

The Music Herald

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

Colossians 3:16

Early American Psalmody, Part 5: “Rush On, Ye Sons of Harmony”

We come now to the fifth and last tune style of early American psalmody. We saw last month how the fourth tune style, the decorated duple style, was developed when duple tunes were once again explored after the mastery of the triple time style. The fifth style developed soon after and for the same reason, that of effectively and interestingly conveying texts in duple time. Once again, as in the decorated duple style, the lively motion of the quarter note was the key, but this time it was employed in a different way.

This fifth tune style is called the declamatory duple style, named for the way it often “declaims” (expresses in a forceful way) texts in explosions of repeated quarter notes. The chief distinguishing feature of this style is a definite change of motion about halfway through the text, often by means of a burst of quarter notes. After a relatively brief opening, which may even be in the common-tune or dactylic style, the motion changes suddenly with a string of repeated quarter notes, thereby quickening the pace and infusing the piece with fresh energy.

In most of these pieces, this change of motion is simultaneous with a change of texture, reducing the texture to one voice and then building voices on top of that voice. For example, in the tune “Majesty,” on page 4, the bass comes in alone on the words “On cherubs and on cherubim,” and then the alto joins on the words “Full royally he rode” until finally all the parts come back together. The tune “Montague” on page 5, also builds voices one at a time but with text overlap. The bass comes in alone on the words “The Jews behold,” then the tenor comes in on the same words a measure later, then the treble, and finally the alto, all singing the same words at different times. This kind of text overlap is known as “fuging,” and fuging soon came to dominate the declamatory duple style.

Often the quickened pace of the second section is accentuated by repeated melody notes. Once again, the fuging section of “Montague” furnishes a good example. After one D as the first note of the bass entry, the next three notes are all repeated A’s, then all four notes of the tenor entry are repeated A’s, as are all four notes of the treble entry and three notes of the alto entry. Such repetition, coupled with the fact that they are all repeated quarter notes, gives a driving urgency to the piece. Repeated notes are also used in the fugue entries of “Psalm 34.”

In a few of these declamatory duple tunes,

Styles of Early American Psalm Tunes

1. Common-Tune Style
2. Dactylic Style
3. Triple Time Style
4. Decorated Duple Style
5. Declamatory Duple Style

the change of texture occurs without the simultaneous change of motion. For example, the tune “Bridgewater” on page 6 opens its fugue with the same dactylic motion that characterizes the opening bars of the tune. But even the texture change alone imparts fresh energy to the piece as it builds in grandeur and even climaxes in a later change of motion, an explosion of repeated quarter notes just before the end. It thus results in the same sense of quickened pace and heightened energy that characterizes all the tunes of the declamatory duple style.

As Richard Crawford puts it, in all the tunes of the declamatory duple style, the second section of the piece is the “most striking event” of the piece. It imparts increased energy either by the quickened motion of repeated quarter notes, a change of texture, repeated notes, or any combination of these features. Indeed he argues that perhaps the term “fuging” was originally applied to the entire declamatory duple style, even those without text overlap (such as “Majesty”). The term “fugue” means, literally, “to fly” and perhaps denotes not merely voices flying on top of voices but also the rapid “flying” motion that is common to all of the declamatory duple tunes. At any rate, the true fuging style, that with text overlap, eventually dominated the entire declamatory duple style.

William Billings, one of the great masters of the fuging tune, loved the power of it and wrote this delightful passage in praise of it:

“It has more than twenty times the power of the old slow tunes; each part straining for mastery and victory. The audience, entertained and delighted, their minds surprisingly agitated and extremely fluctuated, sometimes declaring for one part and sometimes for another. Now the solemn bass demands their attention; next the manly tenor, now the volatile treble. Now here, now there, now here again; rush on, ye sons of harmony.”

Unlike the decorated duple style, this fifth style developed from within psalmody, not from out-

side instrumental music. For this reason it still retains features of the common-tune and dactylic styles. Usually the opening bars begin with a half note and then move in some combination of half notes and quarter notes until the “fuging” section. The time signature throughout is either 2/2 or 4/4, not the faster 2/4 of the decorated duple style. This makes the motion of the opening sometimes similar to that of the common-tune or dactylic styles, and the “quickened pace” then of the second section is not a change of tempo but a true change of motion; each syllable of text is declaimed (forcefully expressed) with a quarter note, making the words pour out with more energy and vigor. “Rush on, ye sons of harmony.”

It is revealing of the importance of the “second half,” or “fuging section,” that this section is usually longer than the “first half” of the tune, though it usually contains exactly half of the text. Because of the text overlap, this section often has portions of the text repeated so that all of the voices can eventually come back together on the same words. This in itself often makes the second half of the tune longer. In addition, there is often a repeat sign at the end of the “fuging section,” making it sometimes last four times as long as the opening section. All of this serves to highlight the second section as the climactic and important part of the song.

