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## "I'LL FLY AWAY": THE MUSIC AND CAREER OF ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Kevin Donald Kehrberg

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2010

“I’LL FLY AWAY”: THE MUSIC AND CAREER OF ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
School of Music at the  
University of Kentucky

By  
Kevin Donald Kehrberg

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Ronald Pen, Associate Professor of Musicology

Lexington, Kentucky

2010

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### “I’LL FLY AWAY”: THE MUSIC AND CAREER OF ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

Albert E. Brumley (1905-1977) was the most influential American gospel song composer of the twentieth century, penning such “classics” within the genre as “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “If We Never Meet Again,” “Turn Your Radio On,” and “Rank Strangers to Me.” His “I’ll Fly Away” has become the most recorded gospel song in American history with over one thousand recordings to date, and several of his works transcend cultural boundaries of style, genre, race, denomination, and doctrine. However, the racialized historiography of American gospel music has left Brumley—from America’s lesser-known white gospel traditions of convention singing and southern gospel music—largely untouched by scholarly scrutiny.

Comprising nearly four hundred works, most of which appeared in annual shape-note gospel songbooks published during the 1930s and 1940s, Brumley’s music is central to many Americans’ religious identity. This thesis represents the first thorough, academic assessment of his music, career, and his work’s cultural impact. Deeper examinations of the composer’s personal life and his work as a songwriter, as well as a fresh look at his publishing business’s growth and development, contribute a more complete biography. A broad analysis of his output—including a complete thematic catalogue of his published works—provides a framework for interpreting Brumley’s general compositional style and offers a context for understanding his music’s enduring legacy within popular music history, especially southern gospel, black gospel, and country music. Research into the cultural history of one particular Brumley work—“I’ll Fly Away”—and its various incarnations in music, television, film, and other outlets acts as a lens through which to view his impact on American music and society. This thesis ultimately argues that Brumley’s compositions have influenced the development of religious and popular music in America much more significantly than indicated by current scholarship, and that his music has become an important medium for American cultural expression that stretches well beyond the confines of the convention-singing and southern gospel traditions. As a result, it recognizes him as an emblematic figure of American music deserving inclusion within the ranks of its greatest contributors.



KEYWORDS: Twentieth century, United States, Gospel music, Popular music, Popular culture

Kevin Kehrberg  
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“I’LL FLY AWAY”: THE MUSIC AND CAREER OF ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

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DISSERTATION

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To Sarah

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There are several individuals at the University of Kentucky who were instrumental in the development and completion of this project. First and foremost is Ron Pen, chair of my graduate advisory committee and the director of this dissertation. I must thank him for embracing another one of my “unorthodox” thesis topics. He challenged me with hard questions about Brumley’s greater significance, made me prove my answers, and shaped my philosophy of inquiry to place this discourse at the center. Once I began, his encouragement was unwavering, his editing was marvelous, and his guidance was sagacious. However, my gratitude extends far beyond just this dissertation. Ron Pen has been much more than an advisor. He has been a musical companion, dinner host, bowling partner, hotel roomie, gridiron high-five recipient, Santa impersonator, and gamelan collaborator as well as many, many more wonderful things. Above all, he has been a dear friend who has always offered kind, wise advice on life’s matters whenever I have asked. While he may insist that we are now colleagues, he will forever remain my mentor.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### **Subject Background**

Albert E. Brumley (1905-1977) was the most influential American gospel song composer of the twentieth century, penning such “standards” as “I’ll Fly Away,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “If We Never Meet Again,” “Rank Strangers to Me,” “Turn Your Radio On,” and many others. Leading gospel music historian James Goff recently labeled Brumley “the best-known southern gospel songwriter of all time.”<sup>1</sup> While the popularity of Brumley’s songs stretches across many musical genres, today his work as a composer and music publisher is most closely aligned with two related subgenres of American gospel music, convention singing and southern gospel.

The terms “convention gospel” or “convention music” generally refer to popular sacred music rooted in America’s gospel songbook publishing industry of the early twentieth century. Beginning around the turn of the century, this industry grew to the point where it was producing hundreds of thousands of octavo paperback songbooks—primarily printed with shape-notes—each year from the early 1920s into the 1950s. Often referred to as “convention” songbooks, these collections of mostly newer, four-part gospel songs spread primarily through the medium of singing schools, local singings, and regional singing conventions (hence the name). While such events—all of which incorporated new songbooks with each passing year—were popular in various parts of the country, they were most concentrated in the American South and Southeast. The

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Goff, Jr., *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 93.



industry's leading publishers were also mostly headquartered in the South, including the James D. Vaughan Publishing Company (Lawrenceburg, Tennessee), the Stamps-Baxter Music Company (Dallas, Texas), the R. E. Winsett Music Company (Dayton, Tennessee), and the Hartford Music Company (Hartford, Arkansas), which published Brumley's first songs and eventually came under his ownership. Although convention singing experienced significant decline after 1950, the tradition continues today with singing schools, annual songbooks, and publishers in various southern and southeastern states.<sup>2</sup>

While the convention songbook industry ushered in a new phase of shape-note singing in America, the use of shaped notes as well as the phenomena of singing schools and conventions began much earlier than the twentieth century. *The Easy Instructor* (1801) by William Little and William Smith of Philadelphia was the first pedagogical method of musical notation to substitute simple shapes (e.g., triangles, squares, diamonds) in place of the oval note heads on a musical staff. This original method implemented just four shapes in correspondence with the four-syllable solmization technique (e.g., *fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, [fa]*). In 1846, Jesse B. Aikin's *The Christian Minstrel* introduced a seven-shape system—one for each degree of the major scale (e.g., *do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, [do]*). The use of seven shapes came to dominate shape-note

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<sup>2</sup> There are at least fifteen annual convention gospel singing schools currently operating today (2010), including the Cumberland Valley School of Gospel Music (Pulaski, TN), the Do Re Mi Gospel Music Academy (Lebanon, TN), the Gospel Singers of America School of Gospel Music (Pass Christian, MS), the North Georgia School of Gospel Music (Cleveland, GA), and the Texas Southern Gospel School of Music (Corsicana, TX). There continue to be smaller, more local schools as well. For example, the Jeffress/Phillips Music Company (Crossett, AR) listed at least eight such schools variously occurring in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas for 2010. In addition to Jeffress/Phillips, current publishers of yearly convention songbooks include the Cumberland Valley Music Company (Knoxville, TN), Gospel Heritage Music (Cleveland, TN), and the Leoma Music Company (Leoma, TN).

pedagogy in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and Aikin's system subsequently became the notation of choice for the paperback songbook publishers.

