

JOHN WESLEY'S "DIRECTIONS FOR SINGING": METHODIST HYMNODY AS AN EXPRESSION OF METHODIST BELIEFS IN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

MARTIN V. CLARKE

John Wesley's "Directions for Singing" was included as an appendage to *Select Hymns: with Tunes Annexed* (1761), a collection of hymn texts and tunes designed for congregational use across the Methodist Connexion.¹ Although a list of only seven brief points, it reveals much about the way in which Wesley desired music to be used in Methodist worship and the benefits that he believed could be reaped from its effective use. Carlton Young suggests that the "Directions" represent "Wesley's attempts to standardize hymn singing performance and repertory,"² which is borne out by their publication together with the tunes of *Select Hymns*, which Wesley advocated as authentically Methodist. The full significance of these instructions can only be understood when they are considered in relation to the theological and doctrinal position of Methodism, while they need to be assessed alongside *Select Hymns* and other collections of tunes used within Methodism in order to evaluate their impact. They highlight the importance Wesley attached to *Select Hymns*, while also offering more general practical advice, before concluding with a reminder of the purpose of congregational singing:

That this part of Divine Worship may be the more acceptable to God, as well as the more profitable to yourself and others, be careful to observe the following directions.

- I. Learn *these* Tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please.
- II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.
- III. Sing *All*. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up and you will find a blessing.
- IV. Sing *lustily* and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of *Satan*.
- V. Sing *modestly*. Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.
- VI. Sing in *Time*: whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before

¹ Hereafter, *Select Hymns*. This collection is often referred to as *Sacred Melody*, although this title was not added to the collection until publication of the second edition in 1765.

² Carlton R. Young, *Music of the Heart: John and Charles Wesley on Music and Musicians* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1995), 72.

nor stay behind it; but attend closely to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can. And take care you sing not *too slow*. This drawing way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.

VII. Above all sing *spiritually*. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your *Heart* is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the *Lord* will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.³

The "Directions for Singing" and Methodist Theology

The first point is a clear indication of the central place that *Select Hymns* was intended to occupy in Methodist worship. Wesley's first direction indicates that the tunes contained therein were meant to be both suitable and sufficient for the needs of any Methodist congregation, although it does allow for the conditional use of other music. Wesley made clear that other music should only supplement tunes in *Select Hymns* rather than to replace them. The first direction also emphasises the connexional nature of Methodism and Wesley's attempts to ensure that each local society conformed to standard Methodist practices in its worship.

The societal and connexional structure of Methodism was one of Wesley's key principles in organising the movement and attempting to order its devotional activities. Wesley drew on a number of influences: Anglican religious societies, his experiences with his brother Charles as members of the Holy Club in Oxford, and their observance of Moravian practices in Georgia. John Wesley developed Methodism's societal structure so that individual members might support, encourage and admonish one another and seek to spread the Gospel. Theological and doctrinal principles were adhered to at a local level through a tiered connexional form of governance and directed by Wesley through the Methodist Conference meetings. This societal organisation had a strong theological basis in Wesley's advocacy of an Arminian understanding of salvation, whereby God's grace was freely offered to all, and his emphasis on the pursuit of holiness.

Individual members were expected to participate in a variety of communal activities and to report their spiritual progress to their fellow believers on a regular basis, under the guidance of an appointed lay leader. Hymn-singing played a vital role in almost all Methodist meetings and the frequently issued collections of hymns, mostly written by Charles Wesley, were designed to communicate the essential beliefs of Methodism in a concise and memorable fashion. Music clearly played a key part in this area of Methodist worship and communication; Wesley's advocacy of the tunes appended to *Select Hymns* suggests that he regarded them as possessing suitable qualities for congregational use, such as being memorable, approachable and interesting.

³ John Wesley, "Directions for Singing," quoted in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* ed. Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge and Frank Baker, vol. 7, *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 765.

