indicate accidentals.⁴⁶ In his *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, Tufts explained how to use basic notation on a staff to read simple music. He introduced clefs, notes and their values, as well as his own modified solmization system in a clear, concise format intended to be accessible for the common man.⁴⁷ In addition to this, he also included a number of Psalm tunes that were notated with both notes and solfege abbreviations.⁴⁸ While his method of notation was generally

⁴³ Mark and Gray, *American Music Education*, 72.

⁴⁴ John Tufts, "A Short Introduction To the Singing of Psalm Tunes," quoted in "John Tufts' Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes (1721-1744): The First American Music Textbook," by Irving Lowens (*Journal of Research in Music Education* 2, no. 2 [1954]) 101.

⁴⁵ Mark and Gray, *American Music Education*, 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

⁴⁷ Lowens, "The First American Music Textbook," 95.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

accepted, some critics rejected it in favor of traditional notation.⁴⁹ They argued his method unnecessarily complicated things where traditional notes would be clearer. His system marked a major step toward standardizing a musical notation system for the New England colonies.

Thomas Symmes and Thomas Walter (1721)

Many others also contributed to Tuft's efforts with their own works on the instruction of singing and music. Thomas Symmes (1677-1725) published a pamphlet in 1720 called *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing, or Singing by Note*, in which he advocated for the singing by note method.⁵⁰ A year later, Thomas Walter (1696-1725) published *The Grounds and Rules of Musick, Explained, or An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note*.⁵¹

In contrast to Tufts' work, Walter's *The Grounds and Rules of Musick* presented a more traditional notation method, different from the solmization system.⁵² However, Walter also detailed the process of how to sing Psalm tunes, providing yet another resource for those hoping to learn how to read and sing music.⁵³ Several authors argue that the work of men like Tufts, Symmes, and Walter "had significant results in the establishment of a formal system of music education to provide music instruction to the masses and eventually led to school music

⁴⁹ John H. Butler, "John Tufts: Aurora Unaware," *Music Educators Journal* 55, no. 5 (1969): 46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3392497?pq-origsite=summon&seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁵⁰ Mark and Gray, *American Music Education*, 76.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

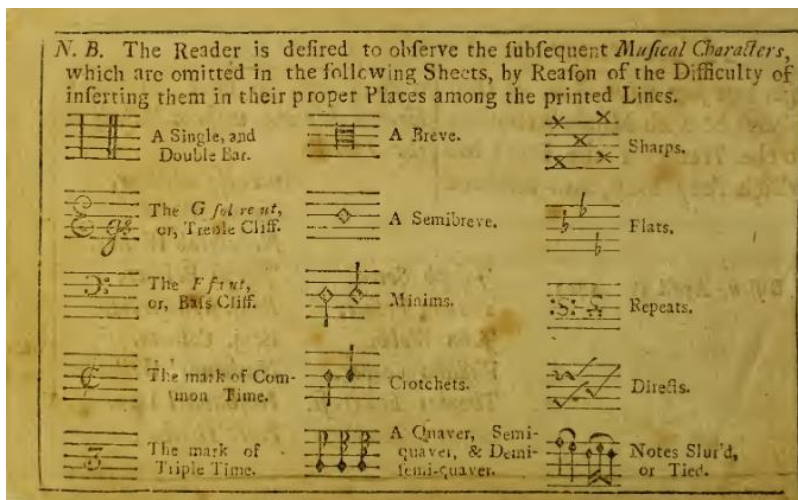
⁵² *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵³ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 32.

education as we know it today.”⁵⁴ An image from Walter’s book is shown in Figure 2, demonstrating many of the major symbols used in the singing by note method.

Figure 2.

The Grounds and Rules of Musick, Explained, page 11.⁵⁵



Standardizing Musical Notation (1737-1830)

At this stage in early American choral education, resources were available for the first time to be used for singing instruction in the church and singing schools, such as Tufts’ *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*. The Psalms were still sung in churches, but the “lining out” method of congregational singing gradually began to phase out of the churches in favor of reading music, rather than sound before symbol methods. As the singing schools gradually improved the common man’s musical literacy, it became increasingly clear that a standardized method of musical notation was needed, especially in light of the new works by Tufts, Symmes, and Walter. Additionally, as the Great Awakening spread across America in the

⁵⁴ Mark and Gray, *American Music Education*, 77.

