

# PRISM

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## The American Singing School Revival

Stephen Marini

*Stephen Marini, Professor of Religion at Wellesley College, is Visiting Professor of Religion and Literature at ISM for the Spring 2001 term. A singing master for more than twenty-five years, he conducted singing schools on campus for the Tercentennial Celebration in October and the Up with a Shout! conference in January, and has also presented this tradition to his classes and in chapel. His new book, Sacred Song in America: Religion and Music at the Twenty First Century, will be published in 2002 by the University of Illinois Press.*

An important but little-noted aspect of the current renewal of sacred song is the revival of the American singing school tradition in urban and university communities throughout the country. This mode of unaccompanied hymn singing has been practiced continuously since Boston minister Thomas Walter convened the first American singing school there in 1723. Originally conceived by Puritan pastors to reform unison psalmody, which had fallen into cacophonous decline, the singing school brought together an intergenerational parish community for short periods to gain music literacy and learn rudimentary principles of singing. Successful schools often resulted in the organization of permanent choirs to support congregational singing.

By the Revolutionary era, the singing school had incorporated English country parish music into its repertory and fostered itinerant singing masters like Boston's William Billings and New Haven's Daniel Read who wrote accomplished original compositions in that style. Spreading rapidly west and south, the singing school became the leading institution of music education in the new nation from 1800 to 1850, its singing masters creating and publishing tens of thousands of harmonized psalm tunes, fusing tunes, spiritual ballads, camp meeting songs, and anthems set to the evangelical poetry of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. This is the music barely tolerated in mainline Protestant hymnals, represented by a few selections which until recently were identified simply as "early American melodies."

The singing school movement was greatly assisted by its "shape-note" systems of notation keying different syllables and degrees of the oral-aural scale to geometri-

C major scale



cally shaped note heads on the staff. The most popular shape-note system, developed around 1800, keyed the four syllables of the fa-so-la-mi sung scale to note heads shaped respectively as triangles, circles, squares, and diamonds.

The immense singing school repertory was collected in hundreds of tune books, the most important of which were William Walker's *The Southern Harmony* (1835) and B. F. White and E. J. King's *The Sacred Harp* (1844). These tune books supplied sacred music for worship, revivals, and social meetings of American frontier denominations, especially Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Disciples.

**CALVARY. C.M.**  
"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." -- 1 Cor. 2:14.

**A Minor Isaac Watts, 1707.**

**Daniel Read, 1785.**

continued on page 2

After the Civil War, the singing school began an extended period of decline. Already driven from urban churches in the North by the efforts of Congregationalist music educator Lowell Mason, whose papers reside at Yale, the singing school lost a pitched battle with the gospel hymn between 1880 and 1915 in the South. Further decline occurred after the Second World War as the cultural environment of the rural south succumbed to the modernizing forces of the interstate highway system and industrial investment. By 1970, fewer than 3000 traditional singers remained, the great majority of them participants in the network of periodic singings of *The Sacred Harp*, which, despite generally waning interest, had remained in print continuously since 1844.

Something strange then happened to the singing school tradition, however, that has brought it to renewed vigor and popularity. University scholars and folk music practitioners began singing these scores in small ensembles, finding unsuspected musical and spiritual power in their performance. In 1975, New England singers organized the first regional convention of *The Sacred Harp* outside the South, a two-day singing that observed traditional singing school rules. Through the unceasing efforts of traditional southern leaders and their new northern counterparts, regular singings and regional conventions of *The Sacred Harp* have been organized across the North in urban and university centers from Philadelphia to San Francisco, with extraordinarily successful singings in Chicago and Minneapolis leading the way. By 1995, new northern singers outnumbered traditional southern ones, and more are recruited every week.