The second point gives further evidence of Wesley's attempts to instil uniform performance practices across Methodism; this instruction is even more prescriptive than the first, seeking to control the manner in which the tunes are sung as well as promoting a common repertoire. The advocacy of this simple mode of performance is also derived from Arminian theological precepts and may be seen as having twofold significance. First, it seeks to prevent musically literate members from altering or embellishing tunes in a manner that might preclude less skilled singers from participating and thus undermine Methodism's central message of grace universally and unconditionally offered. Wesley's reaction to this practice is recorded in his diary entry for August 9, 1768, following a visit to Neath: "I began reading prayers at six, but was greatly disgusted at the manner of singing: (1) twelve or fourteen persons kept it to themselves, and quite shut out the congregation . . ."⁴

Moreover, the second direction foreshadows the final direction by warning against potentially distracting musical embellishments, thus defying the purpose of congregational singing in focusing the singer's attention on the textual content of the hymn. S T Kimbrough, Jr., comments on the close relationship between the "Directions" and *Select Hymns*, arguing that the former represents a clear statement of the quality of the latter and the benefits it afforded, which are illustrated chiefly in these first two points:

I suspect that part of what is behind the directions is that with a core of good tunes in prevalent meters one could sing many different hymns . . . For example, in *Select Hymns*, 1761, most tunes are assigned to more than one hymn. Above all, I think the Wesleys had come to understand the power of the wedding of text and tune as the most vital way of celebrating and remembering faith, scripture, theology, and the task of social service.⁵

The third point further emphasises Wesley's theological position and attitude towards musical participation; like the earlier points, it is concerned with the communal aspect of worship but highlights the importance of individual participation and commitment. In theological terms, Wesley's model for Methodist organisation was designed to communicate the offer of salvation to every believer, but also to encourage a rigorous and active commitment to the ethos of the movement from each member. Class meetings had a disciplinary function in admonishing members who had neglected their duties, while the subject headings in the seminal *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780) include "For Persons convinced of Backsliding" and "For Backsliders recovered." This exhortation attempts to impress upon the individual the need for their continued participation in worship to maintain their spiritual well-being.

Points four, five and six contain more specific musical advice but are nonetheless inspired by the same basic theological principles. The exhortation to "Sing *lustily* and with good courage" is clearly aimed at inspiring confidence in faith and uses a scriptural reference to reinforce its message;

⁴ Quoted in Young, *Music of the Heart*, 97.

⁵ Quoted in Young, *Music of the Heart*, 73

the charge to "lift up your voice with strength" is quoted directly from Isaiah 40:9, itself a command to boldly proclaim God's presence to the world.⁶ Here, Wesley's twofold understanding of the purpose of congregational song can be seen. On one level, the congregants are encouraged to contribute to an enthusiastic expression of worship, while the second sentence—"Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of *Satan*"—is indicative of the use of hymns as evangelistic tools, as the singers are instructed to sing in such a way that the central theological message of each hymn is boldly proclaimed. It also reflects Wesley's practice of using hymnody as a means of relating the sacred and secular worlds of his followers; he attempts to channel the energy that they once expended in singing secular melodies into the singing of hymns that express their new-found faith. This relationship between the sacred and secular will be explored in greater detail hereafter, in connection with the musical content of *Select Hymns*.

Point five is linked to point two, reinforcing the principle of equal participation by all members of the congregation. Baker and Beckerlegge comment on Wesley's use of the word "harmony," which seems to contradict his advocacy of unison singing as evinced in the musical settings in *Select Hymns* and later forcefully argued in "Thoughts on the Power of Music."⁷ While this may indicate that harmony singing was prevalent in Methodism, even with Wesley's blessing, it also seems that he is using the term figuratively to describe the desired unity of the congregation.⁸ Ultimately, it is a warning not to allow musical ability or enthusiasm to override the more important function of expressing corporate praise, prayer and belief.

