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HENRY COWELL AND
EDSON HYMNS AND FUGING TUNES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide an examination of a 1960 musical composition by the American composer Henry Cowell built from postcolonial American musical sources. Cowell's work, *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* takes musical material from an early American tunebook that Cowell helped uncover. This tunebook, "The Social Harmonist" contains the compositions of two earlier American composers, Lewis Edson (1748-1820) and Lewis Edson Jr. (1771-1845). Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is a choral-orchestral work in the form of an expanded suite of hymns built from the work of these two Yankee Tunesmiths. The primary purpose of this study is to examine this composition so that it may be understood and performed.

The material in this study is organized in the following manner. After an introductory chapter on the genesis of the work itself, a biographical sketch of Henry Cowell is provided with an emphasis on the aspects of his life that fertilized his later interest in early American choral music. Following this chapter is an exploration of the history and musical style of the early American singing school movement utilized in this piece (1720-1820). The next section returns to the piece itself and, building on the previous chapter, provides a descriptive musical analysis of this composition. The concluding chapter commends Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* as a choral-orchestral work deserving to be considered and performed because of its intriguing intersection of early and twentieth-century American music.

KEYWORDS: Henry Cowell, Lewis Edson, Singing School movement, Choral, Choral-orchestral, American music, Yankee Tunesmith, Fuging Tunes

Chapter One - The Genesis of Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes

Introduction

On November 13, 1960 the Hudson Valley Philharmonic and Chorale premiered a new work by the American composer Henry Cowell (1897-1965) entitled *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* in the town of Poughkeepsie, New York.[1] The work is a suite of orchestrated postcolonial American hymns by two American composers Lewis Edson (1748-1820) and his son Lewis Edson Jr. (1771-1845). At the time, Henry Cowell was living in Shady, New York almost directly adjacent to where these two composers had settled earlier at the start of the nineteenth century. Henry Cowell and his wife Sidney had recently helped to uncover the work of these two local prior composers and dedicated this piece, an original arrangement of their music, to the Hudson Valley's local orchestra. What follows is an account of Cowell's discovery of the Edsons and the events leading up to and following the creation of his work, *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*.

Henry Cowell's Discovery of the Edsons

The account of Henry Cowell's discovery of the Edsons is recounted by the music historian Irving Lowens in a historical chapter specifically on these two early American composers.[2] According to Lowens, in 1952 Lowens himself met with Henry's wife and musicologist Sidney Cowell, sharing his difficulty tracking down the location of a certain Mink Hollow, New York where the Edsons purportedly resided. Sidney told Lowens the place was immediately adjacent their summer home in Shady, New York.

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[1] Hudson Valley Philharmonic, *Second Subscription Concert, 27th Season.* (Poughkeepsie: NY, 1960).

[2] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Coompany, 1964), 178-193.

Inspired by the conversation, Sidney spent the following years tracking down the location of the Edsons' old postcolonial homestead and their descendants who were still living in the Hudson Valley. The Cowells arranged for the singing of Edson hymns at the local Shady Methodist Church and Sidney recorded the event for submission in the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress. In June of 1960, Lowens traveled upstate to meet the Cowells and a Mrs. Jannette Edson who possessed an authentic tunebook from 1801 called, "The Social Harmonist" which was compiled by Lewis Edson Jr. This family's heirloom tunebook contained the music of him and his father Lewis Edson. This is the tunebook which contains the source material for Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*. Now all that Henry needed was a chance to utilize it.

Commission, Composition, and Premiere of Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes

Henry Cowell did not have to wait long for an opportunity to utilize the music of the Edsons. In 1960, the Hudson Valley Philharmonic received a sizable budget increase from $8,000 to $50,000.[3] In July of the same year, their conductor Claude Monteux sent a letter to Henry Cowell inviting him to contribute a work to their upcoming November concert.[4]

In early September, Henry Cowell wrote the president of AMP Music Publishing to inform him of his own progress on a, "simple piece for orchestra and mixed chorus."[5] By the end of the same month, Cowell refers to his continued work as a, "Sacred Suite" in a letter to his

[3] "Philharmonic Budget $50,00 Compared to $8,000 Last Year," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, September 30, 1960, 30.

[4] Claude Monteux to Henry Cowell, July 29, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[5] Henry Cowell to Leonard Feist, September 1, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

stepmother.[6] Cowell finished the work quickly, as the piece was already accepted by AMP into Cowell's catalogue of works just before its November premiere under its present title *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*.[7] Cowell notes the same title in a letter to his stepmother while also mentioning his travel to Poughkeepsie to attend the first performance.[8]

Local newspapers mention the premiere of the work prior to the concert[9] and mention that the newly formed Hudson Valley Chorale will perform the work as their first public performance.[10] Sidney Cowell also was simultaneously writing other local papers to generate further enthusiasm. She wrote to the nearby newspaper, the Daily Freeman, about the story of how the local Edsons and their tunebook were discovered, also mentioning Henry Cowell's fondness for Lewis Edson and his intentional study of the early American musical style.[11]

As mentioned above, *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* was first performed on November 13, 1960 in Poughkeepsie, New York. The first half of the concert featured the guest pianist Claudio Arrau playing Beethoven's, "Emperor Concerto" while *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* started the choral second half after the intermission. The review in the local paper was positive saying,

> The most interesting number on the program was Cowell's setting for chorus and orchestra of several "Hymns and Fuging Tunes" by Lewis Edson and son. Mr. Cowell dedicated his work to the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, which gave its premiere last night. The Hymns and Fuging Tunes present a fascinating mixture

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[6] Henry Cowell to Olive Cowell, September 22, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[7] Kurt Stone to Henry Cowell, November 7, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[8] Henry Cowell to Olive Cowell, November 10, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[9] "Orchestra to Play Cowell Composition," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 6, 1960, 10A.

[10] "Chorale to Perform With Orchestra," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 13, 1960, 10.

[11] Sidney Cowell to The Daily Freeman, November 7, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

> of styles. In melody and harmony, they resemble the model idiom of the High Renaissance, and the "fuging" device is reminiscent of the motets and ricercare of the same period, c. 1600. Apparently the Edsons ignored the styles of their own day and preserved the older style of their ancestors… In summation this [concert] was perhaps the most spectacular (because of Arrau) and the most interesting (because of the Cowell and the choral pieces) program that the Philharmonic has offered to date.[12]

Post-Performance Arrangements and Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes Today

Cowell returned to *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* the following year and letters between him and AMP discuss the editing of an organ and chorus arrangement of the work[13] which was later published in 1963. Presently, the organ arrangement is available for purchase, but the orchestra score is only for rental. It may however be viewed in its entirety through AMP's digital scans.

Sidney Cowell described *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* by calling it, "energetic, enthusiastic music and fun to sing, once gets used to it."[14] In the same letter, she comments that Henry preserved the open sonorities and qualities of the early American music he built the suite from and stresses that this style is meant to be more, "social" than, "religious."[15] Therefore, before examining the composition itself, it is important to understand how this piece fits into Henry Cowell life and interests, tracing why he acquired such fondness for the local music of early American composers like the Edsons. So, it is to Henry Cowell himself things now turn.

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[12] Victor Landau, "Pianist Called 'Brilliant' In Philharmonic Concert," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 14, 1960, 13.

[13] Kurt Stone to Henry Cowell, October 5, 1961. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[14] Sidney Cowell to Mario di Bonaventura, March 1, 1975. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

[15] Ibid.

Chapter Two - The Life of Henry Cowell

Introduction

This chapter consists of a selective sketch of the life of Henry Cowell that is intended to trace what led to Cowell's attraction and motivation towards, the early American folk style that inspired him to ultimately compose *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes.* This narrative's structure will emphasize the following: the early self-awareness of young Henry Cowell as a distinctly non-European composer, his discussions with his mentor Charles Seeger in the Composers' Collective about the relationship between American music and American society during the Great Depression, Cowell's simultaneous passion for what he called, "indigenous music"[16] or the music of a local culture, how Cowell developed a path towards accessible music-making during his prison years, and finally the support and inspiration of his musicologist wife Sidney Cowell to engage with American vernacular music.

A Young, Independent, and Non-European Composer

Henry Cowell was born in Menlo Park, California on March 11, 1897. He claimed that some of his earliest memories were of his parents singing American and Irish folk music.[17] After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake his family relocated multiple times to Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, and New York City before returning to the Bay Area of California again in 1909. During this time, Henry was homeschooled, and his bohemian parents allowed him to study music as his

[16] Henry Cowell, *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium* (California: Stanford University Press, 1933), 3.

[17] Joel Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

own interests guided him. Of these early years, Cowell said he developed an appreciation for the folk music of simple people.[18]

The precocious Henry Cowell was discovered in 1913 by Henry Hadley, the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, who introduced him to a young Charles Seeger who was just starting to teach at UC Berkeley. Seeger accepted Cowell as a promising young composition student and began a long bond of sympathetic musical and cultural discussions, especially in the Composers' Collective discussed below. Seeger supported the young Cowell in cultivating an independent musical spirit, distinct from the traditional European styles, through musical studies in, "free composition"[19] and, "dissonant counterpoint."[20] These studies were immediately paramount to Cowell developing his 1920's ultramodernist style but, even greater, was the instillation a lifelong spirit of musical independence[21] that would motivate Cowell to equally embrace populist and, "indigenous" folk music in subsequent decades.

Populist Music and the Composers' Collective with Charles Seeger

After World War I, Seeger encouraged Cowell to perform his original compositions and Cowell's career began as a pianist. He toured Europe with his ultramodernist and experimental style three times in the 1920s. On the third trip, in 1929, Henry Cowell also became the first American composer to visit the Soviet Union.[22] It was during this time that Cowell met the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians and took a special interest in the music of the workers. Cowell biographer Joel Sachs writes, "it [the music of the workers] was completely

[18] Michael Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 29f.
[19] Ibid., 67.
[20] Ibid., 72.
[21] Ibid., 90.
[22] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 162.

unlike anything Henry had heard otherwise. Remote from dominating pedantry, it vaguely suggested the free music of peasants singing in the fields."[23]

This attention to the music of the Russian people, and his return to the United States, was just before the Great Depression brought about a shift in Cowell's priorities. Music historian Kyle Gann writes,

> musical innovation and economic insecurity ebb and flow in inverse ratio. The 1920s, in America and Europe, were an era of free-wheeling avant-gardeness too hot to sustain. In October of 1929 the stock market crashed, precipitating the Depression. In the 1920s, Cowell, Ornstein, and Antheil had been considered the notorious great pianist-composers of the future; by the mid-1930s all three had abandoned their early innovations for an undistinguished conservatism… The depression demanded of the American composer an end to self-indulgence and a turn to larger social issues… political progressivism walked hand in hand with musical conservatism, as composers abandoned modern dissonance and complex textures in a democratic attempt to reach a mass audience.[24]

From 1931-1932, Henry Cowell took up extended conversations with his former teacher Charles Seeger that gradually came to involve other sympathetic left-leaning composers. By 1933, these musicians came together to form a group known as the Composers' Collective. Their goal was to create an American styled version of proletariat music. The Collective was focused on the role of music within society and the compositional identity of an American composer.[25] Cowell's proposal was that, instead of cultivating music of greater complexity like the classical European tradition, their music should strive for, "a drive for vitality and simplicity."[26]

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[23] Ibid., 172.