As an institution, singing schools stretch as far back as the early eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> By the early twentieth century, a typical convention-style shape-note singing school usually lasted a couple of weeks and was often taught by a traveling instructor.<sup>4</sup> Such schools were popular in the South in part because they offered a practical and concentrated way to learn the rudiments of music that was especially convenient for those in more rural, isolated areas. A performance frequently coincided with the conclusion of these singing schools, allowing the new graduates to showcase publicly their newfound skills. Another venue for student performers was the singing convention. Lasting anywhere from one to three days, this was a community-wide event that featured mostly public singing but also programmed occasional "specials" (small group performances usually by a soloist, duet, trio, or quartet) as well as recent singing-school classes from the region. Popular formats were the district convention (once every other month) or the larger, weekend-long countywide convention (quarterly or biannually), both of which almost always incorporated a potluck style meal, or "dinner-on-the-grounds," as part of the activities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 31-35.

<sup>4</sup> Two resources which give detailed accounts of shape-note, convention-style singing schools of the early twentieth century are David Charles Deller, "Sing Me Home to Gloryland: Arkansas Songbook Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1999), 34-61; William Lynwood Montell, *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 9-29.

<sup>5</sup> For a concise discussion covering the origins of shaped notes and their spread into southeastern rural regions, see Ron Pen, "Triangles, Squares, Circles, and Diamonds: The 'Fasola Folk' and Their Singing Tradition," in *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities*, ed. Kip Lornell and Anne Rasmussen (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 209-32. Also see George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). While quite dated, Jackson's pioneering writings still represent some of the most thorough studies of American shape-note music to date.

In the 1910s and 1920s, Vaughan, Stamps-Baxter, Hartford, and various similar publishers began employing trained male quartets to travel and promote their shape-note songbooks at singing conventions and church revivals. While studying and working at the Hartford Music Company during the late 1920s, Brumley himself served a stint as bass singer and pianist with the company quartet. Unanticipated by the publishers, these quartets not only increased songbook sales but also achieved immense popularity strictly as performers, and as a result gospel quartet singing attained a new level of entertainment value among general audiences. By the 1930s, amateur quartets modeled after the touring ensembles were springing up in large numbers, and they all relied on convention songbook publishers for new material. These professional and amateur groups, by this time including male and female singers, formed the foundation of the style of music that would come to be known as “southern gospel.”

Ever since the introduction of shape-note sacred music in the nineteenth century, whites have largely—but not exclusively—dominated its production and consumption.<sup>6</sup> Twentieth-century shape-note gospel publishing and the quartet industry it spawned were no different.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, some black quartets of the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., the Norfolk

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<sup>6</sup> One notable exception is the black Sacred Harp tradition of southeast Alabama, including the *Colored Sacred Harp*. See Doris J. Dyen, "New Directions in Sacred Harp Singing," in *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, ed. William Ferris and Mary L. Hart (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 73-79; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 447-48; Henry Willett, "Judge Jackson and the *Colored Sacred Harp*," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*, ed. Henry Willett (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1995), 50-55.

<sup>7</sup> The black composer Cleavant Derricks (1910-1977), composer of such hits as “Just a Little Talk With Jesus” and “When God Dips His Love in My Heart,” is a prominent exception, as are more recent performers such as Teddy Huffam and Charles Johnson; see Goff, 199-200, 209-10, 276-77. Seven-shape convention singing among African Americans badly needs more research. Some examples of the scant writings on the topic are Steve Grauberger, liner notes to *Traditional Music of Alabama, Vol. 2: African American Seven Shapenote Singing* by various artists (Alabama Center for Traditional Culture: No. 202, 2002); Deller, 94; Goff, 209, 355; Jackson, 408-9; Kuanita Murphy, “From the Brush Arbor to the Sanctuary: The History of the Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church” (Master's thesis, Valdosta State University, 2004). For evidence of musical exchanges between black and white quartets, see Goff, 171,

Jubilee Quartet, the Heavenly Gospel Singers, and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet) enjoyed commercial successes that rivaled those of their white counterparts, but segregation forced black gospel music to follow essentially its own parallel trajectory of commercial development. Indeed, by the 1930s, there were basically two major markets thriving within America's gospel music industry, white and black. Professional groups from both sectors were contributing heavily to early radio and the budding record business. Although listening, learning, and borrowing between black and white singers certainly continued during this time, target audiences and market boundaries would remain largely segregated for at least the first sixty years of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the terms "convention music" and "southern gospel" as opposed to simply "gospel" help distinguish the white traditions that descended from the seven-shape convention songbooks from the better-known gospel music legacy of African Americans. Initially, participants from both streams simply preferred the term "gospel music," creating a confusion among outsiders that continues to problematize broader discourses on American sacred music. While the use of "convention" as a qualifier dates back to at least the 1930s, more recent adoptions within academic circles have established it as the current preferred term to delineate the participatory, convention-based singing tradition from both African-American gospel music as well as the entertainment-driven industry of southern gospel.<sup>9</sup> However, confusion persists as a result of the lineage between

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209-11; Gary B. Reid, *Rockin' on the Waves*, Brown's Ferry Four (CD liner notes. King Records: 3056-2-2, 1997); Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 44, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Thankfully, current scholars are viewing the historic debate over whether whites or blacks contributed more to American gospel music expression as futile, instead recognizing a complex web of mutual influence as more responsible. For a brief discussion on this and the racial climate within early twentieth-century gospel music, see, for example, Goff, 4-5; David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>9</sup> A 1938 newspaper feature about convention singing uses the term as follows: "Such things all add up or down to syncopation, whether they bear the label of ragtime, jazz, swing, or convention singing." See

convention singing and southern gospel, with the latter still often appearing in conjunction with the former. According to Goff, the label “southern gospel” is a fairly recent development which “emerged within the white gospel industry in order to designate the older styles of [quartet] music from the growing contemporary Christian music that, in the 1960s and 1970s, borrowed heavily from sounds associated with the radio strains of rock n’ roll and pop.”<sup>10</sup> In addition to “southern gospel,” other terms which also appear in reference to the convention singing tradition include “white gospel,” “new-book singing,” “songbook gospel,” “seven-shape,” “class-and-convention style,” and “doremi” or “dorayme” (as opposed to “fasola” which designates shape-note music of the four-shape variety).