Point six gives perhaps the most practical musical advice, but is still directed towards promoting the unity of the congregation. It gives approval to the use of leaders to direct and guide the whole congregation and upon them is vested the responsibility of adopting a suitable tempo for full and enthusiastic participation. The injunction "take care you sing not *too slow*" seems to refer to the so-called "Old Way of Singing," which prevailed in parish churches in the late seventeenth century, largely as a result of a lack of musical direction. Nicholas Temperley gives a general description of the main causes and results of the style:

⁶ Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge and Baker, eds., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, 765, n.3. The whole verse reads "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" (Is. 40:9 Authorised Version)

⁷ Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge and Baker, eds., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, 765, n.5.

⁸ This figurative use of the term is clearly related to the musical concept; Dryden's *Ode to St Cecilia* famously begins with the lines "From harmony, from heavenly harmony/The universal frame began," which is a clear illustration of the same dual and related meanings of the term. Charles Wesley uses the term in a similar way in his "Musician's Hymn," which begins "Thou God of harmony and love." Although clearly derived from musical language, the term is used metaphorically to describe God's goodness and benevolence.

In places where congregations are left to sing hymns without musical direction for long periods, a characteristic style of singing tends to develop. The tempo becomes extremely slow; the sense of rhythm is weakened; extraneous pitches appear, sometimes coinciding with the hymn tune, sometimes inserted between them; the total effect may be dissonant.⁹

Elsewhere, referring specifically to the development of this style in English parishes of the late-seventeenth century, together with the practice of “lining-out,” he argues that its prevalence is not surprising:

Such a development was not unnatural when, for a hundred years or more, parochial congregations had been left without any sort of musical direction The old psalm tunes became slower and slower and lost their distinctive rhythms (the printed psalm books provide abundant evidence of both trends); the more difficult tunes dropped out of use.¹⁰

By the turn of the eighteenth century, there were many attempts to eradicate this style of singing; significantly, Temperley notes that it was the rise of Arminian theology amongst the high-church members of the Church of England that brought this about:

There was greater emphasis on the corporate nature of worship, less on the individual worshipper. Increasing material prosperity made the “hoarse or base sound” of the Old Way seem unacceptable to middle-class people who were familiar with art music; they began to feel that God, too, would not accept it, and that only the best possible music should be used in His service.¹¹

Wesley’s own Arminian theology is clearly behind his desire to avoid this practice, but the particular circumstances of early Methodism made this specific warning necessary. As early Methodist meetings were usually held either outdoors or in rooms not specifically designed for congregational worship, lining-out was commonly used to teach new hymns to those attending,¹² while the movement’s prevalence among the industrial communities meant that many of its followers were not accustomed to the contemporary art music style preferred by Wesley and the more middle-class members of both Methodism and the Church of England, making clear instructions vital.

The unifying principle that seems to underlie the first six directions is that all worshippers should be enabled to participate in hymn singing in order that they might express their faith, be encouraged and challenged in it, and share it with those around them. Robin Leaver’s definition of the concept of the priesthood of all believers offers a useful theological framework for interpreting the emphasis Wesley placed on this principle. Leaver argues that the congregation truly means the entire assembly, including musicians, preacher and celebrant, but that in practice, the idea of the priesthood of all believers is often denied, even if it is acknowledged in principle by the

⁹ Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 34 (1981): 511.

¹⁰ Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing,” *The Musical Times* 120 (1979): 945.

¹¹ Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” 536.

¹² Temperley notes that George Whitefield was an acknowledged master of leading straight into a hymn by lining out the melody immediately after preaching (535).

persons concerned, with musicians granted an elevated, levitical status. He claims that the congregation is more commonly understood merely as those who have no defined role in the liturgical process, which can result in them being separated from the music and the musicians. Instead, he advocates an environment where the musicians, even if located separately from the main body of people, serve to enhance, encourage and lead the music of the congregation.¹³ This clearly accords with Wesley's own understanding of the whole congregation as an equal body of believers and offers a plausible explanation of the theological construction of these directions, particularly given the prominence of lay leadership at local level within Methodism. Wesley appears to attribute a twofold importance to congregational song, emphasising at once the duty of the whole worshipping community to include everyone present in its musical activities and also indicating to the individual believer their requirement to participate fully in the life of the Society in order to fulfil their religious calling.