What accounts for the new popularity of this archaic American sacred music, and what might that suggest for church music programs in urban and university communities? Many new northern singers are secular people; most of the rest adhere to liberal mainline Protestant denominations. They are drawn to singing school music, I think, for two principal reasons. The first is the very fact that the singing school's rituals are not associated with any specific ecclesiastical or liturgical tradition. Singers sit arranged around a hollow square according to their vocal part; a designated leader convenes the session, but songs are successively called and led from the center of the square by singers in the class. Everyone sings and everyone is encouraged to lead. These procedures create a strong sense of community through active participation in music making, bonds that are strengthened further by a tradition of hospitality and communal meals at singings.

The second reason for the revival of interest in the singing school, however, is the profound experience of sacrality that such plenary singing can produce. The music is traditionally performed full voice with personalized vocalisms and ornamentation, and local singings usually take at least two hours with just one brief break. Tunes are also sung in large groups: twenty to one hundred singers gather for local singings, while regional conven-

tions regularly draw two to four hundred singers. The sheer power of the sound can be overwhelming when first encountered, and endlessly moving when experienced over a long period.

The most intriguing dimension of the singing school's sacred power for contemporary northerners, however, is the words. The evangelical poetry of Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and their imitators of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries permeates *The Sacred Harp*. The songs give relentless voice to highly emotional lyrics about original sin, atonement, salvation, and heaven -- beliefs that secular and liberal northern singers would not normally affirm. Yet they sing them for hours at the top of their lungs and come back the next week for more. Those words confront singers with a profoundly traditional religious worldview that they accept along with the rest of singing school practice. New northern singers routinely describe their embrace of the singing school tradition in conversionary terms. There is something, they say, about the plenary singing, the rough-hewn music, and those old words that seems quintessentially American and genuinely transcendent.

I would suggest that there is a powerful resource here for mainline Protestant congregations. This is, after all, our own music, and any form of group activity that generates community, commitment, and enjoyment while at the same time giving expression to a classic formulation of the gospel is worth pursuing as ministry. The music is not difficult: any small choir can perform it as special music; any group of a dozen passable singers can try it out for themselves; any congregation can learn more about the historic faith by hearing or singing it in worship. These are the same constituencies for which this music was originally created, and they need to be gathered and nurtured by the power of sacred song today just as they did when the singing school began almost three centuries ago. The time has come to bring the music of the hollow square home, where it belongs.

### **Rebecca Chopp Named Dean of Yale Divinity School**

President Richard C. Levin has named Rebecca Chopp as the thirteenth Dean of the Yale Divinity School. Faculty, students, and staff gathered in the Common Room to hear the official announcement and join the president, with Provost Alison Richard, Deputy Provost Diana Kleiner, and Vice President Linda Lorimer, in welcoming the new Dean. Chopp, a scholar of Christian theology and an ordained Methodist minister who currently serves as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Emory University in Atlanta, offered an enthusiastic greeting to the community. "Working together," she affirmed, "I believe we can strengthen the presence of the Divinity School at Yale and help to envision what theological education will look like in the twenty-first century."

*continued on page 3*

## OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND

### *Home-thoughts from Abroad, by Bryan Spinks*

*Director's Note: Hail to Spring! It has seemed to us at ISM that this has been a long and hard winter, now reluctantly giving way to spring. As a celebratory tonic, we asked Professor Bryan Spinks to share some comments about his trip home to England last year, which he was especially glad to make in springtime. Here he focuses upon the hospitality and joy which the season brings to the countryside and the tea table.*

—Margot Fassler

Back in 1999, I had been invited to deliver the Hensley Henson Lectures in the University of Oxford during the month of May 2000. The subject of the lectures, which will be published in book form by Ashgate toward the end of 2001, was *Sacraments, Ceremonies and Stuart Divines, 1603-1662*, looking at disputes on ceremonies, liturgical compilation and revision, and sacramental theology in England and Scotland. Through the good offices of Diarmaid MacCulloch (of Thomas Cranmer fame, and a former Churchill College student), I had been made a Visiting Fellow of St. Cross College. Moreover, invitations to High Tables at other Oxford Colleges—St. Hilda's, Christ Church, New College, Exeter and St. Catharine's—provided further rich fare and conversation. I was also a guest at the Leaver's Dinner at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, one of the leading Church of England seminaries. There I was introduced to one of the University Old Testament professors who announced that he was pleased to meet Bryan Spinks, who, several of them now thought, should have been appointed to the chair of ecclesiastical history!