Albert Brumley began his career within convention music’s foundational network of shape-note singing schools, gospel songbook publishing, conventions, and quartet singing. He was born on October 29, 1905, in a small community in Indian Territory that would later become Spiro, Oklahoma, located near the state’s eastern border with Arkansas.<sup>11</sup> At the age of sixteen, Brumley attended his first singing school in nearby Rock Island, Oklahoma. He began composing and writing songs almost immediately, and in 1926 he left his home to study at the Hartford Musical Institute under the direction of Eugene M. Bartlett, music publisher and owner of the Hartford Music Company in

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"Swinging in Refrain," *The Daily (Oklahoma City) Oklahoman*, 27 Nov. 1938, D7. Examples of more recent, academic preferences for the term include “Farther Along”: A Conference on the Southern Gospel Convention-Singing Tradition (Murfreesboro, TN: 2008) and the documentary *I’ll Keep on Singing: The Southern Gospel Convention Tradition*, dir. Stephen Shearon (Middle Tennessee State University, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Goff, 4.

<sup>11</sup> A sufficient source for basic biographical information concerning Brumley is the popular biography by Kay Hively and Albert E. Brumley, Jr., *I’ll Fly Away: The Life Story of Albert E. Brumley* (Branson, MO: Mountaineer Books, 1990). Most of the information presented here is from this book. Additionally, there are two shorter magazine articles that offer good portraits of Brumley: Bill C. Malone, "Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 21 (July 1986): 69-77; Charles K. Wolfe, "'I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian': The Music of Albert E. Brumley," *Precious Memories* (May-June 1991): 15-18.

Hartford, Arkansas. Except for about one year during 1927-28 when he returned to work on his family's farm, Brumley remained in Hartford, working for the company in various capacities until 1931. He had his first song published by Bartlett in 1927 ("I Can Hear Them Singing Over There"), eventually became a staff songwriter, and began singing bass and touring with the Hartford Quartet in 1929. He also became increasingly active as a traveling instructor in the Oklahoma-Missouri-Arkansas tri-state area, conducting singing schools and teaching in music normals.<sup>12</sup>

In 1931, Brumley married Goldie Schell, a young woman from Powell, Missouri, whom he had first met while leading a singing school in that community. They settled in Powell where Brumley began working in his father-in-law's grocery store. Although at first Brumley was able to retain a small income (\$12.50/month) from his staff position with Hartford, time constraints soon forced him to do his songwriting for Bartlett on a strictly freelance basis. Nevertheless, a string of successful songs in the early 1930s, including "I'll Fly Away" (1932), emboldened Brumley to give up his day job and devote

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<sup>12</sup> Music "normals" were advanced classes for singing school graduates interested in continuing their music education with the intention of teaching and/or composing. Their precedents were the normals that arose out of Lowell Mason's music education reforms of the nineteenth century. See Crawford, 150. Aldine Kieffer (1840-1904), the most important publisher responsible for advancing the seven-shape system of notation, opened the Virginia Normal Music School in 1874 in New Market, Virginia, with the purpose of educating future singing-school teachers. Kieffer's normal, featuring annual course offerings lasting just four weeks, is considered the first effort of its kind within shape-note pedagogy. Its success prompted similar endeavors among subsequent generations of shape-note publishers including A. J. Showalter's Southern Normal Institute (Georgia, est. 1885), the Vaughan Normal School of Music (Tennessee, est. 1911) and the Hartford Music Institute (Arkansas, est. 1921). Modeled after Kieffer's, these institutions held annual or biannual sessions lasting from four to six weeks and offered courses in such areas as theory, composition, conducting, quartet singing, and teaching. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kieffer's activities also inspired itinerant "normals" organized in much the same manner as singing schools. Qualified teachers who found a locale concentrated with enough interested and advanced students could simply set up a normal in the area. Showalter, Vaughan, and Hartford were behind many such events which catered to those unable to attend their permanent schools, and they would sponsor them during the same summer months as their singing-schools. Brumley was active in both formats of Hartford's normals. For more information, see Deller, 30; Goff, 38, 49-50, 53, 65, 69-74. While Kieffer's original normal eventually merged with what would become Shenandoah College by the mid-1880s and Shenandoah University today, the music normals of Showalter, Vaughan, and Hartford were private entities that did not offer advanced degrees. They should be distinguished from the often state-funded normal schools and teacher colleges of the nineteenth century from which developed several of America's public universities.

himself full-time to composition. The decision paid off: over the course of the next decade Brumley wrote several of the most enduring works of his career, and by 1937 he was reportedly earning \$200 a month as a staff songwriter for Stamps-Baxter. In 1944, Brumley started his own publishing company, Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Inc., and he became a majority owner of the Hartford Music Company in 1947, gaining the copyrights to several of his most successful songs in the process.

While Brumley continued to compose into the twilight of his life, the bulk of his most popular songs were written before 1950. With his own publishing company fully established by then, along with the acquisition of the Hartford Music Company underway, his career entered a new phase after mid-century that saw more attention devoted to publishing—primarily custom songbooks for entertainers, radio stations, etc.—and copyright management. He also became involved in festival promotion, inaugurating and sponsoring two large music festivals in the late 1960s. At the time of his retirement in 1976, Brumley had become a legend both inside and outside of convention-singing circles and the southern gospel music industry, and he was widely recognized as perhaps the most recorded gospel song composer of the twentieth century. Following his death just a year later, two of his sons, William and Robert, took over the company. Today, Robert remains the President/CEO of Albert E. Brumley and Sons/Hartford Music Company and continues its operations from the original headquarters in Powell, Missouri.