The final direction is the most overtly spiritual and makes use of a further biblical quotation to reinforce its message; the final phrase, "when he cometh in the clouds of heaven," is taken from Matthew 26:64, but unlike the earlier quotation from Isaiah, it bears little contextual relation to worship. This direction firmly establishes that the use of music in worship is only a means to an end; the previous directions all hinge on this final point if the music is to be of any assistance in enhancing the religious experience of those participating. Wesley's words function both as a warning and a challenge to the congregation about the conduct of their worship.¹⁴

While the earlier directions provide more practical advice, this final point is the most instructive in terms of Wesley's perception of the value and significance of communal singing in Methodist meetings. Again, Leaver offers a model for understanding this approach; he suggests that music in the context of worship is essentially functional, and that it forms part of the theological construction of worship, claiming that "The intertwining duet of music and theology form the substance of Biblical theology,"¹⁵ and argues both a biblical precedence for the use of music in the propagation of the Divine message and also its historical significance in the worship of the Christian Church. According to Leaver, music in a theological context is far removed from the concept of "absolute music," and exists to fulfil a practical purpose. He goes on to assert that Church music cannot justify its own existence; rather, it must be grounded in the theological context of the Church's worship. Furthermore, he argues that there is a strong practical theological link between the Bible and music, with music providing the "accompaniment" to

¹³ Robin A. Leaver, "The Theological Character of Music in Worship," in *Duty and Delight, Routley Remembered: A Memorial Tribute to Erik Routley, 1917-1982, Ministry, Church Music, Hymnology*, ed. Robin A. Leaver, James H. Litton, and Carlton R. Young (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co., 1985), 58.

¹⁴ Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge and Baker, eds., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, 765.

¹⁵ Leaver, "The Theological Character of Music in Worship," 47-48.

the explanation offered by the Bible of the interaction between God and humankind.¹⁶ Thus, for Leaver, music forms a vital part of Christian worship, taking on an important role in the expounding of theology.

It is clear from Wesley's insistence that the Methodists should "sing spiritually" that he too understood this close connection and desired his followers to use it to their advantage. The words of the hymns were of the utmost importance, "attend strictly to the sense of what you sing," but the music enabled the worship to attain greater spiritual heights and to be a more fitting expression of praise, "such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven." Kimbrough suggests that "The hymns had become the 'theological memory' of the Methodist movement"¹⁷ and notes the significance of the final direction in understanding Wesley's views, "One could perhaps find directions 1-6 in any good book on hymn or choral singing, but No. 7 is the crowning direction of John Wesley and the Methodist movement."¹⁸

These directions are Wesley's clearest and most comprehensive attempt to offer practical advice and establish normative musical practices across the movement. Grounded in scripture and his theological position, they represent a characteristically Methodist combination of good practice underpinned by clear principles. Young sums up their significance in understanding Wesley's approach to music and worship: "Wesley's lifelong efforts to standardize the rhetoric and music of congregational song—the unity of emotion and the cognate—the heart and the head—became a distinctive mark of the eighteenth-century Methodist revival in Britain."¹⁹

"Directions for Singing" and Methodist Music in Practice: Select Hymns

Between 1742 and c.1790, John Wesley oversaw the issuing of three principal collections of hymn tunes for use across the Methodist Connexion. Of these, *Select Hymns* was the second, first issued in 1761 and running to four editions.²⁰ Wesley's preface to the volume indicates that he held it in high esteem, primarily for its textual content, but presumably also for its practical value in providing appropriate music to which the texts could be sung. It succeeded *A Collection of Tunes, set to music, as they are commonly sung at the Foundery* (1742) and was in all respects a far superior publication, with higher editorial standards and a larger body of tunes.