The lectures attracted a number of Oxford scholars and research students, including Henry Chadwick, Christopher Haigh (another ex-Churchill College historian), and Felicity Heal. Faithful in attendance also was John Fenton, the New Testament scholar and Canon Emeritus of Christ Church, who was my former Principal at Durham. I was pleased to meet up with Peter Van Inwagen whom I got to know at Notre Dame, and who was giving the Wilde Lectures.

The visit coincided with a meeting of the Liturgical Commission at Ely, and so I was able to make my second appearance or "real presence" at the Commission in five years. It is ironical—and tells something of the state of liturgy in academic institutions in England - that two of the three consultants (Paul Bradshaw and I) are

professors of liturgy in American universities!

After Ely, I experienced the hospitality of Churchill College, Cambridge, and the next day I had lunch at Trinity College with the Regius Professor of Divinity, David Ford, followed by tea at Westcott House Theological College with (among others) Ruth Lampard, who spent fall semester 1999 with us at YDS. After a few days in Peterborough with family, I returned to Churchill, this time as guest preacher at Chapel. How delighted they were to welcome me back to Cambridge at the expense of Oxford! How strange it was to be there as guest preacher after seventeen years as Chaplain!

After the third lecture at Oxford, I headed to Durham for my next speaking engagement. I was fêted at a special High Table by my old College, St. Chad's, where I had been made an Honorary Fellow. It was good to see some old faces: Charles Cranfield, who lectured on Romans (usually spending the hour lecture on one verse at a time—we were guinea-pigs for his work for the two volumes in the ICC series), and who taught me to appreciate Karl Barth and Calvin; and Gerald Bonner, the Augustine scholar, who taught me church history and the appreciation of sherry.

The return to Oxford ushered in a glorious final few days, with real sunshine and warm May weather and plenty of walks through Christ Church meadows. A "fine careless rapture" indeed!

#### NOTE:

*Professor Spinks spent the second part of spring break this year in the Diocese of the Windward Islands, at the invitation of the Anglican bishop, the Rt. Rev. Sehon Goodridge, to address groups of clergy and laity about liturgical revision and praying the liturgy. He spent four days in Grenada, and four days in St. Vincent. When a teenager, Professor Spinks was an altar server in the village of Cressing, in Essex, England. The Rector, Fr. Alastair Sandeman, had served at the Cathedral Church of St. George in Kingstown, St. Vincent. When Professor Spinks was Chaplain at Churchill College, Cambridge, the Bursar was Hywel George, who had been the last British Administrator/Governor of St. Vincent. Professor Spinks met people who remembered both men. The Bishop of St. Vincent has invited Professor Spinks to be a consultant to the Liturgical Committee of the Diocese.*

*Rebecca Chopp continued—*

After thanking interim dean Harry Adams and praising the efforts of the search committee chaired by Nicholas Wolterstorff, President Levin said, "Rebecca Chopp brings an extraordinary array of strengths to her new position at Yale, and we are extremely fortunate to have attracted a person of such distinction. She is an outstanding scholar as

well as an energetic and capable administrator. Her judgment and humanity are widely appreciated by her colleagues at Emory and elsewhere. She comes to the Divinity School at a crucial time in its history, when the school is in the midst of unprecedented renewal."

A distinguished theologian, dean-designate Chopp received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1983. She has written

several books and many articles, and is widely regarded as a leader in her specialties. She also has served in a number of administrative capacities, including dean of faculty and academic affairs at the Candler School of Theology. She is currently President of the American Academy of Religion. Chopp will be named Professor of Theology and Culture at Yale Divinity School, and will assume her duties as dean on July 1, 2001.

## Alumni and Student News

### ISM Alumni

**David Ouzts** '87 notes that his little parish cathedral has secured its own internet domain. David's e-mail address is now dpouzts@gracecathedraltopeka.org.