## Statement of Problem

Albert E. Brumley wrote or coauthored nearly four hundred published works in addition to numerous arrangements.<sup>13</sup> For many of these, he composed both the words and the music, and while the majority is sacred, he also achieved great success with material that was not overtly religious—what he called his “sentimental” songs.<sup>14</sup> His music has been recorded innumerable times by an array of artists, and his songs have received awards from various performance rights organizations. The recorded history of “I’ll Fly Away” alone is staggering. When the song entered the SESAC (Society of European Stage Authors and Composers) Hall of Fame in 1986, it had purportedly been commercially recorded over five hundred different times.<sup>15</sup> Today this number is well over one thousand, making “I’ll Fly Away” the most recorded gospel song in American history.<sup>16</sup> Dating back to at least 1940, gospel—both white and black—and country

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<sup>13</sup> Accurately determining Brumley’s prolific output—even just his published songs—has been difficult because the composer often sent his only finished manuscript copies to publishers and left his own records incomplete. As a result, estimations of his total body of works are often varied, vague, and largely approximate. See David Crawford, “Albert E. Brumley: Ozark Gospel Musician” (Paper presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the Sonneck Society, Lawrence, KS: 1982); Goff, 96; Hively and Brumley, 74, 134; Malone: 71; Wolfe: 16. Malone and Wolfe both put Brumley’s total around six hundred, while Goff posits around seven hundred. Hively gives conflicting numbers, first reporting “more than 700” (p. 74) and later changing that to “almost 700” (p. 134). Crawford claims it is closer to eight hundred (p. 1). See also the Albert E. Brumley and Sons website, “Albert E. Brumley,” Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Inc. <http://www.brumleymusic.com/> (accessed 7 Nov. 2007). Similar to Crawford, this web bio claims that Brumley wrote “over 800 gospel and ‘sentimental’ songs.” All of these estimates lack the accuracy of the current study, which utilizes extensive new primary source research from private songbook collections to create the first complete thematic catalogue of Brumley’s music. Details of this methodology appear in the following subsection of this chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Hively and Brumley, 50.

<sup>15</sup> SESAC, established in 1930, is the second oldest performing rights organization in the United States. While SESAC originally catered specifically to European artists, it soon expanded to include artists from across the globe and now prefers the acronym as its official name. See “About Us”, SESAC, Inc., <http://www.sesac.com/aboutsesac/about.aspx> (accessed 16 Jan. 2008). For information on Brumley’s SESAC award, see Hively and Brumley, 131; Wolfe: 15. See also “Albert E. Brumley,” <http://www.brumleymusic.com/>.

<sup>16</sup> In the Winter 1998-99 issue of SESAC’s company magazine, *Focus on SESAC*, a feature article titled “The World Flight of ‘I’ll Fly Away’” reported that “by conservative estimate, the song has been recorded at least 800 times.” See Edward Morris, “The World Flight of ‘I’ll Fly Away,’” *Focus on SESAC* 4, no. 3 (Winter 1998-99). The author of this thesis has compiled a discography of recorded versions of “I’ll Fly Away” from 1940 to 2010. It contains over 275-plus entries from 2000 to 2010 alone. Adding this last



artists account for most of these releases; however, other noteworthy treatments include those by various Delta blues singers, the Boston Pops (with Arthur Fiedler and Chet Atkins), and such individuals as Bob Marley and Etta James. Even within the last fifteen years, tropings or full performances of “I’ll Fly Away” have appeared in the recorded output of artists as diverse as Alan Jackson, Kanye West, the Dixie Chicks, Puff Daddy, Jars of Clay, Aretha Franklin, Johnny Cash, and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, as well as in various television and film contexts.<sup>17</sup>

While “I’ll Fly Away” is certainly his most popular song, several other Brumley works have enjoyed similar success. “If We Never Meet Again,” recorded by Elvis Presley in 1960, was apparently his mother Gladys’s favorite gospel song and the one that the rock and roll star sang at her funeral in 1958.<sup>18</sup> “Rank Strangers to Me”—a Brumley sentimental song—has long been a bluegrass classic since the Stanley Brothers recorded it in the 1950s. Bobby Osborne, another bluegrass pioneer, recently credited the song as being his all-time favorite, and country music luminary Ricky Skaggs featured it on his landmark 1997 album that signaled his reentry into the bluegrass market.<sup>19</sup> Among

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number to that published in *Focus on SESAC* produces a “conservative” approximation of more than 1,075 recorded versions to date. See Appendix B for more on this discography. With regard to the song’s status as the most recorded gospel song in American history, the distinction of “I’ll Fly Away” as an American gospel song is important here. While “Amazing Grace” may boast more recorded versions, it represents a historically different type of work. Notwithstanding the hymn’s British provenance, it was over fifty years before John Newton’s text (written in the 1770s) became paired with its now-familiar tune, “New Britain,” in William Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835). While “Amazing Grace” has certainly been “gospelized” in countless performances and recordings, to distinguish it as a gospel song similar to “I’ll Fly Away” would be inaccurate.

<sup>17</sup> More recent television/film examples include NBC’s *I’ll Fly Away*, which aired for three seasons from 1991 to 1993, and the films *The Apostle* (Butcher’s Run Films, 1997), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Touchstone Pictures, 2000), Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 2006), and most recently, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Kennedy/Marshall, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> The song appears on the album *His Hand in Mine* by Elvis Presley (RCA LSP/LPM 2328, 1960).

<sup>19</sup> Bobby Osborne revealed this during a live, unrecorded interview by Eddie Stubbs in Nashville, TN, on March 21, 2007. The Skaggs album is *Bluegrass Rules!* by Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder (Skaggs Family Records/Rounder 0801, 1997).

non-bluegrass artists, notable versions by Kitty Wells and Bob Dylan also exist.<sup>20</sup> “Turn Your Radio On” is another celebrated Brumley standard that received an achievement award from Broadcast Music, Incorporated (BMI) in 1972.<sup>21</sup> In short, an unprecedented number of Brumley’s songs have become recognized standards in the field, especially with respect to gospel and country music.

While the magnitude of Brumley’s legacy in the popular sphere is overwhelming, his lack of mention within the academic sphere is inversely sparse. Country music scholarship has paid little attention to songwriters in general, and southern gospel music, unlike its African-American counterpart, has remained mostly untouched by scholarly scrutiny until roughly the last five years.<sup>22</sup> Only one full-length book about the composer exists—a thin (144 pages), popular biography written by Kay Hively (a newspaper columnist and freelance fiction writer in the Ozark region) and Albert E. Brumley, Jr.<sup>23</sup> Published in 1990, this biography is an indispensable collection of lively anecdotes and recollections culled from old interviews with Brumley, Sr., as well as new ones with his family and friends. It is a most welcome addition to the dearth of literature about the composer, but it offers little in the way of rigorous scholarship.

This thesis represents the first thorough, scholarly assessment of Albert E. Brumley’s music, career, and impact. Deeper examinations of the composer’s personal life and his work as a songwriter, as well as a fresh look at his publishing business’s growth and development, contribute to a more complete biography. A broad analysis of

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<sup>20</sup> See the albums *Dust on the Bible* by Kitty Wells (Decca DL 8858, 1959) and *Down in the Groove* by Bob Dylan (Columbia OC 40957, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Files of Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Inc. (AEBS).

