



Musings from the pen of Academician Mixie Lidyan...

Today we'll look at the tenor words on two fugal tunes.

First, #36 top AMERICA. Many tenors who've never sung this one before will launch bravely forth on the notes, think to themselves "hey, this is pretty easy" and then come to grief on the words. Here's how verse one is supposed to go for the tenors: "My soul repeat His praise, Whose mercies are so great, Whose anger is so slow to rise, So ready to abate, So ready to abate." Notice that the first phrase in the fuge is sung once, and the last phrase is sung twice. This pattern holds for all three verses. William Walker's *Christian Harmony* helpfully prints the words underneath the tenor notes making everything crystal clear.

A similar sort of thing happens with #36 bottom NINETY-FIFTH, that is, tenors feel confident until they go to sing the words and then they wonder what to do. There are two variant streams among the different shapenote books. *Christian Harmony* tenors will sing: "When I can read

my title clear, To mansions in the skies, I'll bid farewell, I'll bid farewell to ev'ry fear, And wipe my weeping eyes." Sacred Harp teacher Richard DeLong, however, will firmly correct tenors he hears doing this. *The Sacred Harp* way is: "When I can read my title clear, To mansions in the skies, to ev'ry fear, I'll bid farewell to ev'ry fear, And wipe my weeping eyes." In other words, the tenors sing the same words the basses are singing at the point the tenors enter the fuge. This pattern is universal among southern Sacred Harp singings, though a few northern singings (perhaps due to inexperience) waffle back and forth from singing to singing.

How would Academician Lidyan resolve the issue? She recommends following the example set by *The Christian Harmony* when attending Christian Harmony singings, and following Prof. DeLong's strictures when attending *Sacred Harp* singings regardless of geography, thus maintaining the ancient dignities of the two songbooks' traditions.