**Leigh Axton Williams** '91, leigh.williams.DIV.91@aya.yale.edu., will become Associate Chaplain and teacher of history and religion in the Upper School of the Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge. Students range in age from 4 to 18 (K-12). She will continue to work on her dissertation for General Theological Seminary. After the middle of August her address will be: The Episcopal School of Baton Rouge, 3200 Woodland Ridge Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70816.

### Student News

**Brian Harlow** '01 will be interim organist and choir director at Groton School, Groton MA for the 2001-02 academic year, while Craig Smith UTS '67 is on sabbatical. Brian is an alum of Groton. The following year, he will return to Yale to pursue the MMA degree.

**Paul Jacobs** '02 is now represented exclusively by Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists. Paul is currently prepare a cycle of the complete organ works of Olivier Messiaen which will be performed next year in New York City, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's death.

### Faculty News

—This just in from the “April Fool’s Q Spoof”—

#### **Harry Adams named Interim Football Coach**

In a surprise announcement Friday, President Richard Levin named Professor Harry Adams interim varsity Football coach. Adams, a stand-out halfback in his Yale undergrad days, has no previous coaching experience. He does, however, have significant facility in prayer, which he is expected to parlay into many Yale victories. “I am looking forward to taking over the helm of yet another gentlemanly endeavor, especially one as challenging as the God Squad (Adams’ pet name for the team).” On a related note, next year’s schedule includes Holy Cross, Notre Dame (High School of West Haven), Messiah College, St. John’s, Sacred Heart, Incarnate Word College, St. Olaf four times, and Ozark Christian College.

## Placement Listings

### Connecticut — Music Director

**FAITH CONGREGATIONAL (UCC)**, 2030 Main St, Hartford, CT 06120. 860-547-0820; fax 860-293-1541. Historic black Congregational church is seeking an Organist/Choir Director. Candidate must be familiar with black church hymnody, sacred anthems and display competence on both pipe and Hammond organs. Proficiency in voice and piano necessary. Successful candidate will oversee church’s music program and also direct the church’s chancel and men’s choir. Please contact Dr. Barbara E. Headley, Pastor.

**GOLDEN HILL UMC**, 210 Elm St, Bridgeport, CT 06604. 203-336-0152. Music Director for two Sunday morning services and 6 pm Wednesday service. Chancel and youth choirs, bell choir. 1929 3-manual Moller organ, rebuilt in 1969. Salary is listed between \$21-24,000 on a 12-month basis. Position begins 5/07/01. For information, contact Rev. Dr. Brian Schofield-Bodt at the church.

**HAMDEN PLAINS UMC**, 20 Broadfield Rd, Hamden CT 06517. 203-288-0286. Part-

time organist/choir director. 3-manual Allen organ. Contact the church for more information.

**SAINT JAMES (RC) Church**, 767 Elm St, Rocky Hill, CT 06067. 860-529-8655; fax 860-257-1754. Full time Director of Music for 1800-member parish. Familiarity with Vatican II liturgy and traditional/contemporary music desired. Responsibilities include weekend masses, funerals, weddings, directing adult and children’s choirs and paid cantors, and overseeing maintenance of 18-rank 1943 Austin organ (rebuilt 2000). Contact Fr. Tom Shepard.

**SAINT JAMES EPISCOPAL**, 25 West St, Danbury, CT 06810. 203-748-3561; fax 203-744-6350. Organist/Choir Director. Two Sunday morning services, adult and youth choirs, 3-manual Allen organ. Begins Summer 2001. Contact Rev. Dr. Laura Ahrens at the church.

**SAINT LUKE’S EPISCOPAL**, 111 Whalley Ave, New Haven, CT 06511. 203-865-0141. Organist for one Sunday mass and seasonal services. The organist is also responsible for the youth choir.

Weekly rehearsals with the chancel and youth choirs. Extra compensation for weddings and funerals and directing the instrumental ensemble. Salary is listed between \$11-\$13,000. Contact Fr. Victor A. Rogers, Rector.