<sup>22</sup> One notable exception to the latter claim is Montell. The best example of recent southern gospel scholarship would be Goff. Also see Michael P. Graves and David Fillingim, eds., *More Than Precious Memories: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel Music* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> See full citation in footnote 11.

his output—including a complete thematic catalogue as an appendix—provides a framework for interpreting Brumley’s general compositional style and offers a context for understanding his music’s enduring legacy within popular music, especially southern gospel, black gospel, and country music.<sup>24</sup> Research into the cultural history of one particular Brumley work—“I’ll Fly Away”—and its various incarnations in music, television, film, and other outlets acts as a lens through which to view Brumley’s impact on American music and society. This thesis ultimately argues that Brumley’s compositions have influenced the development of religious and popular music in America much more significantly than indicated by current scholarship, and that his music has become an important medium for American cultural expression that stretches well beyond the confines of both the convention-singing and southern gospel traditions.

### **Delimitation and Methodology**

The music, publishing work, and life of Albert E. Brumley are the primary scope of this dissertation and represent the general order of its priorities. Brumley’s music is the centerpiece of his career, yet it remains the least studied, and the story behind his early career as a composer and publisher is vague at best. Though important additions are made to Brumley’s personal biography, this facet has received more attention than any other in the extant literature and therefore occupies a lesser priority in the overall scheme. With regard to his music, this thesis concentrates on the reception history of his most influential work, “I’ll Fly Away.” However, its more general survey of his complete output—based on the thematic catalogue—certainly informs explanations of his overall influence as well. Where encountered, every effort has been made to document

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<sup>24</sup> A fuller explanation of this analysis appears later in this chapter.

unpublished pieces, but the catalogue's chief objective is documenting Brumley's published compositions in detail.

The methodology combines secondary source study with extensive primary source research. Robert Brumley, the fourth son of Albert and the current President/CEO of Albert E. Brumley and Sons/Hartford Music Company, granted the author permission to examine the sizeable amount of previously untouched primary source material housed at the company's headquarters in Powell, Missouri. Although somewhat scattered and fragmented, this included several items of business and family correspondence; scores of photographs from the 1920s to the 1970s; various business contracts, deeds, purchase agreements, catalogs, and copyright permissions; around thirty or more original song manuscripts, some of which date to at least the 1940s; song and lyric sketches in Brumley's hand, both complete and incomplete; many items from the Brumley and Sons/Hartford Music Company backlist, several of which are out-of-print; and a number of unreleased and unpublished audiotape interviews with Brumley from the 1960s and 70s. In addition, Robert Brumley helped organize new interviews with existing family members and friends.

Further archival research was also important. The Center for Popular Music (Murfreesboro, Tennessee), the Frist Library and Archive at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (Nashville, Tennessee), and the Southern Gospel Music Hall of Fame and Museum (Sevierville, Tennessee) contained important holdings. Significant research conducted during summer 2007 at Berea College's Special Collections uncovered information on Brumley's relationship with Renfro Valley's John Lair. Other correspondence and visits involved the United States Copyright Office, the W. J.

Hamilton Memorial Museum (Hartford, Arkansas), and the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame.

Examinations of private convention songbook collections have been a key aspect of primary source research. Most of Brumley's original works appeared only one or two times in various shape-note gospel songbooks published from the 1920s to the 1970s, and the composer himself kept poor record of his compositions. Thus, these songbooks—central to America's white gospel tradition—remain the best repository of Brumley's music. However, very few institutional libraries and archives contain holdings associated with this greatly understudied area of American music, and the few that do cannot rival the songbook collections held by such private individuals as Bobbie F. McLemore, an independent book collector in Jasper, Texas. McLemore's collection—one of the best in existence—comprises nearly 2,200 volumes and purportedly includes every songbook from the major publishers' catalogues. Furthermore, McLemore has indexed his entire collection, creating an electronic songbook database searchable via song title, author, songbook title, publisher, and the year of publication.<sup>25</sup>

Over three hundred digital images gathered during the summer of 2008 document every out-of-print Brumley work in McLemore's collection. Together with the hundred or so songs still in print, these images have been organized into a complete thematic catalogue (Appendix A), separating Brumley's arrangements from his original compositions and establishing, for the first time, a truly accurate estimate of his entire output. The catalogue contains records for 396 original works. About twenty percent (or one-fifth) are collaborations for which Brumley provided the text to someone else's tune

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<sup>25</sup> McLemore is a retired principal scientist for the U.S. Forest Service. He has been involved in convention gospel singing and songbook collecting since the late 1930s. His vast private collection is not available to the general public, but he is happy to share it with researchers and other interested individuals.

or vice versa. For the rest, Brumley is the sole author. For delimitation purposes, this catalogue does not include: 1) Brumley's arrangements to which he did not contribute as an author or composer, and 2) manuscripts, sketches, fragments, or otherwise unpublished work. Further details concerning the research and assembly of the catalogue appears in Chapter Three.

In addition to title and publication information, the Brumley thematic catalogue assembled for this study documents each of the composer's works according to a series of specific musical traits including melodic and lyric incipits, key, meter, tempo, and other harmonic, textural, and structural features. This catalogue data is the basis for the thesis's general analysis of Brumley's complete published works (Chapter Three), including broad conclusions regarding his characteristic compositional style and the thematic preferences of his texts. In order to maintain an appropriate breadth of inquiry, more detailed textual, poetic, and/or rhetorical analyses that isolate text from music must unfortunately remain largely outside the scope of the current study. Thankfully, a few such investigations into both southern gospel in general and Brumley in particular already exist.<sup>26</sup>

The musical analysis presented in this thesis offers perspective into the mystery behind Brumley's unprecedented success as a gospel songwriter. To be sure, his music's popularity is indebted to aspects of cultural context, but only in part. Scores of other gospel songwriters were working at the same time as Brumley, but yet none achieved

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Curtis W. Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995); David Fillingim, *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003); Graves and Fillingim, eds; Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth, *Honky Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001). Malone: 72-76; Howard Wright Marshall, "'Keep on the Sunny Side of Life:' Pattern and Religious Expression in Bluegrass Gospel Music," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1974): 3-43.

such sustained accomplishment. His composing possessed qualities that exceeded those of his counterparts, and the inspections of his musical style contained in this study help define these qualities while at the same time illuminating his compositional influences in both the sacred and secular realms.