⁵⁵ Thomas Walter, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick, Explained, or An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note* (Boston, MA: Printed by J. Franklin, near the Brick Church in Cornhill, 1721), 11. IMSLP.

late 1720s, composers and choral instructors emerged with a new style of repertoire for churches: hymns. The Wesley brothers, John (1703-1791) and Charles (1707-1788), composed and published a number of hymn collections in England during the time of the Great Awakening in America.⁵⁶ As war between America and England broke out, the ideals and convictions of the Puritans ceased to impact music instruction like they had before.⁵⁷ A new, consistent method of musical notation was necessary for singing instructors across the nation. One composer in particular, William Billings, helped standardize musical notation in America through his writings on choral instruction.

William Billings (1770)

A tanner by trade, William Billings (1746-1800) was a prominent singing school instructor whose compositions are some of the most famous choral pieces from this era of early American music.⁵⁸ He composed both sacred and secular choral pieces during his lifetime.⁵⁹ Before the time of Lowell Mason, Reverend John Tufts and William Billings were considered the two most influential writers and composers who contributed to the development of American choral music education.⁶⁰ In addition to composing some of the first choral music in the new world, Billings also published several books that built off of Tufts' *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, adding to the growing repertoire of choral instruction resources.

⁵⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 78-79.

⁵⁷ Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 39-40.

⁵⁸ McCray, James. "The Evolution of American Choral Music: Roots, Trends, and Composers before the 20th Century." *The Diapason*, (May 2011): 26, <https://www.thediapason.com/sites/thediapason/files/webDiap0511p26-29.pdf>

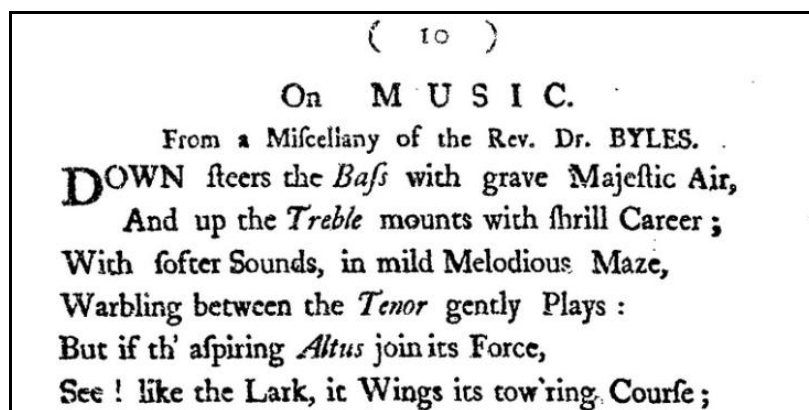
⁵⁹ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 22.

⁶⁰ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 72, 95-97.

In the year 1770, Billings published his first book, *The New-England Psalm-Singer, or, American Chorister: Containing a Number of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Canons, in Four and Five Parts: (never before published)*, engraved by Paul Revere.⁶¹ The book included 127 works by Billings, and “was the first published compilation of entirely American music and the first American tunebook devoted wholly to the music of one composer.”⁶² *The New-England Psalm-Singer* was created in collaboration with Mather Byles (1706-1788) and the evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770), who was a prominent figure in the Great Awakening.⁶³ In addition to psalm tunes and poems by Byles and Whitefield, the book contained original choral music composed by Billings. An excerpt from the introductory poem, written by Mather Byles, is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

The New England Psalm-Singer, page 11, poem by Mather Byles.⁶⁴



⁶¹ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 96.

⁶² Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 38.

⁶³ William Billings, Mather Byles, and George Whitefield, *The New-England Psalm-Singer, or, American Chorister: Containing a Number of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Canons, in Four and Five Parts: never before published* (Boston, MA: Edes and Gill, 1770), 2, Gale Primary Sources.

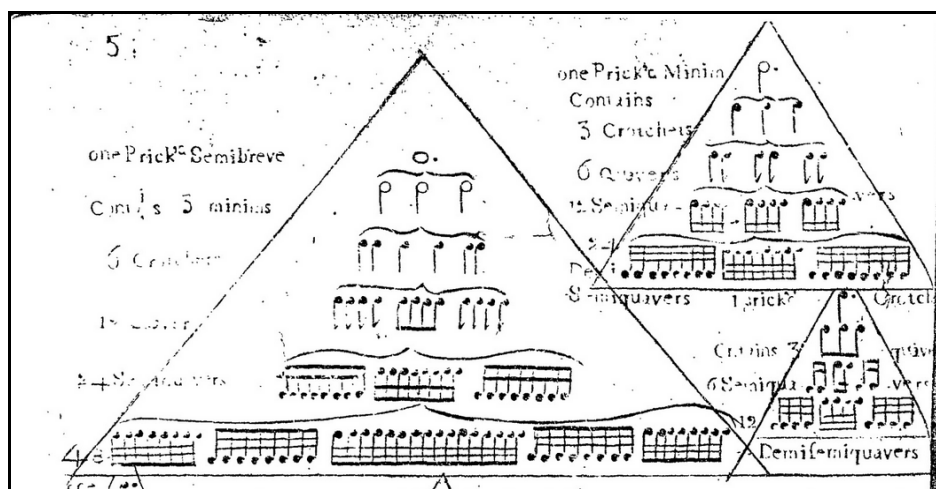
⁶⁴ Billings, Byles, and Whitefield, *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, 11.