**ST. PETER’S EPISCOPAL**, 71 River St, Milford, CT 06460. 203-874-8562; fax 203-878-2152; e-mail stpetersmilford@aol.com. Adult choir, one rehearsal and one service per week. Ideal candidate will have excellent keyboard and choral conducting skills, tradition for Anglican liturgy, and willingness to work with a leadership team. Two-manual Baker organ, 23 ranks. Salary is listed at \$12-14,000 and will be based on AGO standards. Contact Phyllis Mullins at the church.

**TRINITY EPISCOPAL**, 91 Church, Seymour CT. 203-888-6596. Alto and Tenor section leaders for the 10 am choral Eucharist, Christmas Eve and Easter Day. Additional Holy Days negotiable. Thursday evening choir rehearsal from 7-8:30 pm. Salary is listed as \$50/week for 35 weeks. If interested, please contact David Davison, Music Director.

*Postings continued on page 5*

### Out of State — Music Director

ALL SAINTS EPISCOPAL, 800 Abbott Road, East Lansing, MI 48823. 517-351-7160. Full time Minister of Music for three Sunday services and Evening Prayer (sung) Monday-Friday at 5:30 pm. Adult and children's choirs, 8-member early music ensemble. 1958 McManis organ. Salary is listed at \$36-37,000 with relocation costs up to \$2500. Present Music Director becoming a postulant. Anticipated start date is Fall 2001. Experience in Episcopal liturgy essential. Rector (YDS '90) has a master's in music and will respect your freedom. For more information contact Rev. Caroline Stacey at the church.

BRIDGEWATER UMC, 651 Country Club Rd, Bridgewater, NJ 08807. 908-526-1414 x3. Full time Music Director/Organist for two Sunday services. Two adult choirs, 4 children's vocal and bell choirs. Responsibilities will include overseeing volunteer music leaders.

CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE KING (RC), 2699 Peachtree Rd, Atlanta, GA 30305. 404-233-2145. Part-time Assistant Organist for 4800-family parish. Present music staff has a Director of Music, a Choirmaster and a Cathedral Organist. Duties will include playing for 2-3 week-end liturgies and accompanying choirs. Master's degree in organ and experience in liturgic tradition preferred. Three-manual, 66-rank 1991 Goulding and Wood organ. Salary range is \$25-35,000. Additional remuneration available. Please contact the Music Search Committee at x 494.

CENTERPORT UMC, 97 Little Neck Rd, Centerport, NY 11721. 631-261-5222; [www.onlongisland.net/cumc](http://www.onlongisland.net/cumc). Two positions: eleven month position as Organist to accompany three choirs, and 10-month position as Choir Director. Once-a-week evening rehearsal. Both positions begin Fall 2001. Contact Robert Domencetti, 631-261-5977.

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, 209 E. Lomita Ave, Glendale, CA 91205. 818-247-2222. Director of Music with experience and knowledge of Catholic liturgy. Position begins Summer 2001. Please contact the church for more information.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TOMS RIVER, 1070 Hooper Ave, Toms River, NJ 08753. 732-349-1331; fax 732-505-2045. Full time Music Associate. Successful candidate will be primarily responsible

for a new 4<sup>th</sup> worship service, to be held at 5:00 pm Saturdays, beginning Fall 2001. Music planning and other duties dependent upon the skills/interests of the new Associate. 1970's Henry Baecker organ in sanctuary, 1994 Wicks organ in the chapel (playable from the main console). Compensation range is \$24-32,000 with benefits. Contact Mary Ellen Hudson, Associate Music Search Committee, at the church.

SUGAR LAND FIRST UMC, 431 Eldridge Rd, Sugar Land, TX 77478. 281-491-6041; fax: 281-242-0771; Director of Worship and Music Ministries for 3500-member congregation with a new 1000 seat sanctuary, located southeast of Houston. Master's Degree preferred with five years' church music experience. For more information, contact the church.

