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# A Visit with the Shakers

## Music and Dance at a Shaker Village

performed by guest artist

Randy Folger

and the

### South Bend Symphonic Choir

IUSB Ensemble in Residence

Robert W. Demaree, Jr., Music Director



Saturday, March 15, 1997

8:00 o'clock p.m., Campus Auditorium

## A VISIT WITH THE SHAKERS

Beginning with the Bach Anniversary in 1985, the officers and members of the South Bend Symphonic Choir have undertaken the presentation of idealized worship settings as one aspect of the Choir's mission. Their two-and-a-half-hour "1745 Leipzig Easter Service" at Saint Joseph's Church, Mishawaka, was the first of these; a Moravian Lovefeast at First Methodist, Mishawaka, a newly-composed Solemn Service at Temple Beth-El, a Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom (Rachmaninoff) at Saint Andrew's Greek Orthodox Church, and our annual "An American Thanksgiving" have been part of this effort.

Tonight we add to that list a Shaker Song Service, as it would have been celebrated in the mid-nineteenth century at the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, near historic Harrodsburg. We are honored to feature this evening as guest artist Randy Folger, who directs Music and Special Programs activities at Pleasant Hill. For the Symphonic Choir each of these projects proves to be a valuable educational experience, and this has been especially the case this year with Mr. Folger.

An introductory word about the Shakers themselves: "The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing" arose first in Lancashire in the middle of the eighteenth century, emerging out of the Quaker movement in England (hence their colloquial name, which was short for "shaking Quakers.")

Early on, an embittered, angry, mystical young prophetess named Ann Lee — subsequently known to the Believers as "Mother Ann" — became the central figure in the sect. Frequently visited, she claimed, by Jesus Christ himself, as well as saintly and angelic figures, she shaped the faith of the Shakers. Having suffered a bad marriage made tragic by the successive deaths in infancy of her four children, she forcefully persuaded her brethren that sexual intercourse was the root of all sin, and that the loss of her children was God's punishment for her having married.

Thus, as things developed, the Shakers agreed to segregate the genders, so all would henceforward lead celibate lives. Recalling their expectation of the Second Coming, some of them, at least, began to regard Mother Ann herself as the reincarnated Messiah.

Mother Ann and several of her followers (responding to another of her now-frequent visions) moved to New England in 1774, seeking religious tolerance. Here they formed what the scholar Edward Deming Andrews described as "a fellowship literally following the example of the primitive apostolic church: men and

(Continued page 6)

# A Visit with the Shakers

## Music and Dance at a Shaker Village



### Program

#### O Holy City, Seen of John

arr. W. Douglas

Give us, O God, the strength to build  
The city that hath stood  
Too long a dream, whose laws are love,  
Whose ways are brotherhood....

#### Shaker Spirituals

arr. Jack Bomer

#### I Will Bow and Be Simple

...I will bow and be free.  
I will bow and be humble, Yea, bow like the willow tree.

#### A New Zion

Let your hearts be encouraged, and your hands be  
strengthened, For Jehovah is with you of a truth.  
He is guarding His people from the powers of evil,  
O Zion begun upon earth!

Virgins Cloth'd in a Clean White Garment

...we shall drink at the fountains above.

Yea, we will rejoice in freedom in this strait little way;  
Here is the fold and the lambs all feeding;  
On this green we'll skip and play.

Sweet Love

Nearer to thy fountain, Lord,  
Nearer to thy throne I come,  
Asking for Thy love, sweet love,  
And Thy strength to bear union.

Since We are Called to Liberty

...in this great day of jubilee,  
We will arise and all be free,  
and march the streets of Zion.

Pretty Love and Union

Stay with me, thou lovely treasure.  
Stay with me forevermore:  
Stay with me that I forever  
Pretty love and union may adore.

South Bend Symphonic Choir

Welcome to Pleasant Hill

Mr. Folger

INTERMISSION

A Fantasy on the Theme of a Shaker Worship Service by Randy Folger

Mr. Folger  
and the Symphonic Choir

Led by two elders and two eldresses, a community of Shakers greet "visitors" (you yourselves), and seek to interest them in joining their community. In so doing, they sing and dance, and give testimony as to the meaning their faith brings to their lives. The traditional Shaker songs listed below are used.