[24] Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth, 2006), 49

[25] Jennifer Ashe, "Modernism and Social Consciousness: Seeger, Cowell, Crawford, and the Composers Collective - 1931-1936." (Doctoral diss., New England Conservatory of Music, 2006), 24f.

[26] Ibid., 58f.

Originally, the Collective was primarily interested in composing original music to assist their apologetic and to be exclusively associated with the working class[27] but, with the growing interest in older American vernacular music, the Collective gradually took a stronger interest in folk music. In 1934, both Seeger and Cowell were asked to provide critical opinions of Alan Lomax's work, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. Seeger and Cowell both were, "stunned by the scope, beauty, and cultural revelation of the songs." [28] What they found in the popularity and connection of earlier American folk music to society prompted Seeger's populist statement that,

> if we are to compose for more than an infinitesimal fraction of the American people, we must write in an idiom not too remote from the one most of them already possess – their own musical vernacular… it is not the music they listen to that is the music of the people, but the music people make for themselves.[29]

For an independent and intentionally non-European composer like Henry Cowell, these ideas served as another way to be a distinctly American composer.[30] Instead of following the modernist compositional trends of Europe, American composers could freely explore their own musical vernacular tradition.[31] For Cowell, this coincided with his own concurrent passion in "indigenous" music.

Interest in "Indigenous" Music

During his 1920s touring years Cowell also carefully observed the folk music of many diverse societies.[32] Notably, he expressed disapproval whenever a community's indigenous

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[27] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 246.

[28] Richard A. Reuss, "Folk Music and Social Consciousness. The Musical Odyssey of Charles Seeger," *Western Folklore* Vol. 38, no. 4 (October 1979): 231.

[29] Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929-1979*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 387.

[30] Ashe, "Modernism and Social Consciousness: Seeger, Cowell, Crawford, and the Composers Collective - 1931-1936," 119f.

[31] Ibid., 121.

[32] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 140.

music was modernized into high European classical musical forms. Speaking specifically of a trip to Czechoslovakia in 1927, Cowell biographer Sachs writes and then quotes,

> Not a single urban Czech musician that Henry met had any conception of the distinctiveness of rural music, however, or any interest in going to hear it. Well-educated Moravian composers adapted folk music by squeezing it into a Germanic theoretical framework, leaving it devitalized and with "very little resemblance to the fresh music of the mountains. Yet those who write in this fashion are fervently convinced that they are writing Czechish music, and the rest of the world knows Czechish music only through their works."[33]

This quote expresses something important to Cowell, namely properly understanding and developing what he often called, "indigenous materials." Sachs gives a concise definition of this by saying, "Henry used the word 'indigenous' to signify both the use of native [musical] materials and the development of techniques independent of European models."[34] It is important to stress that Cowell meant nothing derogatory or inferior with his exact choice of the word indigenous. For him, it was a technical term to describe the musical and compositional resources that were not purposefully derived from the traditional or classical Western European methods.

While Cowell had been sympathetic to vernacular music since his youth, it was in 1930, when he became a lecturer at The New School for Social Research that his interest in indigenous music became increasingly prominent. The New School was a private New York university founded in 1919 for progressive, political, and communitarian goals.[35] New School viewed music, and the arts, as a product of the social sciences and attracted faculty interested in

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 236.
[35] Sally Bick, "In the Tradition of Dissent: Music at the New School for Social Research, 1926-33," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 129.

exploring this connection.[36] The priority was to use one's discipline to understand contemporary society.[37]

Cowell's opening series of musical lectures was called, "A World Survey of Contemporary Music."[38] His final lecture was especially notable, entitled, "American Composers Begin Breaking Apron Strings." His subject was the end of American composers' dependence on European traditions.[39] Musicologist Sally Buck has called this Cowell's, "philosophical views of what constituted American music."[40]

For Cowell, America's indigenous musical material was a broad and all-encompassing welcoming of the entire melting pot of international musical traditions within the country. Sally Buck writes, "to him [Cowell], the indigenous music of the United States comprised a multifaceted culture that encompassed an array of ethnicities and cultures." [41] To be an American composer was to deeply comprehend, beyond mere mimicry, the entire world of music for compositional resources.

Cowell continued to lecture at New School throughout the early 1930s and brought Charles Seeger onto the faculty where their bond and work was called, "symbiotic."[42] Their concurrent discussions within the Composers' Collective were likely mutually reinforcing.

Cowell repeatedly returned to the distinctly Midwestern folk songs of his travelling youth, as well as his experience growing up in the immigrant neighborhoods of San Francisco, as

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[36] Ibid., 135.
[37] Ibid., 139.
[38] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 181.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Sally Bick, "In the Tradition of Dissent: Music at the New School for Social Research, 1926-33," 151.
[41] Ibid., 147.
[42] Ibid., 154.

the source of his passion for all indigenous music.[43] It was the music of a definite community that was especially important to him. It would be his later marriage to the musicologist Sidney Hawkins, discussed below, which would bring him to the indigenous work of postcolonial New York's own Lewis Edson, but first, an unexpected prison term would foster an unanticipated passion for amateur music-making.

Making Music Anywhere - Henry Cowell's Prison Years

In 1936, Henry Cowell's professional life came to a sudden halt when he was arrested on a morals charge. Having confessed to consensual oral sex with a seventeen-year-old boy, Henry was incarcerated in the San Quentin penitentiary from 1936-1940. Despite this setback, Cowell maintained incredibly high spirits and used his time to build an entire music program for the prisoners. Cowell continued to correspond, compose, and arrange during these years but now he also had amateur inmate musicians within his musical purview.[44] Cowell also found the different inmates to be rich sources of diverse ethnic music for him to explore.[45]

Cowell worked tirelessly as a music educator within the prison and sought to organize, "whatever constructive musical activities would be permitted."[46] By 1938, he had founded a chamber orchestra of inmates and was composing and writing arrangements of conventional classical pieces, continually being inspired by the passion of the amateur prison musicians.[47]

Rather than ceasing from activity, the prison years were pivotal in providing concrete amateur musicmaking experiences for Henry Cowell after his previous season of theoretical

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[43] Ibid., 163.

[44] Michael Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," Journal of the American Musicological Society Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring, 1991): 106.

[45] Ibid., 107.

[46] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 325.

[47] Ibid., 331.

discussions and lectures within the Composers' Collective and at The New School. Sachs summarizes Cowell's prison years by saying.

> Henry's articles, books, and compositions of the San Quentin period reveal his intense desire to restore to music-making qualities of usefulness, simplicity, practicality, melodiousness, and just plain fun… rather than dampening Henry's creativity, San Quentin seemed to be providing him with new incentives for innovating and new outlets for his musicality.[48]

Marrying a Musicologist

Henry Cowell had been a long-time acquaintance with Sidney Hawkins. They first met in 1917 when Cowell was finishing his preliminary studies with Seeger in California.[49] By the late 1930s however, Sidney had become one of Seeger's favorite musicology assistants and she specialized in obtaining field recordings of old ballads and folk songs.[50] She also was an authority on the folk music the Ozarks.[51] After she learned of Henry Cowell's imprisonment, she became an escort for his visitors and the two developed a fond bond over folk-song studies.[52]

Upon his 1940 release from prison, Henry moved to New York to work as a live-in secretary and copyist for Percy Grainger. [53] He also resumed teaching at New School. The two composers were prior acquaintances and shared a continuing interest in folk music even after Cowell departed in 1941. That same year Henry Cowell married Sidney on September 27, at Seegers' Maryland home.[54] The couple acquired various living arrangements as Henry worked

[48] Ibid., 338.
[49] Ibid., 72.
[50] Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1992), 141.
[51] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 369.
[52] Michael Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," 107.
[53] Ibid., 108.
[54] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 373.

to rebuild his career, but the two consistently spent their summers and later years in a small cottage in Shady, New York near Woodstock.

Cowell's post-prison music is often seen as far simpler and more conservative than his previous works.[55] Some scholars believe this is because the mainstream musical debate had shifted considerably by the 1940s towards debates over serialism, indeterminacy, and tonality.[56] Cowell however was not unsatisfied composing in more traditional styles. He wanted music to be fun, "simple-with-substance," and now took enjoyment in writing music for amateurs.[57] His music also became what has been called "trans-ethnic" to reflect his continued passion, studying, utilizing, and blending of all forms of indigenous music.[58]

Sidney also continued to share her studies on early American music with Henry. She introduced him to the nineteenth-century American folk hymnal, "Southern Harmony" compiled by William Walker (1809-1875) and Cowell's study of these early American fuging tunes served as a continual impetus for his popular instrumental *Hymn and Fuging Tune* series.[59] He ultimately dedicated the complete set to Sidney.[60] In the 1950s and in 1960, as mentioned in the first chapter, Sidney was instrumental in uncovering and exposing Lewis Edson and his son, to both Henry and Irving Lowens.[61] As such, Sidney Cowell's role in the creation of Henry's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* cannot be overstated.

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[55] Michael Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian,* 146.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 412.

[58] Steven Johnson, "World of Ideas: The Music of Henry Cowell," in *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium,* ed. David Nichols (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1997), 68.

[59] Wayne D. Shirley, The Hymn and Fuging Tunes," in *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium,* ed. David Nichols (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1997), 97.

[60] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 413.

[61] Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 178-193.

Authentic American Indigenous Social Musicmaking

In his later years, Henry Cowell's simpler compositional style was not simply a happenstance shift due to a loss of spirit in prison. It was rather the settling of several streams already present in Cowell's entire career. From his youth he sought to be non-European and this found expression in his passion for social musicmaking and, after his prison years, he embraced bringing this to amateur musicians. He considered the best way forward for an American composer was to become like America itself, a synthesis of many cultures, styles, and traditions. Finally, his wife provided a continual stream of local American historic vernacular music for him to consider.