The methodology used to inspect Brumley's compositions draws conclusions primarily through parametrical observation. The majority of these works utilize four-part writing, providing a medium for musical analysis that, unlike much of popular music, allows for interesting comparisons with and applications of the theoretical rules often used in Western art music, such as those for voice-leading. Thus, whenever and wherever possible, discussions of musical observations use terminologies associated with common practice, harmonically functional music. For example, data regarding harmonic structures applies Roman numeral distinctions, and melodic descriptions proceed from the perspective of Western diatonicism and scale patterns. Comments on rhythmic aspects employ common practice terminologies as well. In cases that present problems of clarification for the terminologies discussed above, observations occasionally exploit parlance associated more with popular music analysis (e.g., blue notes, swing rhythms). The analytical approach outlined by Jan LaRue in his *Guidelines for Style Analysis* is the best example of an existing methodology that guides the theoretical analyses of this thesis. LaRue's system focuses on identifying stylistic traits and parametrical characteristics on the basis of their functional roles within the music in question.<sup>27</sup>

Two chapters in this thesis comprise a specialized inquiry into the cultural impact of Brumley and his most influential work, "I'll Fly Away." A variety of previous

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<sup>27</sup> Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis*, 2d ed. (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992). See especially pp. 224-245 for LaRue's methodology.

scholarship—involving an array of disciplines from such areas as cultural history, ethnomusicology, literary studies, as well as musicology—informs the methodologies of this “song profile” research. Examples of paradigms include recent articles by Jeffrey Magee (“Irving Berlin’s ‘Blue Skies’: Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations”), Charles Hiroshi Garrett (“Chinatown, Whose Chinatown? Defining America’s Borders with Musical Orientalism”), and Stephen Wade (“The Route of ‘Bonaparte’s Retreat’: From ‘Fiddler Bill’ Stepp to Aaron Copland”) as well as book-length studies such as *Steel Drivin’ Man* (2006) by Scott Reynolds Nelson and *The Rose and the Briar* (2005), edited by Sean Wilentz and Greil Marcus.<sup>28</sup> All of these works present discourses on American culture funneled through the histories and trajectories of various pieces of music from “Blue Skies” (Magee) to “Chinatown, My Chinatown” (Garrett) to “Bonaparte’s Retreat” (Wade) to “John Henry” (Nelson) to an assortment of American ballads each serving as the focus of a separate essay (*The Rose and the Briar*). Other writings that guide this phase of the thesis include those of Benjamin Filene (2000), Simon Frith (1996), and David E. Whisnant (1986).<sup>29</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, who took the “Signifyin(g)” concept of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and applied it to African-American

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “Chinatown, Whose Chinatown? Defining America’s Borders with Musical Orientalism,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 1 (2004): 119-73; Jeffrey Magee, “Irving Berlin’s ‘Blue Skies’: Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations,” *Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2000): 537-80; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin’ Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Stephen Wade, “The Route of ‘Bonaparte’s Retreat’: From ‘Fiddler Bill’ Stepp to Aaron Copland,” *American Music* 18, no. 4 (2000): 343-69; Sean Wilentz and Greil Marcus, eds., *The Rose and the Briar: Death, Love and Liberty in the American Ballad* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005). Magee’s article coins and explains the phrase “song profile.”

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).



music, was also an inspiration, especially in light of the frequent appearance of “I’ll Fly Away” in black artists’ repertoires.<sup>30</sup>

## Review of Literature

For all of the success and popularity of Brumley’s music, there is a distinct lack of secondary source material concerning him and his work. The aforementioned popular biography by Hively and Brumley, Jr., is the only full-length book devoted to the composer. The most common sources of useful information on Brumley among published books are those dealing with gospel music on broader levels. There are no scholarly articles that deal specifically with Brumley’s music, and while a handful of these exist which address the history of convention music and southern gospel, there are none with Brumley as a primary focus and only one which gives any significant attention to the composer.<sup>31</sup>

The popular press (newspaper and magazine articles) currently contains the most pieces focusing strictly on Brumley. The limited nature of such resources notwithstanding, many of the newspaper accounts are invaluable as primary source documents that provide contemporary accounts of Brumley’s reception history, including at least one as early as 1953.<sup>32</sup> Due to the dearth of secondary literature, one of the most

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<sup>30</sup> Floyd’s landmark study is Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Also see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> The ensuing review of literature cites all of these writings.

<sup>32</sup> The 1953 article is "Composer of Ozarks Plies Trade from Modest Home," *Neosho (Missouri) Daily News*, 26 May 1953. Other examples include "Albert Brumley," *Music City News* 3, no. 1 (1965): 18; James J. Fisher, "A Composer's Power Survives His Passing," *Kansas City Star*, 1 June 1990, F1; Gene Gideon, "Brumley Music Spans the Generations," n.p. [c. 1972]; Pam Smith, "Many Gospel Greats Have Ties to Hartford," *Fort Smith (Arkansas) Times Record* 2000; Paul Stubblefield, "Old Tune Flying High: Gospel Songwriter Revives Ozarks Town," *Kansas City Star*, 15 Sep. 1976, C1; Paul Stubblefield,

widely used resources for any treatment—scholarly or not—of Brumley’s accomplishments has been a brief 1986 magazine article, Bill C. Malone’s “Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer.”<sup>33</sup> Malone’s article remains, indeed, an excellent, concise account of Brumley’s life and contributions. In addition to providing a vivid biographical sketch, Malone probes possible reasons behind Brumley’s unprecedented success as a songwriter. Ultimately Malone locates his songs as nondenominational but also firmly rooted in rural, southern Protestant culture. Malone argues that Brumley’s work was timely as well: his penchant for lamenting an idyllic past and anticipating refuge and restoration in a pastoral Heaven found universal resonance among Depression-stricken Americans. Limited in scope because of its brevity, Malone’s article does not follow the trajectory of Brumley’s music after mid-century except to remark that performances of his songs have declined dramatically among gospel artists and are now most popular in bluegrass and country circles (thus the article’s appearance in the magazine *Bluegrass Unlimited*). While there is some light lyrical analysis of certain Brumley texts, there is almost no musical analysis of specific songs.