Angel's Shout  
I'm On My Way to Zion  
Earnest Petition  
Glory Unto God We'll Sing  
Christ and Herod  
Come to Zion  
Ezekiel's Vision  
Followers of the Lamb  
Now's the Time to Enter In  
O See the Lovely Angels  
I Have a Little Drum  
I'll Beat My Drum  
Mother Ann's Song  
Simple Gifts  
Star of Purity

Elders and Speakers in order of appearance:

Randy Folger, Peggy Grant Soderberg, Thomas Umbaugh,  
Carol Krieger, Connie Elizabeth Lee, Mary Louise Mills,  
Tom Geyer, Joan Tweedell, Irene Carver.



women living together in celibate purity, holding all goods in common, working industriously with their hands, speaking and singing in unknown tongues, worshipping joyfully, preaching that Christ had actually come to lead Believers to a perfect sinless, everlasting life – the life of the spirit."

In America this fellowship was especially attractive to the pious, the poor, the disillusioned, widows and widowers, orphans, and those skilled in crafts. The skilled workers made Shaker furniture and husbandry famous across the nation. (The Shakers invented, among other things, the garden seed packet!) At the peak of the movement, some twenty communities had spread from New England to the Mississippi Valley.

The Shakers created a substantial body of genuinely American music which composers (notably Aaron Copland) have transcribed and arranged. They lived and worked in beautiful edifices with matched pairs of front doors (one for the women and one for the men). They daily used separate staircases to ascend heavenward in villages celebrated for the music and dancing of their song services.

RWD



## AN OVERVIEW OF SHAKER MUSIC AND WORSHIP

Music is of the utmost importance to a group that believed in dancing in worship and, since the more than 20,000 songs were written by a large cross-section of the Believers, much can be learned about the Shakers from the tunes and lyrics. Music was one of their only legal means of artistic expression and many of the Shaker songs are achingly beautiful. Many have a haunting, almost otherworldly quality to them.

The music in church was always done a cappella (without instruments) from the early beginnings until the latter 1800's, because the Shakers did not think one could improve upon the most perfect instrument, God's instrument—the voice—with anything artificial or man made. There was one instrument allowed in the church that was invented by the Shakers; it was called the "tonometer" and was a

stringed instrument used only to get the beginning pitch of a song.

Harmony was not allowed in Shaker music until 1842. Before that, they believed that if all sang in unison, greater unity was promoted. They were thinking and singing the same things. In 1842, a sister passed out during service and entered a trance. When she awoke she told the gathered she had had a wonderful vision and in the vision she heard the angels singing in harmony. The ministers said it was a sign from God that they could begin singing in harmony.

From the incipiency of the Shaker movement, dancing, or "laboring" under operations of the spirit was an essential element of Shaker worship. The Shakers found several reasons to add dance to their worship. They found 19 scripture passages that said that they should dance for the Lord and also reasoned that God created the whole body, not just the mouth and hands, and therefore they should praise the Lord with their whole bodies. The communal family often gathered in their family meeting room to worship during the weekday evenings, at first in spontaneous, individual dancing, and later to practice intricate dance steps. The earliest function of "laboring" – as the Shakers termed such exercises—was to shake off "doubts" and "mortify the lusts of the flesh" (Andrews, *The Gift to be Simple*, p. 144)

Early in the Shaker movement and during the later eras of spiritual revival, the dancing was in the primitive or "back" manner. Each person manifesting spiritual influence exercised in whatever way he was moved by such a full spirit. Individuals "under operations" carried out a variety of expressive movements, most of which were humbling; Shakers sought to diminish self-pride, seeking ever after simplicity. High-spirited, frenzied exercises took many forms.

When Father Joseph Meacham undertook the organization of the Shaker society, he felt that the dance as an element of worship also needed to be better organized, and in the 1780's he instituted the first formal dance movement, the "holy order step and shuffle", also known as the "square order step and shuffle". This "first distinct dance movement was said to have been learned by Father Joseph ...in a vision of angels before the throne of God". (Andrews, *The Gift to be Simple*, p. 147). No graceful, dancing angel himself, Father Joseph practiced this square step and shuffle while locked alone in a room until he felt adept enough to teach the dance to others. In the late 1780's, this was the only formal dance, but in the first quarter of the 19th century, more types of uniform gestures and dances were introduced. Mother Lucy Wright, successor to Father Joseph Meacham, introduced the practice of motioning with the hands while singing exercise songs in 1815. In 1817, the first simple marches, performed to step-songs, were incorporated into the worship, and the first real "ring" dances were developed in 1822.