In many of his compositions published in *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, Billings added a doubled melody part on the cello to help the choir stay in tune.⁶⁵ He also often composed fusing tunes.⁶⁶ After publishing his first work, Billings published a number of other books containing original music and recommendations for teaching singing. In 1778, he published *The Singing Master's Assistant*, followed by three more tune books.⁶⁷

In *The New-England Psalm-Singer*, Billings included a guide with instructions for reading rhythms and notes, illustrated with diagrams of the different keys and rhythmic values. His method closely resembles the European method of notation, which uses breves, minims, semibreves, and other divisions of those rhythms. Figure 4 shows an example from *The New-England Psalm-Singer* of Billings' divisions of notes. The diagrams and illustrations in Billings' work provided a framework for teaching standardized note and rhythm notation.

Figure 4.

The New-England Psalm-Singer, page 16.



⁶⁵ McCray, "Evolution of American Choral Music," 26.

⁶⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 94.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

Further Developments in Standardization (1798)

Andrew Law (1748-1821) was another singing school instructor who published books of tunes with sections on singing instruction.⁶⁸ He had more formal education than some of his other contemporaries, and published a series of major works containing his own compositions, including *The Art of Singing: Plain Tunes* (1767), *The Select Harmony* (1779), and *The Musical Primer* (1780).⁶⁹ A later edition of *The Musical Primer* included Law's proposed new method of notating music, a method called "shape notes" which did not use a staff.⁷⁰ However, because it was so different to methods more commonly in use, Law's system was not adopted by many.⁷¹

A few other music teachers also published their own musical notation method books during the early 1800s. William Smith and William Little published *The Easy Instructor* in 1801, a method book that also used the shape note system, assigning shapes to each solfege syllable but this time maintaining the music staff.⁷² Shape note tune books were more popular in small communities, while books like Billings' *The New-England Psalm-Singer* were more popular in cities.⁷³ Choral teacher and composer Francis Henry Brown (1818-1891) made an impact on both the world of music teaching and folk music through his compositions.⁷⁴ He taught lessons in the

⁶⁸ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 98-99.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁷² Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 130.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁴ Arlan R. Coolidge, "Francis Henry Brown, 1818-1891, American Teacher and Composer," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 9, 1 (1961): 10, 14, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3344392?pq-origsite=summon&seq=7#metadata_info_tab_contents

pianoforte and voice, and was a prominent choral director.⁷⁵ Each of these men contributed to the ongoing debate regarding a standard method of musical notation.

The Father of American Music Education (1792-1872)

Many historians agree that Lowell Mason (1792-1872) is the Father of American Music Education.⁷⁶ Born and raised in Massachusetts, Mason was trained to play a number of instruments and began teaching music at the age of sixteen.⁷⁷ He worked directing music for churches, teaching lessons, and instructing band and choral groups as a part of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston.⁷⁸ He became President of the society in 1827.⁷⁹ Additionally, he composed both sacred vocal works and “school song books” for children.⁸⁰ One of his books, *The Sacred Harp* (1837), he published in separate versions using both the shape note and traditional notation methods.⁸¹ It is possible he published in two versions because different communities preferred different notation methods.⁸² Mason made significant steps toward incorporating singing instruction in public schools, most notably establishing the nation’s first college of specialized, higher music education. In addition, he was one of the first to advocate that music education be included in the public schools. Mason later established the *Boston*

⁷⁵ Coolidge, “Francis Henry Brown,” 15.

⁷⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 129.

⁷⁷ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 46-47.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁹ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 131.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 133.

Academy of Music, synthesizing the educational theories of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Mason's own practical experience teaching music.⁸³ It was one of the first examples of music education in American public schools.