Certain popular books that profile various famous gospel songs, gospel composers, or country music figures will occasionally include a chapter on Brumley. Some of these are valuable early accounts stemming directly from the major songbook

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"Brumley Is Ozark's Country/Gospel Songmaster," *Music City News* 14, no. 10 (1977): 25, 40; Dana Williamson, "'Little Ditty' Becomes One of Brumley's Most Famous," *Baptist Messenger*, 20 Oct. 2005, 1, 5.

<sup>33</sup> The scholarly work of both Goff and Deller acknowledge the insight of Malone’s article. See, for example, Deller, 172, 181, 187; Goff, 328, n. 66. Other noteworthy magazine articles on Brumley include Kathy E. Ledbetter, "Albert E. Brumley: Gospel and Folksong Writer," *Pickin'* (Oct. 1979): 14-15; Wolfe: 15-18.

publishers themselves.<sup>34</sup> While many of the later ones provide little, if any, new information, they serve as a good gauge of Brumley and his music's renown among popular society.<sup>35</sup>

As a topic within the realm of scholarly literature, southern gospel—including convention music—remains fairly wide open. In 1995, the late country music historian Charles K. Wolfe called it “one of the last remaining uncharted regions on the map of American cultural history.”<sup>36</sup> While there may be no articles exclusively on Brumley and/or his music, several do exist addressing broader topics relating to southern gospel music. Wolfe himself wrote various pieces dealing with such aspects of the music's history as regional publishers, early recording groups, and aesthetic shifts in the industry, not to mention a book on the Louvin Brothers, a country music duo that recorded primarily sacred material (including multiple Brumley songs).<sup>37</sup>

With regard to historical articles, there is even one from 1977 by noted musicologist David Crawford, published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, investigating how various court rulings on southern gospel music copyrights during the mid-1950s

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<sup>34</sup> Two early examples are the Ottis J. Knippers, *Who's Who among Southern Singers and Composers* (Hot Springs National Park, AR: Knippers Brothers, 1937), 28; Virgil O. Stamps, *Radio Song Album* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music Co., 1937), 240.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Ace Collins, *Turn Your Radio On: The Stories Behind Gospel Music's All-Time Greatest Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 111-13, 118-21, 199-202, 211-13, 218-22; Lindsay Terry, *Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 132-33; Charles K. Wolfe, *Classic Country: Legends of Country Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 243-46.

<sup>36</sup> See Charles K. Wolfe, "Seven-Shape-Note Gospel Music in Northern Alabama: The Case of the Athens Music Company," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*, ed. Henry Willett (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1995), 62-80. This quote appears on p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> See Charles K. Wolfe, "'Gospel Boogie': White Southern Gospel Music in Transition, 1945-55," *Popular Music* 1 (1981): 73-82; Charles K. Wolfe, "Early Gospel Quartets: The Case of the McDonald Brothers," *Mid-American Folklore* 10, no. 2-3 (1982): 70-78; Charles K. Wolfe, "Gospel Goes Uptown: White Gospel Music, 1945-1955," in *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, ed. William Ferris and Mary L. Hart (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 80-100; Charles K. Wolfe, "Frank Smith, Andrew Jenkins, and Early Commercial Gospel Music," *American Music* 1, no. 1 (1983): 49-59; Wolfe, "Seven-Shape-Note Gospel Music in Northern Alabama," 62-80. The book is Charles K. Wolfe, *In Close Harmony: The Story of the Louvin Brothers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984; reprint, with a new afterword, 1996).

affected and signaled changes in the industry.<sup>38</sup> In fact, Crawford is responsible for the only article-length scholarly piece on Albert Brumley that the author has yet found, an unpublished conference paper delivered at the Sonneck Society's 1982 annual meeting.<sup>39</sup> Crawford's paper is largely of an introductory nature, familiarizing his audience of music scholars—many of whom likely had no idea who Brumley was—with the composer and his songs. Nevertheless, Crawford manages to add substance by weaving in findings from his earlier article and using Brumley's music as a basis to briefly discuss what he calls the “give-and-take between local and national musicianship” in the performance of southern gospel music.<sup>40</sup>

In American music books available to the general public, mention of Albert E. Brumley only begins appearing in more specialized titles. General texts such as those by Gilbert Chase (1987) or Richard Crawford (2001) cover “white gospel” of the late nineteenth century but give little or no information on twentieth-century incarnations.<sup>41</sup> Volumes restricted to American religious music or southern gospel in particular present a more valuable resource, but they usually offer little more than a few paragraphs or pages of applicable content. Major historical surveys of Protestant church music such as those by Henry Wilder Foote or Friedrich Blume largely ignore twentieth-century gospel music in general. Foote confines “gospel hymns” to his seventh chapter, “Hymns of the Last Third of the Nineteenth Century, 1866-1900,” and his discourse on “Hymns of the Twentieth Century” addresses only major denominational hymnals, remarking that “the

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<sup>38</sup> David Crawford, “Gospel Songs in Court: From Rural Music to Urban Industry in the 1950s,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 3 (1977): 551-67.

<sup>39</sup> Crawford, “Albert E. Brumley: Ozark Gospel Musician.” Also see footnote 13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 444-49. Crawford's only mention of “white gospel quartet singing” comes within a paragraph discussing Elvis Presley's musical influences (see p. 727). In comparison, Crawford's discussion of black gospel during the twentieth century is relatively lengthy; see pp. 748-54.

gospel hymns linger in less progressive churches, but the literary and musical standards are rising.”<sup>42</sup> The treatment in Blume’s book is shorter still. Located in part VII, “Protestant Music in America,” it surfaces within a six-page subsection entitled “Diverging Currents, 1850-1960” that addresses everything from Ira Sankey’s gospel hymns to the masses of Lou Harrison and Roger Sessions.<sup>43</sup> A more recent volume in the vein of Foote’s, Charles W. Hughes’s *American Hymns Old and New* (1980), likewise ignores the impact of twentieth-century southern gospel music and makes no mention of Brumley.

George Pullen Jackson is by far the most relevant author with regard to convention singing scholarship of the early twentieth century. Four of the thirty-four chapters in his *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (1933) cover current practices of “seven-shape” or “little-book” singers (interestingly, the moniker “gospel” is almost completely absent from his discourse).<sup>44</sup> Jackson essentially presents the music as descended from the late-nineteenth-century seven-shape work of such figures as A. J. Showalter. While there is certainly much truth to this connection, Jackson basically skips over forty years in his chronology, jumping from Showalter’s most popular songbook, *Class, Choir, and Congregation* (1888), to existing seven-shape publishing concerns circa 1930 and moves forward from there. He offers no real account of developments during the turn of the century, but his subsequent discussion of the “little-book” industry is nonetheless noteworthy. He gives a list of current publishers (including a special, more

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<sup>42</sup> Henry Wilder Foote, *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (1940; reprint, Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1961), 307.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Blume, et al., *Protestant Church Music: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 684-90.

