

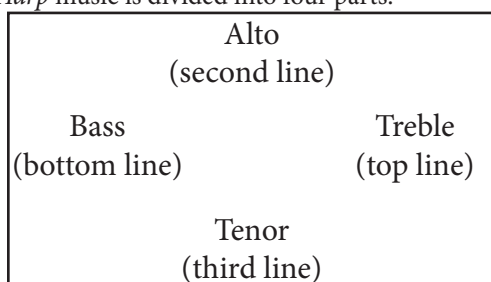
**What is a Sacred Harp singing?*

The *Sacred Harp* is the name of our songbook, originally published in 1846, that came about from even older traditions. The term “sacred harp” refers to the human voice, and harkens back to the days before church organs when church music was sung by the congregation, rather than the choir. Today we sing for the joy of singing as well as for the fellowship of other singers. We sing loudly because it feels good and sounds better to us!

You might notice that instead of being professionally-styled singers, we sing plainly, without vibrato or much attention to dynamics. Trained singers are always welcome, but please do not use vibrato, as it isn't part of our tradition. Listeners are always welcome, but we would rather you sing along!

**Where do I sit?*

Sacred Harp music is divided into four parts:



Singers sit in a “hollow square” with each part taking one of the four sides and facing the center. The *tenor* section (both women and men) is usually the largest, the *bass* section is to their left (all men), the *alto* section is next and is always all women, and finally, the *treble* section is a mix of women and men.

Any singer should be able to find a comfortable and important place to sing with us:

	Part sung
Men	<i>Tenor*</i> —Sung an octave down (treble clef) <i>Treble</i> —Sung an octave down <i>Bass</i> —Sung as written.
Women	<i>Alto</i> —Sung as written (except for the few parts printed in the bass clef) <i>Treble</i> —Sung as written. <i>Tenor*</i> — Sung an octave above or as written.
Children	<i>Tenor*</i> —Traditional location to start singing

**Note that the tenor section is the “catch-all” section, and is a great place for new singers to choose to sing!*

More information may be found about our local singing, as well as others in Michigan and nearby at:

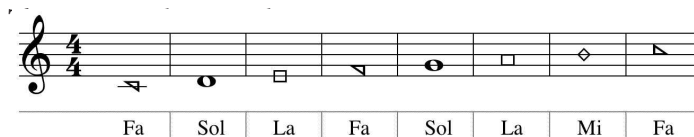
<http://fasolamichigan.org>

For information about shape-note singing, as well as about singings around the country and world may be found at:

<http://fasola.org>

Shaped Notes

This style of singing is also known as shape-note singing. Everything you already know about music still applies in the written music, except that the shapes of the notes are different, which aids singers to sight-read easily, after they have learned the system. That is central to our way of singing—sing lots of songs, quickly, and mostly accurately.



The shapes give us a hint for how to jump from note to note:

Fa to *sol* to *la* are always the same intervals,
Mi is a half step below the key (or *tonic*) note, *fa*,
Fa to *fa* }
Sol to *sol* } Either an easy fourth or fifth
La to *la* }

When we sing the shapes we are doing that to learn the song. If you don't need the shapes, you may choose to sing “la.” The shapes are our servants, not our masters, though eventually you will choose to learn the shapes so you blend in (and they really do make singing easier!)

Don't be intimidated by how assuredly we sing! Besides using shape notes, many of us have these songs memorized or nearly so, and with time you too will come to have these songs engraved upon your heart.

We have a leader that changes throughout the day, usually after every song, since people want to lead their favorite songs and stand in the middle to hear it in all its glory. Singers, too, mirror the leader—it helps them to keep time and sight-sing!

Although these songs are religious, most singers sing for the singing and the poetry, though some take meaning from the texts, many do not. We welcome anyone who wishes to sing this music.

Many of these hymns were written when death and illness were common, and as such, reflect those themes. Unfortunately, we still deal with these, and they still have meaning today.

Prepared by Bob Borcharding, inspired by Lisa Grayson.