*Note: Additional job postings can be found on the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians web site: [www.alcm.org](http://www.alcm.org), and the United Methodist Reporter Communications web site: [www.umr.org](http://www.umr.org). Listings are ecumenical.*

### Academic

ILLINOIS CENTRAL COLLEGE, One College Dr, East Peoria, IL 61635. Music Instructor. Master's degree in music or closely related discipline required. Knowledge of choral music conducting, piano/keyboard, academic classroom teaching (music appreciation, music literature, or music theory), current music technology experience, program recruitment and community college teaching experience desirable. Submit letter of application, current c.v. copies of undergraduate and graduate transcripts, and a list of at least 3 references to Human Resources. An application form can be downloaded from [www.icc.cc.il.us/hr/application](http://www.icc.cc.il.us/hr/application). The initial screening of applications begins April 13 and continues until the successful candidate is selected.

MALONE COLLEGE, 515-25th Street NW, Canton, OH 44709. Assistant Professor of Music, tenure-track, Choral/General Music Education Specialist and Conductor of the Women's Concert Choir, beginning August 2001. Qualifications include earned doctorate in Music Education, ABD considered (doctorate required for tenure). Candidates must have choral conducting experience and a record of success-

ful teaching in the public schools (minimum of three years' experience required). Preference will be given to candidates with college/university teaching experience. Applied voice, music technology, and/or world music experience a plus. Responsibilities: Direct the Women's Concert Choir, teach general and choral music education courses, supervise student teachers, advising, and other classes as assigned by the chair. Candidates must be strongly committed to the mission of Malone College, which is to provide quality education for students seeking to integrate faith and learning within a Christian worldview and in the context of the liberal arts. We seek applicants who have a personal commitment to Christ and who promote and demonstrate Christian values in all areas of life and learning. Send letter of application, c.v., names and addresses of three references, and statement of Christian commitment to Dr. Robert Suggs, Provost. Review of applications will begin immediately and continues until the position is filled.

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY, P.O. Box 425768, Denton, TX 76204-5768. Visiting Assistant Professor of Choral Activities, beginning 8-20-01. Candidates must have a master's degree in music (doctorate preferred) with successful choral directing experience in secondary or higher education settings. Teaching responsibilities include directing and/or overseeing all choir and other choral/vocal ensembles. Additional classroom assignments will be expected in keeping with academic expertise. Recruiting budget management and faculty committee participation is expected. Applicants should submit a letter of application, a c.v. and a list of six professional contacts. Please send no recordings. A review of applications will begin April 2 and continue until the position is filled. Contact Dr. Janice Killian, Director of Music Programs, Department of Performing Arts. Phone 940-898-2505 or e-mail [jkillian@twu.edu](mailto:jkillian@twu.edu).

ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE AT MERAMEC, 11333 Big Bend Blvd, Kirkwood, MO 63122. Choral/voice/theory instructor. Responsibilities include conducting the Concert Chorale, serving as music director for the spring musical, teaching two levels of class voice and four levels of music theory. Master's minimum, previous teaching in these areas required. Application deadline is 4/09. Contact Ronald E. Stilwell, Chair, Search Committee.

## ACDA REPORT

A large contingent of alums was present at the recent ACDA convention in San Antonio. They included UTS alums Eugene Butler, Ann Clarkson Cooper Turpin, and Dale Fisk. Yale School of Music alums seen at the convention were David Tang, John King, Nadine Jurgensen, Craig Johnson, Thomas Brand and others. ISM alums were represented by Shelle Louer, Marian Dolan, Florence Jowers, Paul Weber, Aeri Lee, Anna Song, David Surratt, Roselyn Weber, Tram Sparks and Brad Wells. Also attending were Yale Camerata alum Teresa Baker and ISM students Rebecca Rosenbaum and Garmon Ashby.



—Photos courtesy of Ruth Lackstrom—

At Left

l to r: Ann Turpin, Dale Fisk with his wife

Bottom Left

l to r: Shelle Louer, Brad Wells and Maggi Brooks

Bottom Right

l to r: Rebecca Rosenbaum, Tom Brand and Garmon Ashby