Philosophy of Music Education

Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's (1746-1827) educational philosophy influenced Mason and his contemporaries. Pestalozzi was both an educator and an influential writer.⁸⁴ He wrote extensively about his views on education, and though he was not a music educator, he believed there were many benefits to having music in the schools.⁸⁵ Pestalozzi's educational ideas were influenced by the writings of philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke.⁸⁶ He prioritized developing morality, physical strength, and intellectual pursuits in his students.⁸⁷ The core pillars of Pestalozzi's beliefs surrounding education were 1) experience and nature based learning, 2) sights and sounds before symbols, 3) progression of learning from simple concepts (familiar) to complicated ones (unfamiliar), and 4) the integration of many subjects, among other key principles.⁸⁸ These concepts contrasted with the lecture-based instructional methods of the time, where learning was not student-centered.

⁸³ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 131-132.

⁸⁴ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 34.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 123.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

The man who likely first introduced Pestalozzi's revolutionary educational ideas to Mason was the Reverend William Channing Woodbridge (1794-1845).⁸⁹ On a visit to Europe, Woodbridge first encountered the ideas of Pestalozzi and noticed how effective they could be in the classroom.⁹⁰ He advocated for the application of these principles to the teaching of music, and sought to convince Mason to incorporate them into his teaching.⁹¹ Mason eventually saw the benefits of such a method and began to synthesize many of Pestalozzi's ideas with his own.⁹² After the establishment of the *Boston Academy of Music*, Mason wrote several works on teaching music that applied Pestalozzi's philosophy.⁹³ Most notably, he pointed out that Pestalozzi's idea of teaching experiences before symbols could easily be applied to music.⁹⁴ Mason and Woodbridge applied this idea to their music teaching, specifically within singing instruction, and Mason advocated for a sound before symbol teaching method in the music classroom that utilized solfege syllables.⁹⁵

The Grammar Schools

By the early 1800s, the one room schoolhouse method of the 1700s American schools was being challenged by educational reformers. The people of Boston, Massachusetts led the

⁸⁹ Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work* (University of Minnesota: UMI Research Press, 1971), 62-63.

⁹⁰ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 26.

⁹¹ Pemberton, *Lowell Mason*, 64.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 65-67.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-69.

⁹⁵ Mark and Gary., *American Music Education*, 147.

way in public school advancements.⁹⁶ By 1820, Boston had both public and private schools.⁹⁷ Students began their education in primary schools then moved on to study in grammar schools, which focused on teaching languages and other subjects necessary for college.⁹⁸ For students who would be entering a specialized trade or a profession, Boston also had academies that provided preparatory courses for specialized colleges.⁹⁹ Public high schools were becoming more common, and Massachusetts led the way in this progression.¹⁰⁰ However, music education was not yet a high priority in the schools. While some private schools taught music, music was not viewed as an academically necessary subject for many institutions.¹⁰¹ Mason sought to change this aspect of music education in the schools.

Before Mason's contemporary Woodbridge introduced him to the education philosophies of Pestalozzi, he tutored students in singing in order to improve his church choir.¹⁰² Mason's goal became advocating for music instruction to be added into the public schools, and his wildly successful choral teaching gained him public respect and a growing reputation as a qualified music educator.¹⁰³ Woodbridge joined Mason as an advocate for the benefits of music education for students, and they pleaded that music education would improve musicianship in the church

⁹⁶ Pemberton, *Lowell Mason*, 62.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

and encourage students both morally and religiously.¹⁰⁴ Mason firmly believed, similar to Pestalozzi's view of learning, that if any child could learn to read then they could also learn to sing.¹⁰⁵ He eventually was appointed as superintendent of music for many schools in the Boston area in 1838, a position which required him to oversee the music instruction at a number of schools.¹⁰⁶ After concluding his time as superintendent, Mason spent the rest of his career traveling to lecture, teach, and advocate music education in the schools to a wider audience.¹⁰⁷ Mason's efforts to convince the public of the virtues of music education in the schools directly impacted the growth of organizations for music advocacy later in America's history.

The Boston Academy of Music

After adopting many of Pestalozzi's educational principles, Mason not only revolutionized music education in the grammar schools but established the first college for higher music learning in America. In 1833, Mason, Woodbridge, George Webb, and Samuel Eliot created *the Boston Academy of Music* in order to create a place to train singers and future singing instructors.¹⁰⁸ One of Mason's goals was to incorporate Pestalozzian principles of teaching into the classes at the academy.¹⁰⁹ In addition to teaching a wide variety of music classes, Mason, Webb, and the other leaders of the academy sponsored concerts starring their

¹⁰⁴ Pemberton, *Lowell Mason*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 50. (note: Mark and Gary maintain in *A History of American Music Education* that *The Boston Academy of Music* was established in 1832, not 1833)