Henry was motivated by utilizing the musical materials of local musicians.[62] *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is a prime example of this. Upon the discovery of the musical tunebook of two local early American composers near his own home in upstate New York, it makes perfect sense for Cowell to seek out an opportunity to present this music, in an arrangement which preserved the indigenous quality of their style, for the local Hudson Valley orchestra and community chorus. Therefore, to best comprehend the musical style of Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* one must now also understand the choral music and culture of early America.

[62] Johnson, "World of Ideas: The Music of Henry Cowell," 68.

Chapter Three - Early American Choral Music

Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was established that Henry Cowell was interested in authentic, "indigenous" music. The indigenous music of his work *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is the musical materials of the early American composers Lewis Edson (1748-1820) and his son Lewis Edson Jr. (1771-1845), who had resided in same area of the Hudson Valley as Henry Cowell's final home in Shady, New York. It is it is the purpose of this chapter to understand the singing school movement, which the Edsons participated in as singing masters, and the musical style they composed in so that Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* may be later analyzed. This chapter will begin by surveying the musical culture of the Edsons before examining their lives in specific detail. The following section will provide a discussion of the early American musical styles of choral hymns and fuging tunes. The conclusion will summarize these findings and transition to the next chapter's analysis of Cowell's adaptive work *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*.

Early American Singing Schools and the Yankee Tunesmiths

Lewis Edson and his son, in their day, were both considered, "singing masters" during a period of American musical reformation called the, "singing school movement."[63] This era spans from 1720 to roughly 1820. The movement began in Boston with a call for, "Regular Singing" in churches.[64] Regular singing meant the local congregation would no longer sing by following a deacon recalling a tune from previous oral traditions, but instead read their music

[63] Wiley H. Hitchcock, *Music History in The United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 7.

[64] Ibid., 8.

from written scores.[65] Singing schools were led by itinerant singing masters who travelled across colonial New England to musically educate the laity.

Often, a local church would sponsor a singing school and hire a singing master.[66] At first, this musical material was mostly borrowed from imported British music books.[67] By the 1760s, American singing masters began to publish their own tunebooks, now including their own pedagogical introductory material.[68] It was a self-funded enterprise and singing masters often expected their students to purchase their books for use at their singing schools. Their tenure could last from one week to three months.[69]

Gradually, the singing school became an important part of the general community life in later eighteenth-century America and transcended being exclusively religious.[70] The singing school served as a social outlet for men and women to interact closely together,[71] and was a place where multiple denominations were welcome to participate together.[72] By the 1780s, the singing school was now also sponsored by the towns themselves and held at taverns and schools.[73] It became an independent social activity with some even growing into the earliest American

[65] David Phares McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-century Composer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 12.

[66] Lorenzo F. Candelaria and Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama* (Stanford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 115.

[67] Wiley H. Hitchcock, *Music History in The United States: A Historical Introduction*, 8.

[68] Richard A. Crawford, "The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody," in Recent Researches in American Music, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock. Vol. 11-12 (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1984) x.

[69] Lorenzo F. Candelaria and Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama*, 115.

[70] Richard A. Crawford, "The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody," x.

[71] Wiley H. Hitchcock, *Music History in The United States: A Historical Introduction*, 8.

[72] Lorenzo F. Candelaria and Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama*, 115.

[73] Kevin J. Lambert, "Performance Practice of Early American Choral Music: A Reassessment," *The Choral Journal*, Vol 37, no. 2 (September 1996): 31.

community choral societies.[74]

The popularity of the first generation of American singing masters (1720-1760) inspired the following generations to not only take up the mantle themselves as teachers of music, but now also as active composers.[75] This second period (1760-1820) of self-taught American composer-compiler-singing masters came to be known as the era of the, "Yankee Tunesmith."[76] The Yankee Tunesmith not only sold a tunebook of popular compiled music but included their own original compositions for the communities visited.[77] There was an intimate connection between this local lay musician and their local communities.[78] Their work was a curated repository of the music popular in the towns they instructed, and often simultaneously worked in at non-musical working class trades.[79] Perhaps this all piqued Henry Cowell's interest when his wife Sidney and Irving Lowens uncovered the Edsons' tunebook, "The Social Harmonist" containing the music of these two local New York Yankee Tunesmiths.

Lewis Edson, Lewis Edson Jr. and The Social Harmonist

Lewis Edson Sr. was born in Bridgewater, Massachusetts on January 22, 1748.[80] In 1763, after fighting as a teenager in the French and Indian War, he settled down as a blacksmith in his hometown. He was then trained musically by either his brother or by a visiting singing master. By 1769 he was listed as a teacher of, "The Science of Musik" in the neighboring town

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[74] Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 1998), 250.

[75] David Phares McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-century Composer*, 22.

[76] Wiley H. Hitchcock, *Music History in The United States: A Historical Introduction*, 9.

[77] Richard A. Crawford, "The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody," x.

[78] David Phares McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth-century Composer*, 25.

[79] Lorenzo F. Candelaria and Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama*, 116.

[80] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 182ff.

of Halifax.[81] He taught there yearly until 1776 when he moved to Lanesboro, Massachusetts where he and his brother were both leading choristers for their local Anglican church. His primary duty was to select the music for the choir, and it is believed he began to also compose at this time.[82]

He was known for his impressive voice, with his reputation as a singing master and composer growing in the 1780s. His music at this time was disseminated through the tunebooks of other local singing masters.[83] In 1791 Lewis Edson quietly moved into New York State and records are nonexistent until he settled in Mink Hollow, New York in 1806, near Henry Cowell's later future home in Shady. He lived a quiet life as a blacksmith, and likely still local singing teacher, before passing away on an unknown day in 1820.[84]

His son, Lewis Edson Jr. was born on January 23, 1771 while his father was still living in Bridgewater.[85] After his birth, Lewis Edson Jr. is next mentioned in 1795 as a postrider and singing master in nearby Cooperstown, New York.[86] He lived a more unstable working life than his father, moving to Middlefield, New York in 1797 and then to Danbury, Connecticut the following year.

At the turn of the century, he published a tunebook in Danbury, compiling many of the hymns and fuging tunes of his father and himself. "The Social Harmonist" was popular enough to have been published in three separate editions,[87] with the second edition of 1801 being the

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 183.
[83] Ibid., 184.
[84] Karl Kroeger, "Three New York Composers: The Collected Works of Lewis Edson, Lewis Edson Jr., and Nathaniel Billings," in Music of the New American Nation Sacred Music From 1780 To 1820, ed. Karl Kroger. Vol 3 (New York: Routledge, 2012). xxii.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 185.

extant copy which Sidney Cowell located in 1960. The third edition of 1803 is also surviving.[88] The copy Sidney found is believed to have been owned by Lewis Edson Jr. himself and was added to throughout the rest of his life, as additional tunes on later pages are dated up to 1832.[89]

Coinciding with these initial publications is Lewis Edson Jr.'s relocation to New York City in 1800. He is recorded as working for Christ Episcopal Church on Ann Street.[90] In addition to music, his other trades continually shifted from house builder, to schoolteacher, to nail manufacturer.[91] His records disappear from 1815-1830 when he reemerges in Mink Hollow, New York on a homestead near his father's farm. He passed away there on May 23, 1845.[92] His copy of, "The Social Harmonist" however, was passed on as a family heirloom.[93] Therefore, it is to the musical styles of these two Yankee Tunesmiths things now turn.

The Musical Style of Early American Hymns and Fuging Tunes

The musical medium of the Yankee Tunesmith was the choral ensemble. Music was written in open score, for three-to-five mixed voices. The most common ensemble was four independent voices: the treble, the counter, the tenor (which carried the air or melody), and the bass. The following discussion will begin with broad considerations of the textual inspiration and common musical language of the period using the insights of scholars John Worst and Maxine Fawcett-Yeske. This is followed by some considerations for informed performance practice.

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[88] Karl Kroeger, "Three New York Composers: The Collected Works of Lewis Edson, Lewis Edson Jr., and Nathaniel Billings," xxii.

[89] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 188.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 185.

[92] Karl Kroeger, "Three New York Composers: The Collected Works of Lewis Edson, Lewis Edson Jr., and Nathaniel Billings," xxii.

[93] Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America*, 186f.

Before examining musical specifics, it is important to recognize the inspiration for the title of an early American, "tunesmith." Scholar John Worst has said, "the tunesmith was an artisan who worked with a metrical poetic text to produce a plain tune, fuging-tune, tune with extension, or set piece. He was more an arranger than composer."[94] The most common texts utilized were the widespread and familiar metrical psalms of Isaac Watts, as his poetic psalter was widely used across much of New England. These psalms, in strict poetic meter, provided vivid pictures and shared universal emotions[95] for the tunesmith's unique musical inspiration, while the structure of the poetic stanzas provided apparent forms for their compositions. Describing the relationship between poetry and music for the tunesmith, Worst says,

> The dependence of the New England composers on the textual meter and stanzaic structure to determine musical rhythm and form allowed them to devote more creative energy to melody, harmony, tonality, and word painting. It would almost seem that this dependence on the text gave them confidence to explore and experiment without worrying about the form.[96]

As mentioned above, tunesmiths were especially interested in finding ways to depict the spirit of a text. Their choice of a major or minor mode was the first step in establishing a musical mood, followed by various forms of text painting to emphasize key words.[97] Word reptations, melismas, and dotted passages could be used to draw particular attention to certain words.[98] There were also various types of musical literalisms used to depict a text. A text with the words, "high" or, "low" could include the setting of these words with a respective higher or

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[94] John William Worst, "New England Psalmody 1760-1810: Analysis of an American Idiom." (Doctoral diss., The University of Michigan, 1974), 106.

[95] Maxine A. Fawcett-Yeske. "The Fuging Tune in America, 1770-1820: An Analytical Study." (Doctoral diss., University of Colorado, 1997) 417.

[96] John William Worst, "New England Psalmody 1760-1810: Analysis of an American Idiom," 152.

[97] Maxine A. Fawcett-Yeske. "The Fuging Tune in America, 1770-1820: An Analytical Study," 417.