Interestingly, this is not a reflection of any new kinds of texts. The texts of the declamatory duple tunes are the same as those of the earlier styles. They are not uniquely contrasting in the second half or uniquely forceful in the second half. The declamatory duple style seems to be a style not limited to a particular kind of text but useful for vigorously declaiming any text of psalmody.

This style developed in England in the mid-1700s, but it found its home in New England in the 1770s and 1780s. After learning from English examples (like “Psalm 34” on page 3), the early American composers explored the style to its fullest extent and produced some of the most delightful and moving pieces of all time. They brought the second section from being an optional “chorus” to being an integral part of the piece and developed the fugue from

being one of mere mechanical imitation to being one of more freedom and expression.

This declamatory duple style of psalmody flourished all the way until the musical “reform” beginning in the 1790s squelched it and brought an end to the entire period of early American psalmody. The complaints against the declamatory duple, or fuging (flying), style were primarily two: the confusion resulting from text overlap, and the lively motion which it was feared would destroy any spirit of devotion in singing. It was called by critics “an intolerable insult on common sense,” “utterly incompatible with any devotion,” and worse. But reformer Isaac Woodbury was compelled to say in 1850 that “many old and venerated people . . . in their younger years were wont to perform them [the fuging tunes] in the house of God with perhaps *as much devotion and religious effect* as more modern choirs now sing the music of the day.” As we have seen in several of these styles, many of the pieces in this style outlasted the “reform” by being carried on to other regions of the country, particularly the American South, where they have continued to live and be sung in true praise to the Lord. Thus the “sons of harmony” continue to “rush on” with joy and vigor.

May we leave this survey of early American psalmody with a greater understanding of and appreciation for our heritage. We can be thankful for all five of these styles and the rich treasury of tunes and texts that they have left to us. They are worthy of singing yet today, and they furnish us with an excellent body of psalmody to take up fresh into our lips and sing to the Lord who is the giver of them and who is worthy of all praise.

- J. Murray Barbour, *The Church Music of William Billings*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960.
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 Andrew Gant, *O Sing Unto the Lord, A History of English Church Music*, London: Profile Books Ltd, 2015.
 Hamilton C. MacDougall, *Early New England Psalmody, An Historical Appreciation*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969.
 David McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
 D. Warren Steel and Richard Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: Univ. of IL Press, 2010.
 Robert Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970.

We have, on these next four pages, a sample of each kind of declamatory duple tune that we have discussed on the previous page. The first is “Psalm 34,” one of the earliest British tunes and one of the tunes that American composers laid eyes upon and copied in style. Next is “Majesty,” a “fuging” tune without text overlap. Next is “Montague,” a fuging tune with text overlap, with simultaneous change of motion, and with repeated melody notes. And last is “Bridgewater,” a fuging tune with text overlap but without simultaneous change of motion. In all of these tunes, as we have seen in all the tunes in this series, the melody is in the tenor voice, in the third line. These tunes also were sung a cappella, and both the top line (the treble) and the tenor were sung by both men and women singing an octave apart from each other. These tunes were to be sung in a key comfortable for all parts, not necessarily in the keys in which they are written. The time signatures of these tunes, 2/2, tells us that they should be sung at a metronome setting of 60, 60 for every half note.

This is one of the very tunes that came from England to New England and served as models of the fugal tune style for American composers. Indeed, this tune is perhaps the foremost of those tunes. It first appeared in England in 1760, and it was first printed in America in 1766. Early American composers, who brought the fugal tune to its full development, got their start by examining and copying the style of this very tune.

The composer of this tune, Joseph Stephenson, was from Poole in Dorset, England, and was one of the very first, if not the first, to compose in the fugal style in the 1700s. Similar voice and text overlap had been used to some degree one hundred years before in the Scottish Psalter of 1635, and there is no doubt that Stephenson and others like him were drawing upon this past history, though the exact links in the chain have not been established.

This tune sets the pattern for all later fugal tunes. It begins with a homophonic opening, and then, exactly halfway through the text, it reduces the texture to one voice, changes motion with a burst of repeated quarter notes, builds additional voices in succession, and finally brings all the voices back together. The second section is twice as long as the first and is repeated, making it four times as long as the first. Later American composers would incorporate all of these features into their fugal tunes.

The text is from the *New Version* of the Psalms, by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady in 1696, so called because it was newer than the "old version," by Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins and others in the 1560s. The *New Version* was the official Psalter of the Church of England and thus provided many of the texts for early American psalmody. This vigorous, declamatory tune brings out the power of the text with great force and effect.