¹⁰⁹ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 131.

students.¹¹⁰ Additionally, the academy had classes intended to train students to become music teachers.¹¹¹ Under Mason's leadership the academy choirs flourished, growing into groups of hundreds of students each that performed a wide variety of sacred and secular music.¹¹² Eventually, other states, inspired by the impact of the *Boston Academy of Music*, wrote to the school to ask Mason and others how to incorporate music into their own schools.¹¹³

As music advocacy grew more widespread, Mason also helped create a new organization for advancing the inclusion of music education in the schools: the music convention. At his *Boston Academy of Music*, Mason encouraged the meetings and formations of various music conventions.¹¹⁴ He was involved both with the National Music Convention of Boston and the Massachusetts Teachers' Institutes.¹¹⁵ Many of the conventions were led by people Mason himself had trained.¹¹⁶ Originally, conventions trained teachers in choral instruction, and eventually Mason and a man named George Root established a new kind of convention, The Normal Institute.¹¹⁷ The institutes resembled summer intensives in which the teachers studied together for several months.

¹¹⁰ Pemberton, *Lowell Mason*, 71.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹¹⁴ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 147.

¹¹⁵ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 53.

¹¹⁶ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 149.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

Other Philosophies of Music Education

After the success of the Boston Academy of Music, music education continued to thrive with the first printing of modern hymnals and other instruction books, as well as music conventions and advocacy. However, when the stock market crash marked the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, the rapid growth of music education in the schools ceased. Some schools were still able to budget for some music instruction, but the quality and frequency of instruction went down overall.¹¹⁸ Philosophies of education besides Pestalozzi's began to be discussed in academic circles. In 1970, the American writer and educator Bennett Reimer published his *A Philosophy of Music Education*, in which he postulated that "the essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the art of music."¹¹⁹ By contrast, David Elliot proposed an alternative philosophy of music education, advocating for "participation in music over listening."¹²⁰ While these philosophies of music education had less of an impact on the sound before symbol versus notation-based instruction debate than Pestalozzi's philosophy, they did greatly impact how music was taught in both choral and instrumental classrooms after Pestalozzi and Mason.

Sound Before Symbol in Orff and Kodaly

After the American music educators Tufts, Billings, and Mason, two prominent composers introduced their own methods for teaching singing. For example, Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967) developed a method to improve his students' musical literacy featuring his own version of the sound before symbol method that utilized echo singing,

¹¹⁸ Sunderman, *Historical Foundations*, 281-282.

¹¹⁹ Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 1.

¹²⁰ Mark and Gary, *American Music Education*, 421.

folk songs, and solfege syllables.¹²¹ The German composer Carl Orff (1895-1982) created a similar method that focused on teaching music as students sang and played rhythms and melodies on child-sized percussion instruments.¹²² Both methods emphasized sound before symbol but also incorporated instruction in reading music. The Kodaly and Orff methods have been widely used in modern American music classrooms, but because they are not early American choral education methods, a more detailed discussion of both does not fall within the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

After the sound before symbol tradition of teaching choral music through lining out in Puritan churches was gradually replaced by notation-based teaching in singing schools across America, a need for standard music notation emerged. Choral educators like John Tufts and William Billings built off of each other's work, developing new methods of standardizing notation and teaching to fill gaps in musical literacy. Lowell Mason applied Pestalozzi's educational philosophy of introducing experiences before symbols to music through his own sound before symbol method. His work teaching in the Boston Academy of Music led to an increase in music advocacy through conventions and institutes. Many of the teaching methods created by early American choral educators are still in use in choral classrooms across the nation. While both the sound before symbol and notation-based singing instruction methods have been useful in American music classrooms and churches throughout history, some choral educators have synthesized elements of each approach into more flexible hybrid models. The Kodaly and

¹²¹ Lois Choksy, *The Kodaly Context: Creating an Environment for Musical Learning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1981), 3-11.

¹²² Lois Choksy, Robert M. Abramson, Avon E. Gillespie, David Woods, and Frank York, *Teaching Music in the Twenty-First Century: Second Edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2001), 103.

Orff methods combine elements of both approaches, but instead of relying on only these two methods, the modern choral educator should consider what instruction methods were effective in early American choral classrooms. The educator's personal philosophy of music education should also factor into the decision regarding which elements of notation-centered and sound before symbol methods should be incorporated into choral instruction in the American classroom. By gaining a more thorough understanding of the development of choral instruction methods in America throughout the nation's early history, educators can make informed decisions about what methods and educational philosophies may be most effective in their choral classrooms.

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