[98] Ibid., 434.

lower melodic tessitura.[99] If something was said to be in motion, dotted figures may be employed[100] or if it was, "sounding" long sustained notes may be present.[101]

Of all the musical aspects a tunesmith was interested in, the primary melody or air was the starting point of any composition.[102] In addition to types of musical text painting, the melodic content of this period had three earlier influences: Anglo-Genevan psalm tunes, florid Methodist hymns, and English folk dances.[103] Since the English metrical poetry of this era often followed iambic pentameter, the duple rhythm of long-short-short (e.g. half note-quarter-quarter) is especially common. The fondness for a homophonic, stately, and sturdy melodic hymn style has direct ties to earlier Anglo-Genevan psalm tunes.[104] Not all tunesmith airs are completely free of melodic embellishments however, as some tunes may also contain multiple melodic passing notes between its chords, reflecting the more florid Methodist hymnody that was also simultaneously present around New England.[105] Finally, tunes could also be rhythmically energic, in compound or triple meters, and with multiple melodic skips reminiscent of the English folk dances of the era, such as gigs and reels. Much like in prior music notation, the choice of a time signature would also indicate to the performers the preferred tempo.[106]

Once a melody was established, the tunesmith would turn to working out the other voices independently.[107] Since they were mostly self-taught, their counterpoint possesses unorthodox

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[99] Ibid., 436.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 438.
[102] John William Worst, "New England Psalmody 1760-1810: Analysis of an American Idiom," 232.
[103] Ibid., 112.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 236f.
[106] Ibid., 91ff.
[107] Ibid., 232.

harmonic progressions and voicings when compared with traditional European styles. [108] Their music is almost exclusively in diatonic major and minor, but it was not conceived of within the framework of functional tonality. John Worst describes it as, "a kind of wandering tonality which consists of merely a succession of sounds in no particular plan rather than a progression of chords in a scheme of tonal direction and definition."[109] This is greatly in part due to the lack of rules for handling dissonances. Each tune was a combination of independent melodies, build to compliment the primary tenor air, but with less calculation given to the moment-to-moment sonorities.[110]

All this musical language was utilized by the tunesmith into several defined musical genres.[111] The first was the plain tune, a strophic setting of a metrical text with no repeats of the text. By contrast, a tune with an extension would be a strophic setting in which there is present some degree of textual repetition. The third was the anthem, a through-composed setting of specifically non-metrical text with each section possessing its own meter, tempo, key, and style. It is comparable to a set piece, which was also a through-composed setting, but of multiple metrical stanzas. Finally, there was the fuging-tune.

The standard fuging-tune form is a strict ABB marked by two distinct and contrasting textures of counterpoint.[112] The first section is a homophonic chordal texture which cadences and then is followed by an imitative contrapuntal second section where the voices enter in close

[108] Maxine A. Fawcett-Yeske. "The Fuging Tune in America, 1770-1820: An Analytical Study," 493.

[109] John William Worst, "New England Psalmody 1760-1810: Analysis of an American Idiom," 62.

[110] Ibid., 168.

[111] Ibid., 40ff.

[112] Maxine A. Fawcett-Yeske. "The Fuging Tune in America, 1770-1820: An Analytical Study," 119f.

succession. This second imitative section is then repeated. These two sections frequently covered one single stanza of a metrical text. The genre proved incredibly popular and well suited to the tastes and abilities of the eighteenth-century American singing school member.[113]

There is one final topic to consider before applying the insights of the early American style to Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*. This is an understanding of the correct performance practices for this era. Scholar Kevin Lambert has reassessed the writings of eighteenth-century New England tunesmiths and argues for a different sound than the ruckus quality of singing often found in contemporary folk hymnody performances. [114] Firstly, it is desirable for the various voices to be balanced with each other. Secondly, the vocal quality requested by a singing master was not shouty but something pleasing, controlled, and flexible. Thirdly, it was not inauthentic for available instruments to double vocal parts, even if unaccompanied performances were more common. This is also noted by scholar Karl Kroger in his preface to the music of Lewis Edson and his son. Kroger notes that bass viols and bassoons would have doubled the bass, flute and clarinet for the counter, flute and violin for the treble, and clarinet and viola for the tenor. It was also possible the instruments would play hymns on their own before the singers entered.[115] Finally, though the choral score was written in four parts, it was sometimes realized in a six-part texture to facilitate performance. It was desirous for singing school members to participate by joining the part that was most suitable for their own voice. This means it was not unheard of for the tenor melody to also be realized an octave higher by several lower trebles or higher altos.

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[113] Ibid., 122.

[114] Kevin J. Lambert, "Performance Practice of Early American Choral Music: A Reassessment," *The Choral Journal*, Vol 37, no. 2 (September 1996): 29-34.

[115] Karl Kroeger, "Three New York Composers: The Collected Works of Lewis Edson, Lewis Edson Jr., and Nathaniel Billings," xiv.

In conclusion, the music and musicmaking of singing masters Lewis Edson and his son was a community endeavor. It was music by community members for their community members as both a form of music education and musical socialization. The Yankee Tunesmiths were self-taught and developed a style independent of concurrent European trends. Finally, since both Edsons eventually settled adjacent to Cowell's future New York summer home, they may be thought of as his historic musical neighbors. Perhaps all of this was resonant with Henry as he prepared *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*. With this understanding of the early American singing school established this piece, built from the music of the Edsons themselves, may now be examined.

Chapter Four - Analysis of Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes

Preliminary Musical Information and Analytical Categories

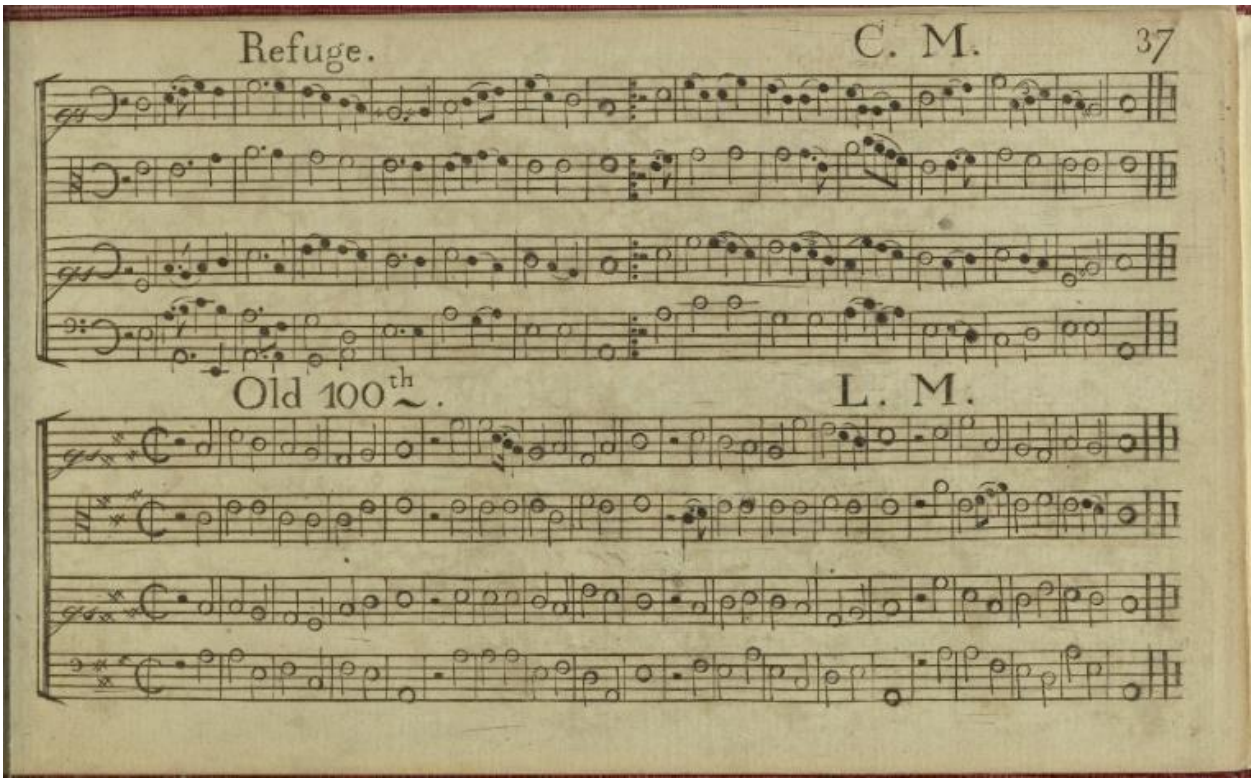
Before proceeding into a systematic analysis of Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*, it will be beneficial to describe the scope of the entire work as well as setting forth the categories which will be used to understand each individual section. Henry Cowell called *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* a, "suite in two parts." The first part of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is a presentation of four distinct pieces by Lewis Edson Jr. and the second part contains five separate works by Lewis Edson Sr. A complete performance of the entire work takes approximately ten minutes.

Both sections contain a variety of harmonized psalm tunes and fuging tunes, sometimes for orchestra alone and sometimes for orchestra and chorus together. If no text was provided for a specific tune in, "The Social Harmonist" itself, Cowell arranged it for orchestra alone but if a text was provided in the tunebook, Cowell included the chorus. All tunes are taken from, "The Social Harmonist" and are in well-defined sections, providing the larger movement structure for the suite. The music is almost exclusively a strict arrangement of the Edsons' exact musical material, but Cowell's independent compositional touches are occasionally noticeable, as are his choices of musical repeats, and diverse choices of orchestration and voicings.

The instrumentation required for a performance of the full choral-orchestral work are as follows: 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets in Bb, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns in F, 2 Trumpets in Bb, 2 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, and a five-part string orchestra with additional divisi. The chorus should be large enough to accommodate frequently being in six parts: Soprano I/II, Alto I/II, Tenor, and Bass. As mentioned above in the opening chapter, the work was also adapted for organ, playing an orchestral reduction, and for similarly divided chorus.

The following analysis will systematically proceed through each section, accounting first for the original material found in the copy of, "The Social Harmonist"[116] Cowell had access to. A figure showing the original tune will be presented, along with the following information: the title of the hymn tune, the source of the text if present, the stanzaic meter of the text, and the form of the original tune. After this source material has been noted, a discussion will follow describing important musical features and explaining how Cowell adapted the Edsons' musical material in his suite *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*.

Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes - Part I (The Music of Lewis Edson Jr.)