In terms of the repertoire contained in both collections, certain similarities may be observed, although the later collection includes material drawn from a wider range of sources. The *Foundery Collection* draws on two principal

¹⁶ Leaver, "The Theological Character of Music in Worship," 49.

¹⁷ Quoted in Young, *Music of the Heart*, 73.

¹⁸ Quoted in Young, *Music of the Heart*, 74.

¹⁹ Young, *Music of the Heart*, 74.

²⁰ Nicholas Temperley, Sources *TS Wes a, *TS Wes b, *The Hymn Tune Index*, <http://hymntune.library.uiuc.edu> (accessed April 30, 2008). The four editions were printed in 1761, 1765, 1770 and 1773; the *Hymn Tune Index* notes that the second, third, and fourth editions had identical contents.

genres: Germanic chorale melodies principally learned through Wesley's relationship with the Moravians, and British metrical psalm tunes, mainly from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In addition, it sets an important precedent by including an adaptation of a secular melody, a march from Handel's opera *Riccardo Primo*. *Select Hymns* also drew on the two main genres used in the *Foundery Collection* and expanded the use of secular adaptations. It is important to note that these were settings which were chiefly adapted from contemporary art music, both vocal and instrumental, reflecting the cultural background and tastes of John and Charles Wesley; neither collection, nor the later *Sacred Harmony*, provides any evidence to support the oft-rehearsed claim that the Wesleys were in the habit of borrowing popular melodies from taverns during their travels.²¹ *Select Hymns* included many more contemporary tunes, some of which, such as those by John Frederick Lampe, had been written for specific texts by Charles Wesley. These newer tunes frequently reflected contemporary art music trends, sometimes being more akin to solo songs associated with the theatre than traditional hymn tunes.

In the preface to *Select Hymns*, Wesley sets out his rationale for producing the collection; he indicates that the work has been carried out by a music editor, under his own direct supervision. It appears that, like the *Foundery Collection*, this volume is representative of existing repertoire and practice, collected for the purpose of making it more widely known and achieving a greater degree of uniformity among Methodist congregations. It also hints at Wesley's dissatisfaction with the *Foundery Collection*, which was printed only nineteen years previously:

I have been endeavouring for more than 20 years to produce such a book as this. But in vain: Masters of music were above following any direction but their own. And I was determined, whoever compiled this, should follow *my* direction: Not *mending* our tunes, but setting them down, neither better nor worse than they were. At length I have prevailed. The following collection contains all the tunes which are in *common use* among us. They are pricked *true*, exactly as I desire all our congregations may sing them: And here is prefixt to them a collection of those hymns which are (I think) some of *the best* we have published. The *volume* likewise is *small*, as well as the *price*. This therefore I recommend preferable to all others.²²

The preface indicates that it can accurately be considered as a definitively Methodist publication, indicated by Wesley's comment that it "contains all the tunes which are in *common use* among us. They are pricked *true*, exactly

²¹ Dean B. McIntyre offers an suggestion concerning the origins of this popular myth, arguing that the term "bar tune" was misinterpreted as being a tune sung in bars, when in fact, it referred to a musical term, "bar form," which indicates a setting with an AAB structure. See Dean B. McIntyre "Debunking the Wesley Tavern Song Myth" http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=5442 (accessed March 30, 2009) and "Did the Wesleys Really Use Drinking Song Tunes for Their Hymns?" http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=2639&loc_id=17,387 (accessed March 30, 2009).