C Major New Version, 1696.

PSALM 34 C.M.

Joseph Stephenson, 1760.

1. Thro' all the chang-ing scenes_ of life, In trou-ble and in joy, The prais-es of my God shall still, The prais-es of my God shall still My heart,___ my heart___ and tongue em-ploy, My heart and tongue em- ploy. ploy. God, The prais-es of my God shall still My heart,___ My heart and tongue em-ploy, My heart and tongue em- ploy. ploy. prais-es of my God shall still My heart_____ and tongue em-ploy, My heart and tongue em-ploy. ploy. prais-es of my God shall still My heart_____ and tongue em-ploy, My heart and tongue em-ploy. ploy.

2. Of his deliv'rance I will boast,
Till all that are distrest,
From my example comfort take,
And charm their griefs to rest.

3. O! magnify the Lord with me,
With me exalt his name:
When in distress to him I call'd,
He to my rescue came.

4. Their drooping hearts were soon refresh'd,
Who look'd to him for aid;
Desir'd success in ev'ry face
A cheerful air display'd.

5. "Behold, (say they) behold the man,
Whom Providence reliev'd;
The man so dang'rously beset,
So wond'rously retriev'd!"

6. The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just;
Deliv'rance he affords to all,
Who on his succor trust.

7. O! make but trial of his love,
Experience will decide
How blest they are, and only they,
Who in his truth confide.

8. Fear him, ye saints; and you will then
Have nothing else to fear:
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.

9. While hungry lions lack their prey,
The Lord will food provide
For such as put their trust in him,
And see their needs supply'd.

William Billings, one of the chief early American composers and one who developed the fugging tune to its height, composed this tune in 1778. This tune is a sample of one that is a “fugue” only in the sense of “flying.” It has no text overlap though it has all the other features of the fugging style. Halfway through the text, it reduces texture to one voice, changes motion with quarter note declamation, and builds voices until it returns to a full four-part texture. Its second section is also repeated, making it over one and a half times as long as the first section.

Notice also the interesting word-painting in this tune. The melody notes descend on the word “descended” and rise on the words “above” and “high,” and the “flying” portion of the tune comes with the words “full royally he rode” and “flying all abroad.”

The text is Psalm 18 from the “old version” of the Psalter by Sternhold and Hopkins, one of the few tunes of early American psalmody to use a text from this Psalter. The ancient beauty and concise strength of this text is brought out majestically by this stirring tune.

MAJESTY C.M.

F Major Thomas Sternhold.

William Billings, 1778.

1. The Lord des - cend - ed from a - bove, And bow'd the heav'ns most high, And un - der - neath his feet he —
 1. The Lord — des - cend - ed from a - bove, And bow'd the heav'ns most high,
 1. The Lord — des - cend - ed from a - bove, And bow'd the heav'ns most high, And un - der - neath his feet — he
 1. The Lord — des - cend - ed from a - bove, And bow'd the heav'ns most high, his feet — he
 cast, The dark - ness of — the sky. Full roy - al - ly he rode, — And
 The dark - ness of — the sky. Full roy - al - ly he rode, — And
 cast, The dark - ness of — the sky. Full roy - al - ly he rode, And
 cast, The dark - ness of — the sky. On cher - ubs and on cher - u - bim, Full roy - al - ly he rode, And
 on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad, — And on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad.
 on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad, And on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad.
 on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad, And on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad.
 on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad, And on the wings of might - y winds Came fly - ing all a - broad.

2. And like a den most dark he made
 His hid and secret place,
 With waters black and airy clouds
 Encompassed he was.
 At his bright presence did thick clouds
 In haste away retire,
 And in the stead thereof did come
 Hail stones and coals of fire.

3. The fiery darts and thunderbolts
 Disperse them here and there,
 And with his frequent lightnings he
 Doth put them in great fear.
 When thou, O Lord, with great rebuke
 Thy anger dost declare,
 The springs and the foundations of
 The world discover'd are.

4. And from above the Lord sent down
 To fetch me from below,
 And pluck'd me out of waters great
 That would me overflow:
 And me deliver'd from my foes
 That sought me to enthrall,
 Yea, from such foes as were too strong
 For me to deal withal.

This tune "Montague" is a singular marvel of the tunes of early American psalmody. The composer, Timothy Swan, attended a New England singing school at the age of sixteen, and the very next year, at only seventeen years old, he produced this masterpiece. It is one of the most complex, challenging, and beautiful fugging tunes of the period. It demands a high tessitura in the melody (remaining high for an extended period of time) and the skill to execute the numerous decorations. When it breaks into the fugging section halfway through the text, it maintains text overlap for a challenging nine measures.