(Figure 1 - REFUGE)

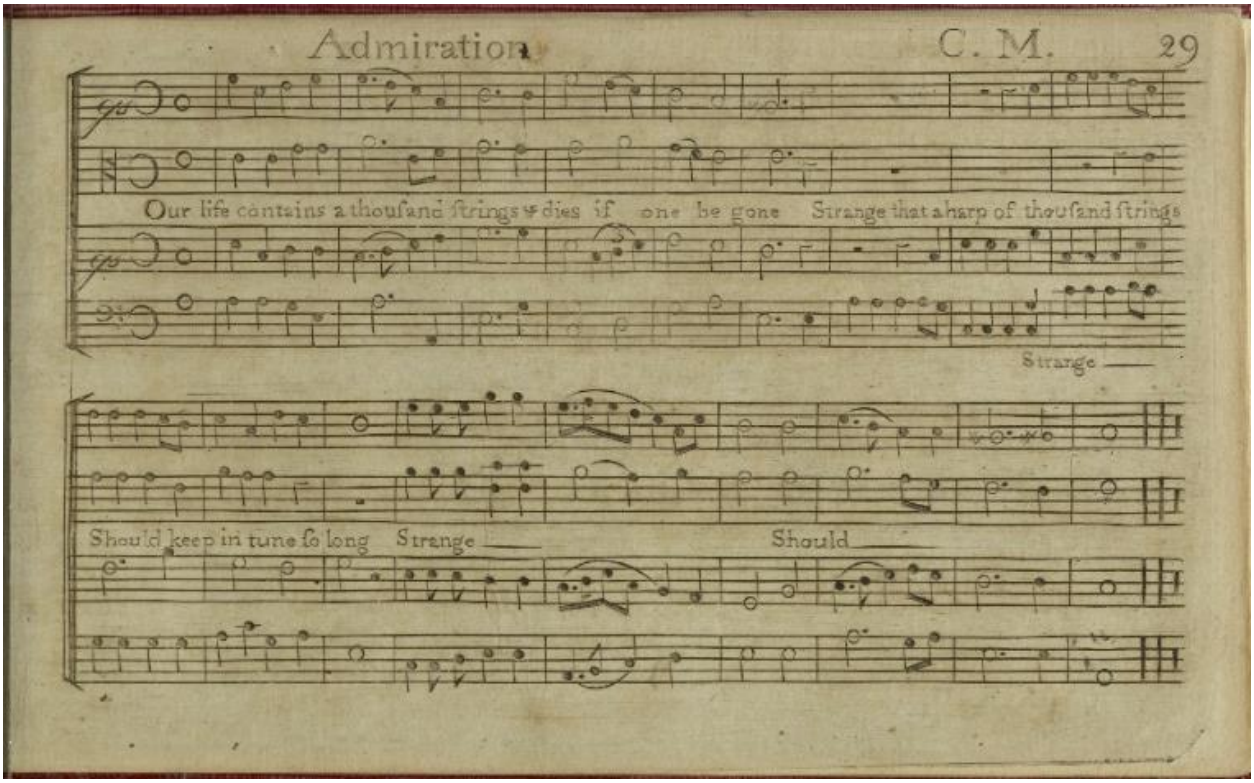
[116] Music Division, The New York Public Library. "The Social Harmonist" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 9, 2022. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a8fe9de1-9baa-91f3-e040-e00a180659ca

Title: REFUGE
Text: Not applicable
Tune Meter: Common Meter (8.6.8.6.)
Form: Tune with extension

REFUGE is a tune in duple meter. It is predominantly in the A natural minor mode but with a raised double leading tone at its final cadence. It is a tune with frequent melodic embellishments to its air and contains a variety of simultaneous subdivisions of the beat. It is also occasionally in six parts with three separate bass voices at the third bar. Edson has clearly notated a repeat of the second section.

Cowell opens his suite with the tempo marking of, "Maestoso" and the quality of an orchestral overture. At first, the strings begin alone. For the first phrase, Cowell interlocks the parts by assigning the tenor melody to the Violin I and Cello I while the counter and treble lines are represented by the divided Violin II. The multiple bass parts are covered by the Violas, lower Cello II, and the Contrabass. Whenever Edson's bass divisi is not present, the Cellos unite on the melody while the Violas continue the bass line.

The strings continue playing in this interlocked divisi until the repeat of the second section. Here, Cowell brings in an orchestral tutti with each of the upper wind instrument pairs assigned to a different part of the tune. This interlocked voicing mirrors the strings' interlocked divisi even as it now expands the octave doublings upwards beyond Edson's original score. The final cadence of this music dovetails into the first bar of the next tune.



(Figure 2 - ADMIRATION)

Title: ADMIRATION
Text: Isaac Watts, "Let Others Boast How Strong They Be" (Stanza 3)

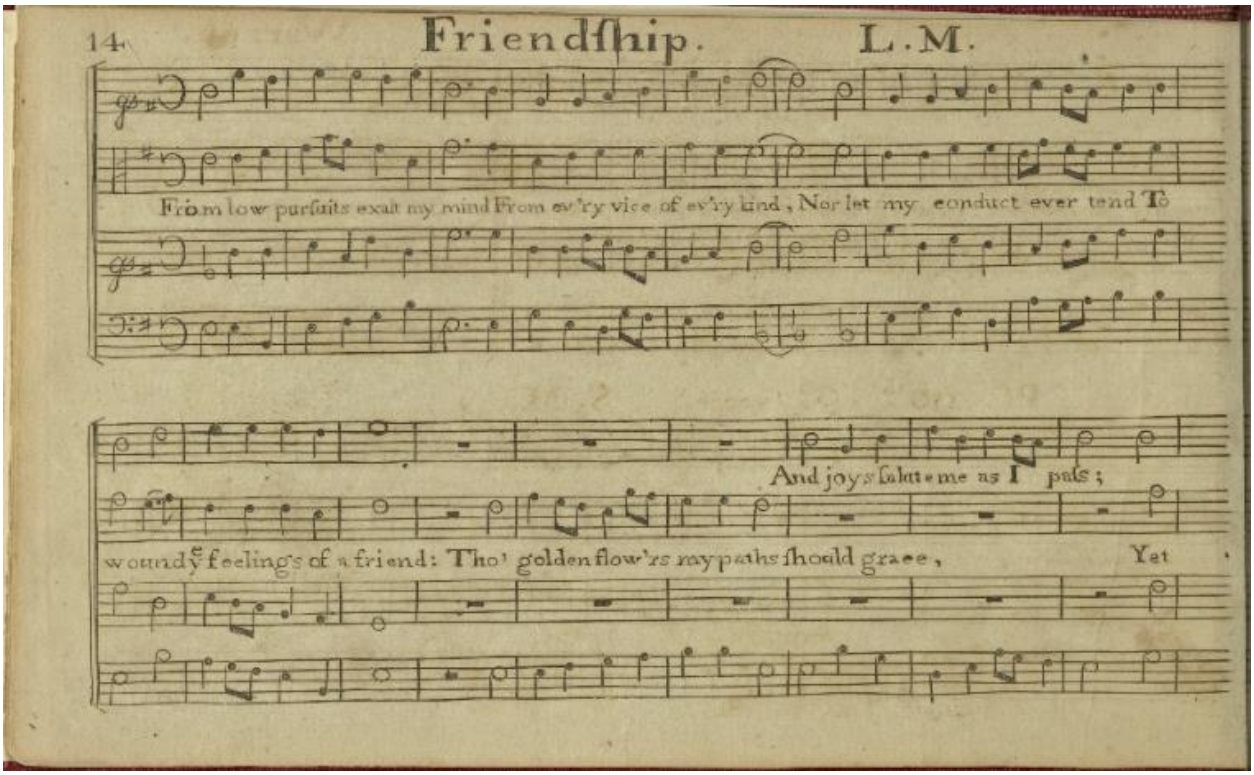
Our life contains a thousand strings,
and dies if one be gone;
Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long.

Tune Meter: Common Meter (8.6.8.6.)
Form: Fuging Tune

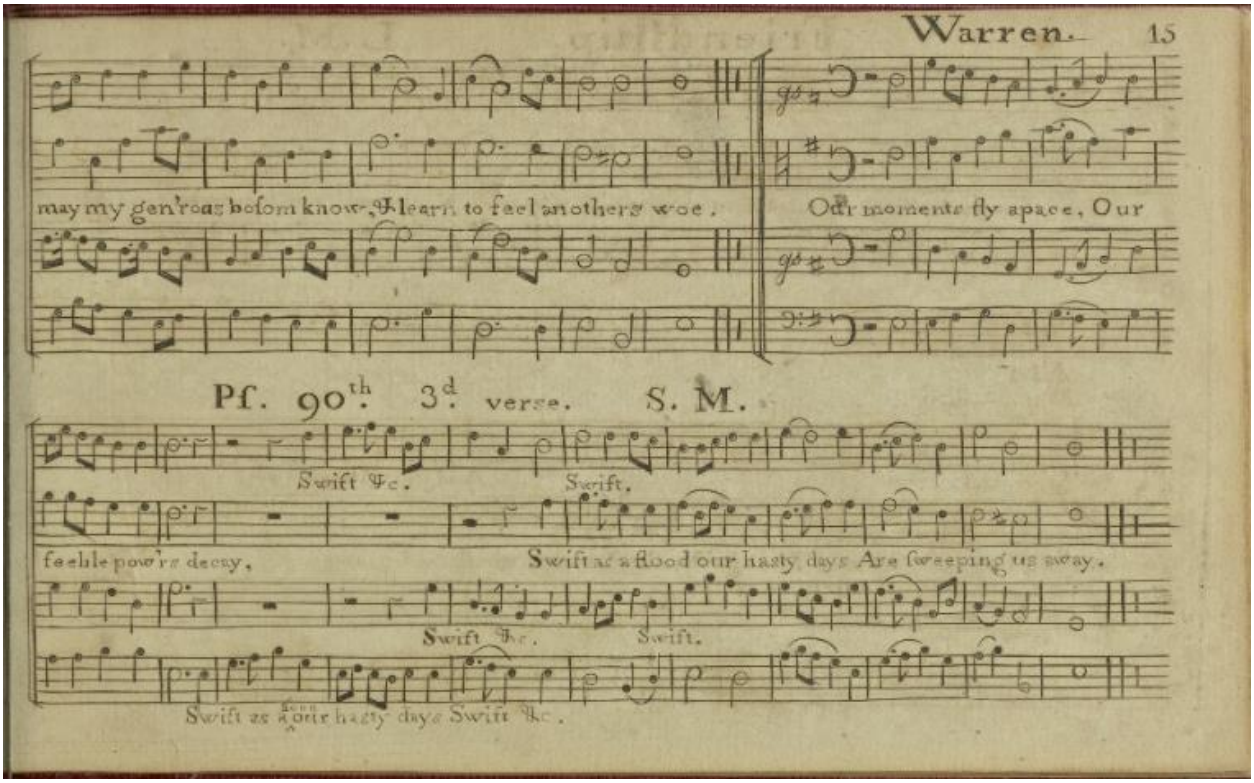
ADMIRATION is the second piece in the suite and the first fuging tune presented. It is in the A natural minor mode, except for its final harmonic minor cadence. It contains prominent dotted figuration at the climax of the fuging section to represent the, "thousand strings" vibrating, a metaphor of admiration for the complexity of the human body.