²² John Wesley, *Select Hymns with Tunes Annex: Designed Chiefly for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1st ed., London: [s.n.], 1761), iv. Successive editions also included prefatory material of a pedagogical nature, devised by Wesley with the intention of promoting a higher level of musical literacy among his followers.

as I desire all our congregations may sing them.” His concluding statement—“This therefore I recommend preferable to all others”—affirms the suitability of this volume for Methodism at large.²³ Wesley affirms both the hymn texts and the associated tunes and his preface indicates that it is the precise combination of words and music contained in the volume that is to be regarded as authentically Methodist, rather than simply the texts alone.

In his thesis on the sources of Wesley’s tunes, Nelson F. Adams attributes considerable importance to the volume as a representation of Wesley’s practical views on music:

This book is literally the culmination of all of Wesley’s ideals about congregational music. His methodical mind, which did not serve him faultlessly in compiling F[oundery], eventually showed him the way in which he should go. He studied the work of others, discarded what he thought could be improved upon, kept was he thought was worthy, and added new material which he thought was better. He now *knew* he was right and he said so—and he *was* right.²⁴

The relationship between the tunes in *Select Hymns* and the “Directions for Singing” is complex; certain types of tunes accord easily with Wesley’s principles, having been either composed specifically for congregational use or successfully adapted from another genre, whereas others, for a variety of reasons, are difficult to reconcile with several of the directions, due to the musical challenges they present. The stylistic content of the collection reveals Wesley’s own musical preferences, strongly influenced by contemporary trends in art music, which are sometimes contrary to the simple and direct style suggested by the “Directions.”

The tune “Amsterdam,” of German origin, was included in both the *Foundery Collection* and *Select Hymns*; it illustrates many of the musical characteristics of the tunes best suited to congregational singing. The melody is defined by its rhythmic vitality, contrasting simple syllabic setting and simple rhythms with more complex decorative rhythmic and melodic features with syllables extended over two or three notes of shorter duration. These passages always occur within phrases, allowing a clear structure to be maintained throughout, which would enable a congregation to sing this melody without being distracted by extensive rhythmic complexity.

God of un-ex-ampl-ed grace, Re-deem-er of man-kind, Still our choic-est strains we bring,
 Mat-ter of e-ter-nal praise. We in thy pass-ion find;
 Still our joy-ful theme pur-sue, Thee the friend of sin-ners sing, Whose love is e-ver new.

Figure 1: “Amsterdam,” from *Select Hymns*

²³ Wesley, *Select Hymns with Tunes Annexed*, iv.

²⁴ Nelson F. Adams, “The Musical Sources for John Wesley’s Tune-Books: The Genealogy of 148 Tunes” (Doctor of Sacred Music diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1973), 53.

Some of these contemporary tunes introduced in *Select Tunes*, although decorative, were highly suitable for congregational use, balancing musical originality and interest with predictable harmonic and rhythmic patterns and memorable melodies. "London" is a typical example of this style of tune; it has a flowing melody with largely step-wise movement and employs many decorative passing notes. Its regular rhythmic phrases aid the learning of it and the use of melodic and rhythmic sequences at once increases its congregational suitability and creates a greater sense of interest and climax; the fifth and sixth phrases ascend using a melodic sequence, which highlights the bold text:

Th' unwearied Sun from Day to Day,
Does his Creator's Power display

by climaxing on the highest note of the tune (*), and propelling the tune towards its conclusion with the implied subdominant harmony:

The spac-ious Firm-a - ment on_high, With all_ the blue, e - ther-eal_ Sky, And spang-led Heavens a
6 shin- ing_ Frame, Their great O - ri - gi - nal pro - claim. Th'un - wear-ied Sun from Day to Day, Does
12 his Cre - a - tor's_ Power dis - play; And pub - li - shes to ev - ery_ Land, The
16 Work of an al - migh - ty Hand, the Work of an al - migh - ty Hand.

Figure 2: "London," from *Select Hymns*

Tunes such as these are easily aligned with Wesley's guiding principle that the full congregation should be able to participate enthusiastically and accurately in the hymn singing at Methodist meetings. Furthermore, their straightforward style and largely syllabic text setting afford primacy to the text and thus enable Wesley's final dictum to "sing spiritually" to be applied with integrity.

