

Music Blurbs for 9-15-19

News and Notes

This week we'll sing "What wondrous love is this," "Amazing grace," and "Praise, my soul, the King of heaven." The choir will sing "Send Down Thy Peace, O God" by Daniel Gawthrop. Of local interest, Mr. Gawthrop spent some time in the DC area as Composer-in-Residence for the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and music critic for *The Washington Post*. He has had works premiere at the Kennedy Center and Washington National Cathedral, and has also had works performed and recorded by the USAF Singing Sergeants, Thomas Circle Singers, and the Cathedral Choral Society.

Sunday Bulletins

"What wondrous love is this" is an iconic hymn in America's shape note singing tradition. In the late eighteenth century in America, tune books began to be published with a new method for learning how to read music for singing: different shapes for different pitches. Singing schools popped up all over the country where people would come to socialize and learn to sing. However, by the 1840s and 50s the "better music" movement gained popularity in the northeast and urban areas of the country. The "better music" method followed European models of teaching letter names to notes (A, B, C). Shape note singing became relegated to the rural South and Appalachia, where it continued to thrive and develop a tradition of its own with collections like *The Sacred Harp* and the "harmony" books such as *The Southern Harmony*.

The anonymous text first appeared in a Methodist publication from Lynchburg, Virginia in 1811. The tune was originally an English folk tune that got recycled for many different texts such as the ballad about the exploits of the pirate Captain Kidd: "My name was Robert Kidd, when I sailed, when I sailed." Setting religious texts to well-known tunes was fairly common practice in earlier times. The "Wondrous love" text and this tune first appeared together in print in the 1840 publication of William Walker's *The Southern Harmony* (New Haven, CT). The linking of the text and tune were attributed to "Christopher." In that publication, the tune was arranged (by Christopher) for three voices and is the alternate version in our hymnal. Many years later in 1867, in Walker's *Christian Harmony* (Philadelphia, PA), "Christopher" was identified as James Christopher of Spartanburg, South Carolina.

The editors of the present hymnal strove to include a wider variety of music and styles than they had in the past. While its first appearance in an Episcopal Church USA publication was in 1971 in the supplement *More Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, this is the first time that "What wondrous love" ever appeared in an Episcopal Church hymnal.