As mentioned above, the first note of this fuging tune is also the final note of the earlier Maestoso REFUGE. Aside from the initial powerful downbeat, Cowell completely removes the orchestra and lets the choral voices fittingly carry this entire fuging tune about the intricacy of

humanity itself. This does not mean Cowell did not make any musical adaptations. Cowell continues the use of interlocked voices by doubling the tenor melody in the Soprano II and doubling bass line in the Alto II. This doubling consolidates to a standard choral four-part texture at the start of the imitative section before coming back to a six-voice texture at the climatic dotted phrase. Unexpectedly, Cowell adds a subito piano dynamic here to call attention to the busier figuration before a sudden resurging forte brings the tune to a strong close. The fuging section is not repeated. Cowell also adds fermatas at the end of this fuging tune and on the barline after, indicating a clear break before the next hymn.



(Figure 3 - FRIENDSHIP - first page)



(Figure 4 - FRIENDSHIP - second page)

Title: FRIENDSHIP
Text: Anon, "Thou Giver of My Life and Joy" (Stanza 3 & 4)

From low pursuits exalt my mind,
From ev'ry vice of ev'ry kind,
Nor let my conduct ever tend
To wound the feelings of a friend.
Tho' golden flow'rs my paths should grace,
And joys salute me as I pass,
Yet may my gen'rous bosom know,
And learn to feel another's woe.

Tune Meter: Long Meter (8.8.8.8.)
Form: Plain tune

Although FRIENDSHIP is categorized as a plain tune in E minor, it is a setting of two entire stanzas of a metrical text. The first half is homophonic while the second half contrasts with initial antiphonal writing. Edson's gentle text painting is exhibited by increasing the rhythmic activity on the word, "generous" and agogic accents on the final phrase, "learn to feel."

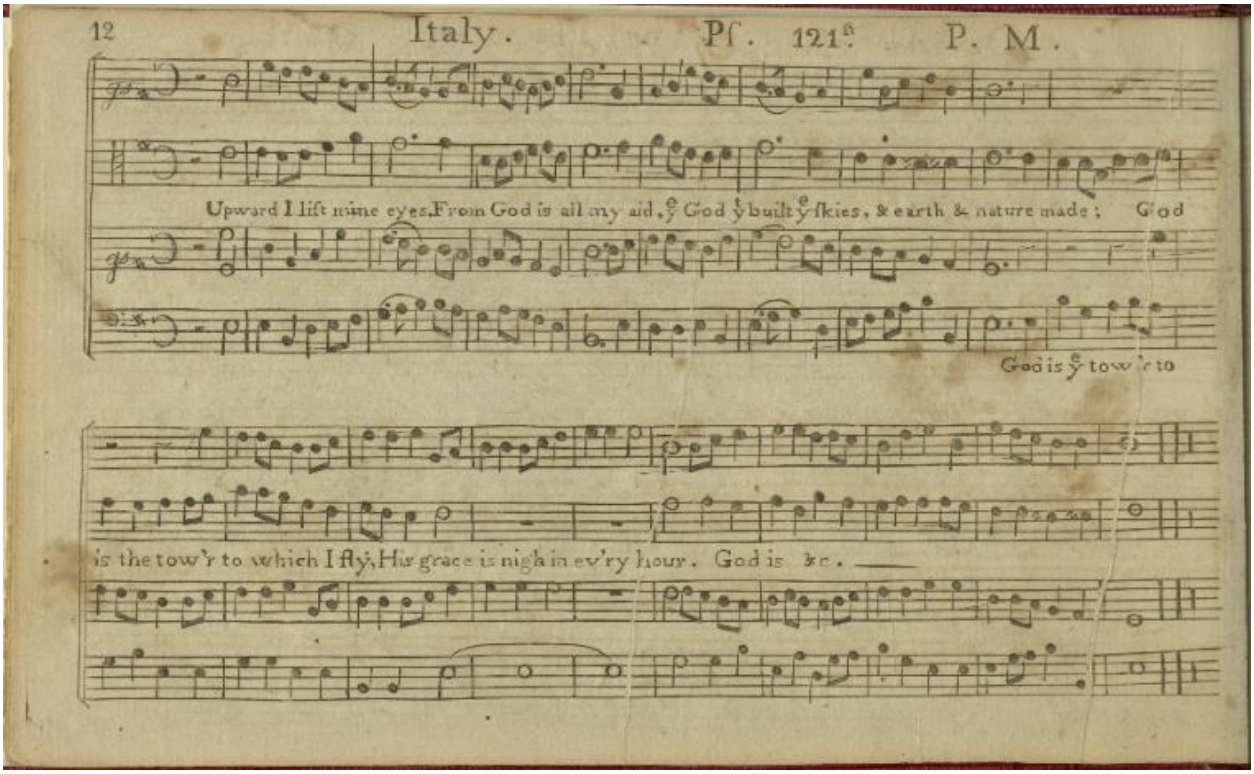
Cowell fittingly now joins the orchestral and choral forces together for FRIENDSHIP. The first stanza of text is sung by the choir and strings in familiar interlocking registers. Cowell continues to double the tenor melody with Soprano II, Violin I, and Cello. The treble is carried by the Soprano I and upper Violin II. The counter, by the Alto I and lower Violin II. The bass line is in the Alto II, Bass, Viola, and Contrabass. This first section is marked much quieter than ADMIRATION.

For the following antiphonal phrases, as in the previously more contrapuntal material, Cowell eschews interlocked voices and changes to more conventional voicing. The low brass doubles the vocal basses while horns and then trumpets double the altos and sopranos respectively. For the final full phrase, Cowell expands the chorus back out into six parts, but accompanies with the wind ensemble not interlocked, with both pairs of instruments now on a single part. This, coupled with the introduction of the timpani, creates a dynamically forceful closing. The final open cadence on E serves as a dovetail and pick-up into the next section, an orchestral restatement of the opening tune REFUGE in A minor.

Cowell then plays through the entire tune of REFUGE again. This time however, it is orchestrated in reverse to its previous setting, moving now from a full tutti in its first section to smaller instrumental ensembles in its second section. The use of the symphonic orchestra allows Cowell to explore farther extremes of pitch than is possible for a chorus alone. The first phrase of the second section of REFUGUE is softly scored for Flutes, Violins and Violas all playing Edson's material in the upper parts of their register.

The following closing phrase is then given to muted brass in closed voicings. This time, Cowell slightly reworks the final two bar of this melody to continue its stepwise motion down through A to cadence on E instead. This is to set up a modulation to the next section. As these

players sustain their final notes, Cowell again dovetails the last notes into the opening of the following tune.



(Figure 5 - ITALY)

Title: ITALY
Text: Isaac Watts, Psalm 121 (Stanza 1)

Upward I lift mine eyes,
From God is all my aid.
The God that built the skies,
And earth and nature made;
God is the tow'r
To which I fly,
His grace is nigh
In ev'ry hour.

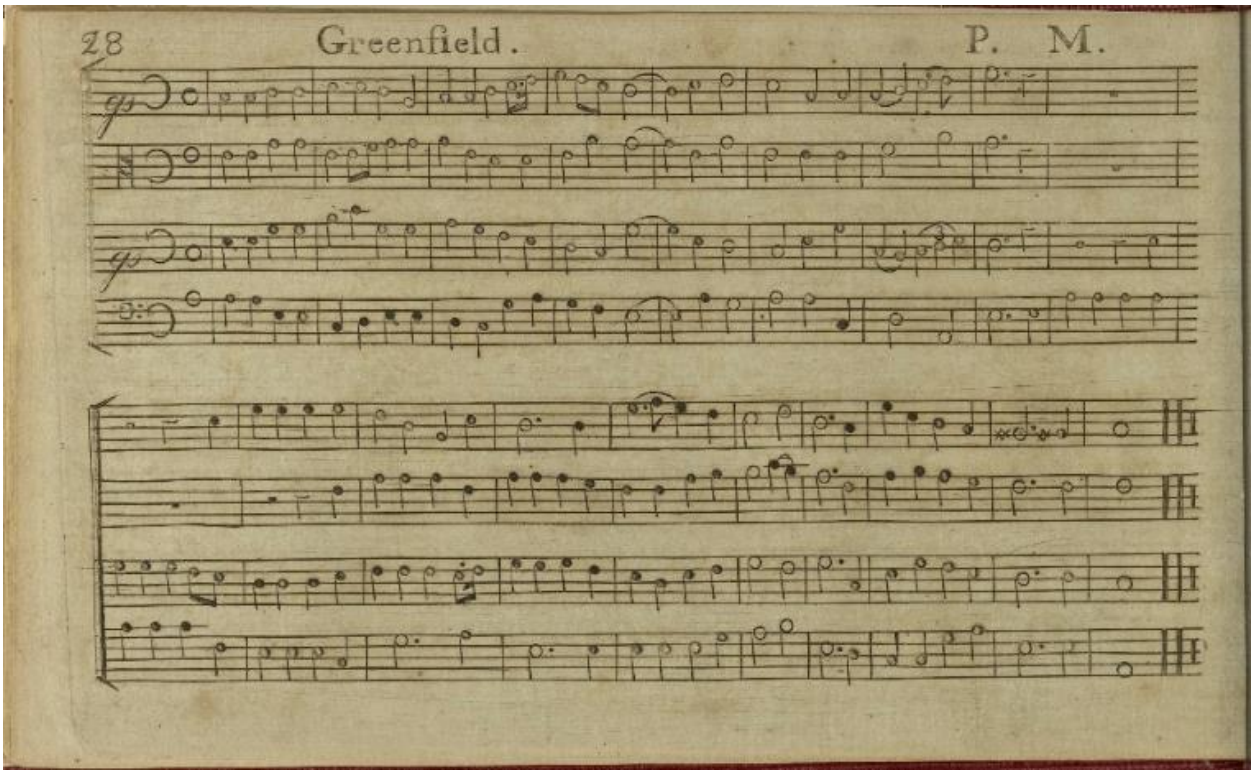
Tune Meter: Peculiar Meter (6.6.6.6. 4.4.4.4.)
Form: Tune with extension

ITALY is the closing tune of the first part of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* and it is notable for Cowell's gentle reworking of the form of the hymn to create a longer movement. At the onset Cowell pivots to E minor and asks for, "piu mosso," bringing the chorus in

unaccompanied, with a strong unison entrance out of the quiet ending of REFUGE. The entire chorus sings the tenor melody for the opening four bars before expanding into their parts for the second phrase.

The unaccompanied chorus proceeds into the contrapuntal second half of the tune but, after the music pauses on its bass pedal, Cowell surprisingly delays Edson's final phrase and instead returns to the opening measures with brass and strings now accompanying. Upon returning to the second contrapuntal section, the winds continue in place of the brass. For the final previously postponed phrase, Cowell writes a full choral-orchestral tutti and augments the duration of the notes to create a natural ritardando at the final cadence. This brings the first half of the work to a vigorous close.

Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes - Part II (The Music of Lewis Edson Sr.)

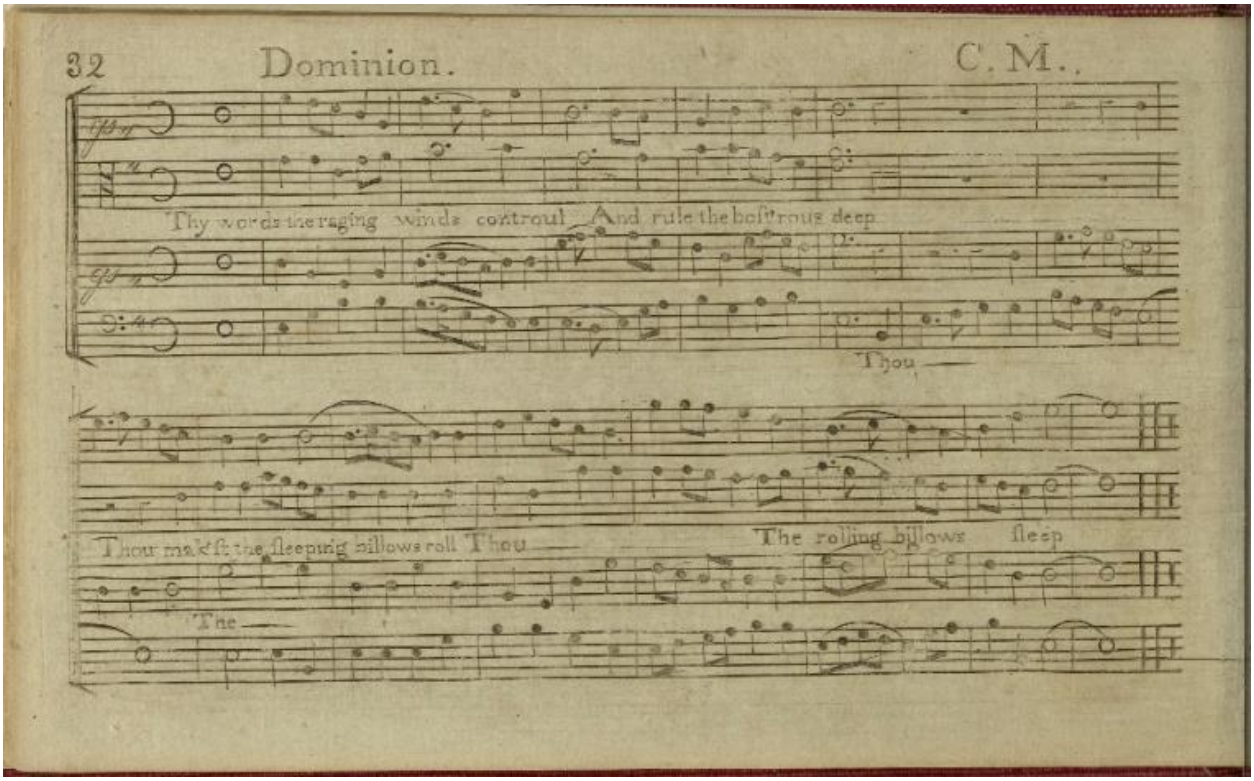


(Figure 6 - GREENFIELD)

Title: GREENFIELD
Text: Not applicable
Tune Meter: Long Peculiar Meter (8.8.8.8.8.8.)
Form: Fuging Tune

The opening of the second half of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is like its first part, an orchestral overture. The tempo is marked, "Allegro moderato," and the key is again A minor. The opening sonority is antiphonal brass. The first phrase is for horn quartet and the second is for trumpets, trombones, and tuba. The brass joins together for the final phrase before the fuging section. For timbral contrast, the fuging section and its coda are played by the strings and winds.

Cowell then chooses to repeat the entire tune, except for its first held sonority, now contrasting larger families of instruments with an increase of dynamics. The first phrase opens with full brass and timpani and is joined by the wind ensemble for the second. The strings alone take the start of the fuging tune before an orchestral tutti brings the movement to a full close.



(Figure 7 - DOMINION)

Title: DOMINION
Text: Isaac Watts, Psalm 89 (Part 2, Stanza 4)

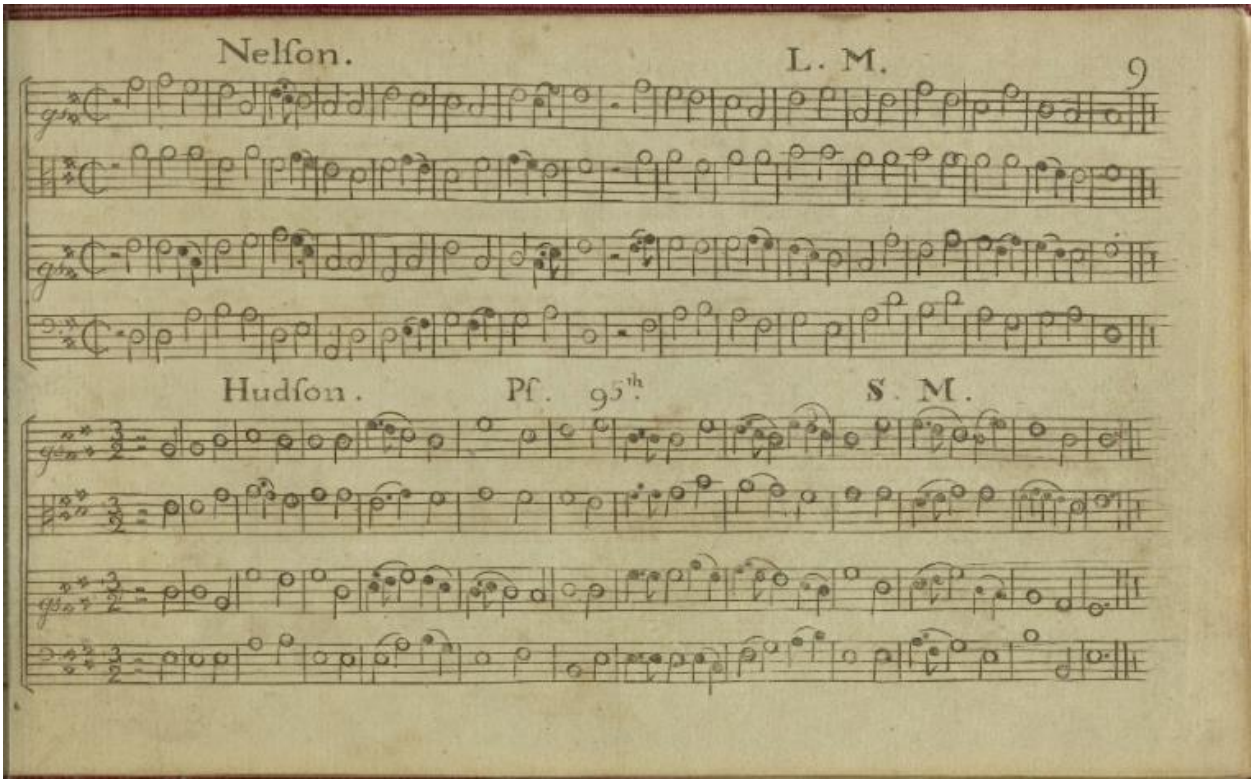
Thy words the raging winds control
And rule the boist'rous deep.
Thou mak'st the sleeping billows roll,
The rolling billows sleep.

Tune Meter: Common Meter (8.6.8.6.)
Form: Fuging Tune

DOMINION is an energetic fuging tune filled text painting from both Edson and Cowell. Set in the key of E minor, the tune itself is filled with dotted rhythms for the, "raging winds" and rolling eighth notes for the moving ocean waves. Cowell marks the tempo as, "Allegro agitato" and sets the hymn twice, using one full repeat, but with special care to create a matching orchestral atmosphere.

The movement opens with the chorus and strings vigorously presenting the first section. Upon reaching the imitative fuging section Cowell adds his own musical material, derived from the tune, by sending the strings into rolling eighth note ostinatos outlining the harmonies above. The winds now double the voices. On the final phrase, Cowell writes a long diminuendo but keeps the string ostinato pulsing under the surface.

Suddenly, at the repeat of the hymn, the chorus and all brass enter with just the melody as the entire string section swells in their billowing ostinatos over rolling timpani. The brass doubles the chorus through the second fuging section. On the second ending, Cowell elongates the final chord while simultaneously creating a textural diminuendo by gradually breaking down the strings' ostinatos into static notes at various times. This creates the orchestrated effect of waves coming back to quiet stillness.



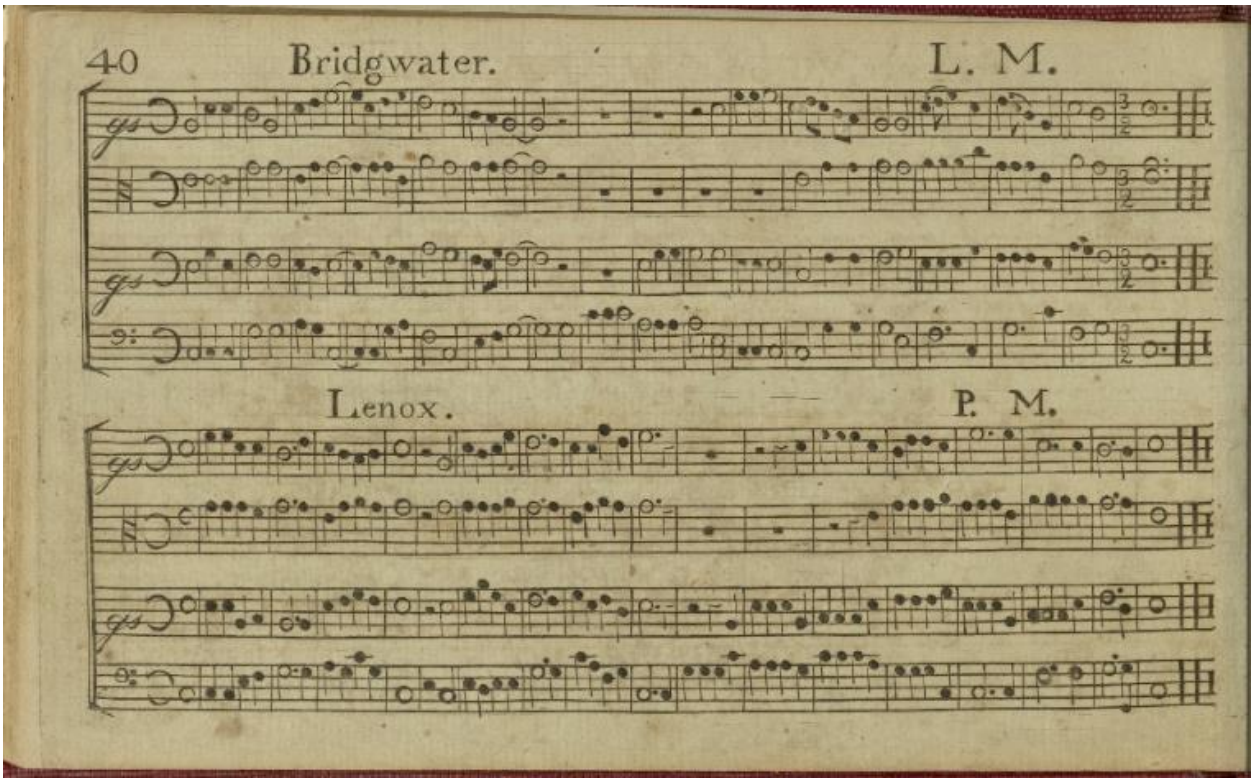
(Figure 8 - HUDSON)