Other tunes present greater musical challenges, partly as a result of their origins, especially those that reflect the solo song tradition in contemporary art music. As early as 1745, John Frederick Lampe had composed and published a set of tunes for Wesleyan hymn texts that established a firm link between Methodist musical practices and the prevailing trend for Italianate, highly decorative melodic writing in contemporary art music, especially in music associated with the theatre. Many of Lampe's tunes were reproduced in *Select Hymns*, suggesting that they had gained some popularity within Methodism and were approved of by Wesley.

One of the most notable adaptations of a secular melody is the hymn “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” the text of which is influenced by Dryden’s poem “Fairest Isle” and is set to an adaptation of Purcell’s tune for that lyric from the opera *King Arthur* (1691). Using this secular melody created a strong link between the secular and sacred and would have been a cultural reference understood by at least some Methodists.²⁵

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,
Fix us in thy humble dwelling,
Joy of Heaven, to Earth come down;
All thy faithful Mercies crown:
Je - su, Thou art all Com - pass - ion,
Pure, un - bound - ed Love Thou art,
Vi - sit us with thy Sal - va - tion,
En - ter eve - ry trem - bling Heart.

Figure 3: “Westminster,” from *Select Hymns*

This melody is not completely unsuitable for congregational use, but places greater demands on singers than the more syllabic tunes drawn from other religious traditions. Here, single syllables are frequently extended over several notes, but to a lesser extent than eighteenth-century tunes by composers such as Lampe, and the tune exhibits the melodic, harmonic and structural balance observed in many seventeenth-century psalm tunes. Its decorative nature, in keeping with its secular origin, demands a carefully nuanced performance that it is difficult to imagine a large, untrained congregation achieving, thus rendering Wesley’s instruction to sing the tunes “exactly as the are printed” somewhat optimistic. Perhaps more significantly, the close relationship between the tune and the secular world of the theatre could be seen as ambiguous in terms of the final, crucial instruction to “sing spiritually.” While the new context and words associated with the tune in its guise as a hymn might be seen as a powerful transformation from sacred to

²⁵ In the 1740s, the Wesleys developed an active ministry in the West End of London and attracted converts from the theatrical community, including prominent musicians such as Lampe and Priscilla Rich.

secular, thus encouraging spiritual awareness in singing it, simultaneously, it offered an easy opportunity to be distracted by the artistry of Purcell's composition or by recalling the original secular text.

The second edition of *Select Hymns* included several additional tunes, one of which, "Cheshunt," marked a significant new direction in musical style, practice and understanding. Rather than conforming to the basic style of a common melody for each verse or double verse of text, it is a through-composed setting of a metrical text, "The Voice of my Beloved sounds," a style of composition usually referred to as a "Set-Piece."²⁶ The music is considerably more complex and decorative than the hymn tunes found in the collection and although it is printed in the same manner, with just a melody line, it seems unlikely that this could have been intended for congregational use. The melody, adapted from a popular song by Henry Holcombe, had been included in *Harmonia Sacra*, indicating that it was already in use in Methodist circles. Wesley's authorisation of it for inclusion in *Select Hymns* established a precedent for this broader variety of music, which was to become more evident in his later collection of tunes, *Sacred Harmony*. Commenting on the inclusion of this set-piece and others in *Sacred Harmony*, Carlton Young suggests that they reflect Wesley's acknowledgement of contemporary musical practices and tastes within Methodism: "Wesley had apparently been forced to include them because of the popularity of the village singing groups and their influence on the singing practice of local Methodist societies."²⁷

Its musical characteristics provide clear evidence of its origin as a popular song, as florid melodic writing, excessive prolongation of syllables, intricate rhythms and a contrasting sectional structure combine to make the music rather than the text the most interesting feature. It is completely unlike any of the hymn tunes found elsewhere in the collection and is considerably more complex than even the most florid tunes by contemporary composers such as Lampe. The overall structure of the music and text is in a simple ternary pattern, ABA, though the recapitulation of A is truncated and there is some musical and textual repetition within sections.²⁸ The time signature changes between sections, while the tonal centre fluctuates between D minor and its relative, F major, throughout. These factors emphasise the highly sectional nature of the piece, a feature atypical of congregational hymn tunes.