In this tune we see all the features of the declamatory duple style. After a homophonic opening, at the half-way point of the text it reduces texture to one voice, changes motion with a burst of quarter notes (several of which are repeated on the same pitch), builds voices to create text overlap, and finally comes to a homophonic conclusion. The second section with its repeat is almost exactly twice as long as the first.

The text is by Isaac Watts, as are so many texts of early American psalmody. Not the original text for which this tune was written, it is nevertheless one of the best fitting with which it was ever paired. This is Watts' version of Psalm 22, recording the "dying sorrows of our Lord" but with full assurance that he would be "raised from the dead" and "reign on high," that the nations would "learn his righteousness" and "humble sinners taste his grace." This truth is carried home forcefully by this masterpiece of a fugging tune.

D Minor Isaac Watts, 1719.

MONTAGUE L.M.

Timothy Swan, 1783.

1. Now let our mourn-ful songs re-cord The dy-ing sor-rows of our Lord, When he com-plain'd in tears and blood, As
 one for-sak-en of his God. The Jews be-held him thus for-lorn, And shake their
 heads, and laugh in scorn: "He res-cued oth-ers from the grave; Now let him try him-self to save. save.
 shake their heads and laugh in scorn: "He res-cued oth-ers from the grave, Now let him try him-self to save. save.
 res-cued oth-ers from the grave; He res-cued oth-ers from the grave; Now let him try him self to save. save.
 oth-ers from the grave; He res-cued oth-ers from the grave; Now let him try him-self to save. save.

2. "This is the man did once pretend
 God was his Father and his Friend;
 If God the blessed lov'd him so,
 Why doth he fail to help him now?"
 Barbarous people! cruel priests!
 How they stood round like savage beasts;
 Like lions gaping to devour,
 When God had left him in their power.

3. They wound his head, his hands, his feet,
 Till streams of blood each other meet;
 By lot his garments they divide,
 And mock the pangs in which he died.
 But God, his Father, heard his cry:
 Raised from the dead, he reigns on high;
 The nations learn his righteousness,
 And humble sinners taste his grace.

“Bridgewater” is one of the few fugal tunes that does not change motion simultaneously with its change of texture. It instead changes motion near the end of the tune, the melody bursting into quarter note declamation on the words “name be sung through ev’ry land,” and thus by these two features, the texture change and the later motion change, it drives the text home forcefully and ends with a very brief homophonic conclusion. Its second section with its repeat is almost three times as long as its first.

Lewis Edson was a blacksmith born in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, hence the name of this tune, one of his earliest. He was one of the early masters of the fugal tune, and his classic one “Lenox” is the only fugal tune found in hymnals today, sometimes with its text overlap retained, sometimes with it removed. “Bridgewater” is still sung today in certain places, especially among shape-note singers as it has been retained in their collections.

The text is one of the many with which it has been paired, Isaac Watts’ version of Psalm 117, the shortest Psalm in the Bible but a bright song of praise. It is conveyed beautifully by this stately fugal tune.

C Major Isaac Watts, 1719.

BRIDGEWATER L.M.

Lewis Edson, 1782.

1.From all that dwell be - low the skies, — Let the Cre - a - tor's praise a - rise; —
 2.E - ter - nal are thy mer - cies, Lord; — E - ter - nal truth at - tends thy word; —

1.From all that dwell be - low the skies, — Let the Cre - a - tor's praise a - rise; —
 2.E - ter - nal are thy mer - cies, Lord; — E - ter - nal truth at - tends thy word; —

1.From all that dwell be - low the skies, — Let the Cre - a - tor's praise a - rise; — Let the Re -
 2.E - ter - nal are thy mer - cies, Lord; — E - ter - nal truth at - tends thy word; — Thy praise shall

1.From all that dwell be - low the skies, — Let the Cre - a - tor's praise a - rise; — Let the Re - deem - er's name be
 2.E - ter - nal are thy mer - cies, Lord; — E - ter - nal truth at - tends thy word; — Thy praise shall sound from shore to

Let the Re - deem - er's name be sung Through ev - 'ry land, by ev - 'ry tongue. tongue.
 Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore, Till suns shall rise and set no more. more.

Let the Re - deem - er's name be sung Through ev - 'ry land, by ev - 'ry tongue. tongue.
 Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore, Till suns shall rise and set no more. more.

deem - er's name be sung, Let the Re - deem - er's name be sung Through ev - 'ry land, by ev - 'ry tongue. tongue.
 sound from shore to shore, Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore, Till suns shall rise and set no more. more.

sung Through ev - 'ry land, by ev - 'ry tongue; Through ev - 'ry land, by ev - 'ry tongue. tongue.
 shore, Till suns shall rise and set no more; Till suns shall rise and set no more. more.

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