The Shaker sabbath worship was unique, and yet in the early days followed the form dictated by spiritual influence on each individual and was therefore purely natural. Shakers shared their devotional feelings in worship as they shared every other aspect of their communal lives. Full participation in worship meant worshipping with one's whole body and soul, expressed through dancing, singing, and other "exercises" rather than merely repeating time-worn phrases.

The public was often invited to attend sabbath meeting, and in the hope of winning converts, a Shaker elder or public minister might preach an address especially for the visitors. This method was, however, not particularly successful in gaining converts to the Shaker cause. In public meetings, the degree of spiritual inspiration seemed not to be so great as in private family meetings, and during the periods of Shaker spiritual revival, sabbath meeting were usually closed to the public. Eyewitness accounts indicate that most visitors, although respectful, attended Shaker meetings as they would to enjoy a theatrical entertainment, rather than to receive religious edification. Many visitors, however, found the worship terrifying.

Although the character of the Shaker worship service changed over the years, certain elements remained constant: brethren and sisters would file silently to their respective sides of the meeting house and sit in meditative, preparatory silence for a while. No one who had unconfessed sins could attend the meeting; all were expected to be present, and "in union". Absences were regarded as tending to disorder.

The Shaker service did not include any public prayer aloud, and there were no formal creeds to be repeated in unison; each person prayed silently. The service would begin with one or two hymns. There was very little sermonizing, but, depending on the particular occasion, one or two of the family elders might give short talks, which were followed by a few more hymns. Sometimes scriptures were read from the King James version of the Bible and even at times a letter from another village would be shared with the group. Then, the presiding elder would indicate that it was time "to go forth and worship God in dance". The benches would be moved back, brethren removed their coats, and the singers and dancers assumed their positions for the dance.

The dancing might start out in a slow tempo, with, say, a slow march as they "warmed up," and then proceed to faster ring dances. During the dancing, the elders and eldresses of the ministry would watch through their small windows high up in the walls on either side of the room to judge the degree of "spirit" manifested in the dance. Dance songs were frequently very long, and often followed one right after another, giving the dancers no rest between dances. While the dancing was going on, the singers would also be keeping time to the tune with hand

motions. After the dancing, there might be one or two brief addresses, and then a final hymn to close the service.

Today's performance will be a fairly close look at a Shaker public meeting as it would have happened in the 1840's. There will be Shaker dancing, messages from the spirit world, a brief statement of Shaker doctrine, and of course Shaker traditional music performed a cappella and unison as the Shakers wrote and performed it.



### **Randy L. Folger**

Originally from Olympia, Washington, Randy moved to Kentucky at the age of six. His father is a Baptist preacher, and consequently he and his family moved frequently. After high school Randy attended Bob Jones University in South Carolina for one year and then Western Kentucky University for two more, majoring in accounting and minoring in music. He left college to pursue a career in purchasing and did that for fourteen. His greatest love had always been music of all kinds and finally in 1990 he came to Shakertown at Pleasant Hill to sing Shaker music full time and do research in Shaker history.

At Shakertown Randy sings four concerts of Shaker music a day five days a week and in the winter he performs many candlelight concerts and researches the old Shaker journals and hymnal. He has become an accomplished speaker on the subjects of Shaker history and music and is a regular lecturer at Elderhostels, schools, and special groups. Randy has recently recorded an album of Shaker music and last year transcribed a Pleasant Hill hymnal into modern notation.

Randy wears many hats at Shakertown, performing the duties of coordinator of special events, workshops, educational programming, and music programming. Being involved on so many different levels in the village presents a big challenge to Randy, but it's a challenge he enjoys trying to meet.

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\* Section Leader

If you have enjoyed our singing this evening, we invite you to contact the IUSB Box Office (237-4203) and ask to be included in our mailings for future concerts. You may be interested to know that we accept new members in early January and early September each season; further information about this can be obtained by calling 237-4815, or by speaking with one of the Choir members.

TAMEA RECTOR, CHOIR PRESIDENT

As a courtesy to the artists and to other members of the audience, latecomers will be seated at an appropriate time. For the same reasons return to seating following intermission should be prompt. Attendance by children under the age of responsible behavior is discouraged. Audio and video recording equipment and cameras may not be used at a performance in any auditorium of IUSB. Eating and drinking in the Campus Auditorium, Recital Hall and Upstage are prohibited. Smoking is not permitted in any building of Indiana University South Bend.

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