The melodic writing in section A is characterised by many decorative passages, such as scales or turn-like figures in short note-values set to a single syllable, and successive pairs of notes set to a single syllable, producing a sighing effect when sung. The first phrase of the second half of section A contains examples of both of these common figurations:

²⁶ Richard Crawford notes that this was "A term sometimes used in 18th- and 19th-century Anglo-American sacred music to denote a through-composed setting of a metrical text." He states that it was in use in England from the early eighteenth century. Richard Crawford, "Set-Piece," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed April 30, 2008).

²⁷ Young, *Music of the Heart*, 71.

²⁸ Only the first half of section A is used in the recapitulation. The last two phrases of both sections are repeated.



Figure 4: “Cheshunt” (bars 16-20), from *Select Hymns*

Whereas section A is set in 2/4 time, with two strong beats in each bar, section B is set in 3/8, a simple triple-time meter, with the emphasis on the first beat of the bar only. This gives the music a lilting quality, which reflects the corresponding section of the text:

Gently doth He chide my Stay
Rise my Love and come away.

Never are more than two syllables set in a single bar of music, while the most common syllabic rhythm is one syllable extended over the first two beats and a second syllable on the final beat of the bar. The third phrase of music in section B contains an extraordinary prolongation of the word “come,” which extends over six full bars, ending on the first beat of the seventh bar of the phrase. Each beat in the six bars has the same dotted rhythm pattern, the melody alternating between two neighbouring notes through each bar, moving to new pitches at the beginning of each new bar in an ascending pattern:

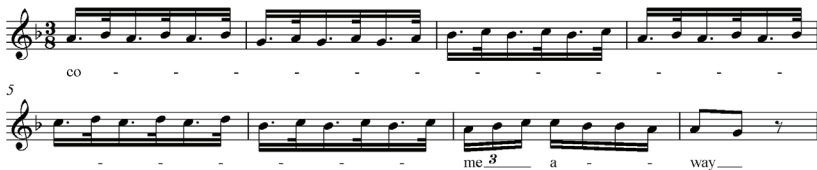


Figure 5: “Cheshunt” (bars 49-56), from *Select Hymns*

The relationship of this tune and the “Directions for Singing” is clearly flawed; the musical complexities of the melody suggest that it would need to be performed by a group of skilled musicians, rather than a whole congregation, flouting the underlying principle of the first six of Wesley’s points. Likewise, the complexity of music and highly repetitive use of text would doubtless have focused attention on the music in its own right rather than on the purpose of singing in worship, thereby contravening the final direction more explicitly than in the case of Purcell’s tune, discussed above.

Conclusion

Wesley’s “Directions for Singing” provide a clear, practical framework for congregational singing, underpinned by theological reasoning and designed to promote an active engagement with worship across Methodism. However, their relationship to the practicalities of singing the tunes included in *Select Hymns* is somewhat inconsistent, as illustrated above. While many of the tunes accord with these principles, others cannot be reconciled on ei-

ther musical or spiritual grounds. At a broader conceptual level, the variety of music contained in the collection, taken as a whole, can be aligned with the sentiment of the directions, even if some individual instances are problematic; the range of musical styles sought to appeal to Methodists from a variety of cultural backgrounds and musical experiences and represents an attempt to encourage them to express their faith through hymnody by offering culturally familiar styles of music for use in worship. As such, *Select Hymns* can be seen as an application of the "Directions for Singing" in principle if not uniformly in practice.