Title: HUDSON
Text: Not applicable, although Psalm 95 is suggested
Tune Meter: Short Meter (6.6.8.6.)
Form: Plain Tune

After the turbulent E minor of the previous section, HUDSON is a serene hymn in E major. The meter suggests a slower tempo as Cowell notes simply, "Allegro quasi andante." Although this movement has a suggested Psalm text, Cowell uses this hymn for a lyrical orchestral respite.

The opening scoring is an intimate wind quartet, with the Oboe taking the melody for the first phrase. Adding judiciously to Edson's materials, Cowell carefully inserts gentle passing and neighbor half notes to the treble and counter voices to keep the motion of the tact present. Gradually, the melody is interlocked with another Flute playing an octave above the Oboe. The dynamic is continually soft.

The hymn is repeated but now with hushed strings. There is no divisi and the voicing is conventional, with the melody in the Violin I. At the second phrase, Cowell adds the flute to the melody and then substitutes it for the Oboe before bringing both instruments together with the strings for the final peaceful phrase.

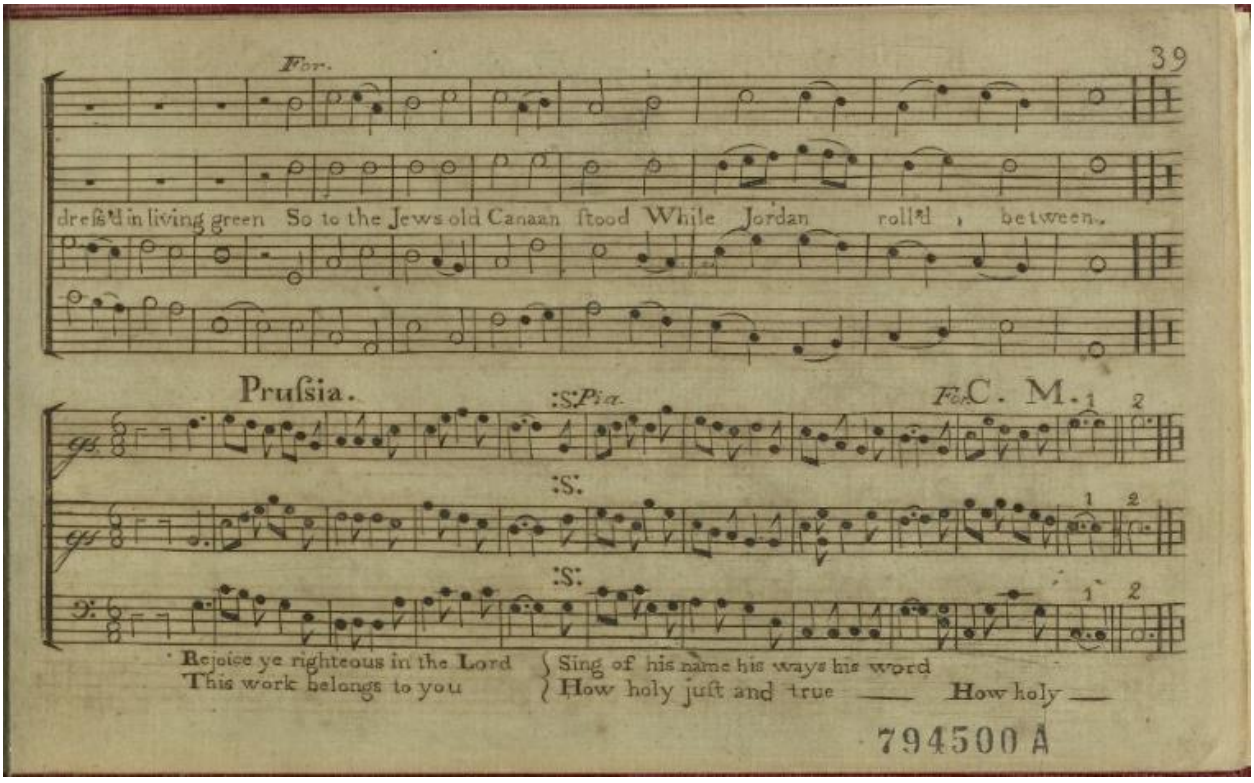


(Figure 9 - LENOX)

Title: LENOX
Text: Not applicable
Tune Meter: Peculiar Meter (6.6.6.6.8.8.8.)
Form: Fuging Tune

After the tranquility of the previous movement, LENOX provides an exuberant contrast. Written in C major and marked, "Allegro," Cowell uses this fuging tune to showcase the major families of the orchestra with each phrase of the music using different timbres. The hymn is played through twice with one repeat.

The tune opens with forte divisi strings. The interlocked voicing returns with the melody doubled in the Violin I and Viola while the Violin II divisi contains both the treble and counter. At the second phrase, the Flutes and Oboes double the melody while the Clarinet provides the treble. The bassoons cover the bassline, and three horns provide extra doubling for the upper three parts. At the imitative section, the strings begin alone before the winds join them for the final tutti phrase. At the repeat of the tune, Cowell employs a full orchestral tutti with fully interlocked winds, brass, and strings. The fuging tune maintains this full texture, setting up the expectation for an even larger choral finale.



(Figure 10 - PRUSSIA)

Title: PRUSSIA
Text: Isaac Watts, Psalm 33 (Stanza 1)

Rejoice ye righteous in the Lord
This work belongs you.
Sing of his name, his ways, his word
How holy just and true.

Tune Meter: Common Meter (8.6.8.6.)
Form: Tune with extension

PRUSSIA is the final tune of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* and an example of the English folk dance style occasionally present in Yankee Tunesmith writing. It is in a quick and duple compound meter and Cowell adds the marking, "Allegro con brio." It is also unique for being the only hymn in the suite originally composed in three voices and a piece where Edson himself requests the specific dynamics of piano and forte respectively. Cowell sets the music twice with one full repeat. The music is in C major.

On the first time through, Cowell brings the Chorus in with the accompaniment of strings and timpani. The tenor melody is reinforced by the Soprano II and all Altos in the choir, as well as the Violin I and Violas. At the first phrase marked piano, Cowell sets only the melody with a Tenor solo and soft violin harmonies, and eschews Edson's indicated forte. Instead, Cowell returns to the start of entire tune with a sudden full choral-orchestral tutti. This gentle reworking of the form mirrors how he closed the finale of Part I.

The hymn is now played fully through with Edson's complete harmonies. Cowell places the treble and tenor melodies across the entire register of the instrumental ensemble, generating a full scoring of the three parts for the first phrase. For the Edson's indicated piano section, Cowell only employs a timbral diminuendo, leaving a forte chorus unaccompanied, before bringing the full orchestra back for the enthusiastic, and fittingly forte, final phrase.

Chapter Five - Conclusion and Commendation

As mentioned in the opening chapter, just before the premiere of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*, Sidney mentioned that Henry Cowell had a fondness for Lewis Edson.[117] It is the purpose of this conclusion to provide several possibilities for this attraction which ultimately inspired the composition of *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes*. This is to serve as a commendation of the work for future conductors, musicians, and educators who are considering how to feature more American music.

The first possibility for Cowell's fondness for the Edsons is their shared American independent musical spirit. Throughout his self-made and entrepreneurial career, Cowell maintained a desire to be a distinctively American composer who was broader than the models and developments of the European classical tradition. To be an essentially American composer, he sought to understand and embrace the indigenous music of all cultures on their own terms. This was his own way of being an American composer. Sidney's research into the Edsons revealed to Henry his own town's local indigenous musicians, who worked in the non-European and independent Yankee Tunesmith musical style. *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* was Cowell's way of sharing their historic music and preserving its indigenous American style.

Cowell's fondness also could have been from his sympathies for the American working class. His earlier discussions with his mentor Charles Seeger in the Composers' Collective about the purpose of music in society, and the importance of folk music to it, likely predisposed Henry Cowell towards both Edsons even more. Lewis Edson Sr. was a blacksmith, and his son held a variety of civic jobs throughout his life, yet both were also active musicians in and for their

[117] Sidney Cowell to The Daily Freeman, November 7, 1960. Henry Cowell Papers, New York Public Library, New York City, NY.

communities. *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is a piece that showcases two everyman composers who were tightly integrated into their society. This was resonant with Cowell's own artistic sympathies.

Finally, since the Edsons' music was part of the singing school tradition, it was not only meant to be heard by the community but also performed by it. This accessible music-making was increasingly appealing to Henry Cowell in his later post-prison years. *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is an approachable work even for performers of moderate ability since the music itself is what the Edsons used as early American music educators. Cowell channels his creativity into adapting this music for all musicians to join into with a combined choral-orchestral work.

Summarizing all these streams, Cowell biographer Joel Sachs writes of Cowell's later musical aesthetic saying,

> Henry's interest in simplicity transcended his dispositions as a composer. Sidney's work as a scholar, combined with Henry's previous experiences with communist policy, drew his attention back to the role of folk music in society… folk music was for all people to join in and make up anew.[118]

For Cowell, it was the Edsons themselves, their music, and even the purpose of it that were all together an incredible fit with his own mature concerns. *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is likely an outpouring of this affection. It is to be commended to musicians and audiences as an energetic compositional bridge between eighteenth-century and twentieth-century American musical cultures. Henry Cowell's *Edson Hymns and Fuging Tunes* is a piece by an American composer, utilizing the music of earlier American composers, to exemplify what he believed in for his own approach to American music itself.

[118] Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music*, 414f.

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