<sup>44</sup> See Jackson, 366-98. The four chapters are 28-31. See also George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kinship* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1943); George Pullen Jackson, *Another Sheaf of White Spirituals* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952). Neither of these later publications, however, make noteworthy additions to Jackson’s scholarship on convention gospel music in *White Spirituals*.

detailed account of the Hartford Music Company) and probes the inner workings of the business, explaining how it is not uncommon for lay individuals to climb the gospel corporate ladder “by the steps of singer, singing-school teacher, tune maker, songbook compiler,” and perhaps eventually “printing publisher.”<sup>45</sup> He also produces valuable estimates in such areas as yearly publication sales and annual numbers of newly written songs. His short stylistic synopsis of convention gospel music is sound for its time and influenced subsequent authors through at least the 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

It was almost forty years after the publication of Jackson’s *White Spirituals* until a book finally appeared that focused solely on southern gospel music history. Written by industry insiders, Jesse Clifton Burt and Duane Allen’s *The History of Gospel Music* (1971) was a noble effort, but one largely dominated by the desires of enthusiasts and individuals within the professional southern gospel entertainment industry that had long been in place by the 1970s. There is little of scholarly significance and less still on the music of Brumley, who would have been far from the industry’s current fads. Lois Blackwell’s *Wings of the Dove: The Story of Gospel Music in America* (1978) was a marked improvement, featuring early chapters on folk hymnody, camp meeting songs, and nineteenth-century shape-note music which proceed through the early publishers, the dawn of professional groups, and eventually all the way to current stars and organizations. Peppered throughout with anecdotes of the author’s personal experiences and famous gospel song lyrics, Blackwell’s narrative style is colorful, but her book remains more appropriately in the realm of popular nonfiction than academic literature.

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<sup>45</sup> Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 371.

<sup>46</sup> Multiple dissertations on southern gospel topics during the 1970s heavily relied on Jackson’s analytical observations. These documents are discussed later in this review of literature.

This distinction surfaces in the page or so that profiles Brumley, which reads more like a celebrity obituary in its prose and content.<sup>47</sup>

Such attempts at surmising southern gospel's history by lay-enthusiasts continued in the 1980s and 1990s. B.F. McLemore's self-published "Tracing the Roots of Southern Gospel Singers" (1988, rev. 2005) is arguably the most ambitious in scope of any such document, beginning with Pythagoras and ending in the twenty-first century (and all in under fifty pages!). As may be expected, McLemore's strength is his greatest weakness—his discussion of the twentieth century encompasses around four pages total.<sup>48</sup> In 1990, Bob Terrill published *The Music Men: The Story of Professional Gospel Quartet Singing*. Another attempt at telling southern gospel's history primarily through the lives of its entertainers, Terrill's book purportedly relied on over "twenty years" of artist interviews conducted by the author.<sup>49</sup> The result is a fine collection of anecdotal vignettes of many of the most celebrated eras and performers throughout southern gospel's history and a valuable resource to any student of the music. Brumley, however, as a composer (and not a performer) is summed up in one page. A resource of similar stock is David Bruce Murray's recent *Encyclopedia of Southern Gospel Music* (2005). Murray's quick reference guide is a useful tool and does include entries on events and composers, but again the performer profiles dominate. Brumley, for example, receives less than half of the space (three short paragraphs) as individual members of the Chuck Wagon Gang.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lois S. Blackwell, *The Wings of the Dove: The Story of Gospel Music in America* (Norfolk, VA: Donning, 1978), 58-59.

<sup>48</sup> B.F. McLemore, *Tracing the Roots of Southern Gospel Singers*, rev. ed. (Jasper, TX: B.F. McLemore, 2005), 36-40.

<sup>49</sup> This quote came from the back cover of Bob Terrell, *The Music Men: The Story of Professional Gospel Quartet Singing* (1990; reprint, Alexander, NC: Mountain Church, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> See David Bruce Murray, *Murray's Encyclopedia of Southern Gospel Music* (Bostic, NC: Musicscribe Publishing, 2005), 14, 16-18.

In 2002, two books surfaced that have become major works in southern gospel historiography: *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* by Don Cusic and *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel Music* by James R. Goff, Jr. Goff's book is the stronger of the two with regard to a focus on southern gospel music in particular. Cusic, currently Professor of Music Business at Belmont University, published an earlier edition of his book in 1990, but he greatly updated, revised, and expanded it for the 2002 version. He begins his large-scale study with a description of Biblical references to music and the Reformation, not reaching the twentieth century until well after the first hundred pages. He subsequently tries to cover everything from southern gospel to black gospel to the complex history of contemporary Christian music through the 1990s. While his treatment of southern gospel is relatively thorough, it suffers from an overall stroke that is too broad, with Brumley's contributions dispersed among a few scattered references.<sup>51</sup>

*Close Harmony* is really the first comprehensive history specific to southern gospel music and written by a scholar.<sup>52</sup> It is well-researched and fastidiously noted (Cusic, on the other hand, opts for cursory bibliographic essays for each of his chapters rather than traditional notes).<sup>53</sup> Part I covers nineteenth-century gospel music and the shape-note tradition and presents an informative, if not somewhat abbreviated, summary

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<sup>51</sup> See Don Cusic, *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2002), 160, 162, 188. Cusic's 1990 edition was *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel Music* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> By contrast, the first scholarly historical survey on black gospel appeared in 1971 (Anthony Heilbut's *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*), the first such book on black quartets in 1988 (Kip Lornell's "*Happy in the Service of the Lord*"), and the first thorough study of Thomas A. Dorsey—who has been labeled as Brumley's counterpart in black gospel—in 1992 (Michael Harris's *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church*).

<sup>53</sup> With regard to Don Cusic's reasoning behind his citation method, he gives the following (questionable) rationale: "My ideas have developed over a long period of time and often I am not sure exactly when or where I came to a particular idea or conclusion except to say that it has been a long, growing process that has come from ideas presented to others, tossed around in conversations, and modified through numerous discussions and articles as well as books I have read." See Cusic, 397.



of southern gospel's roots. Part II explores the two most important publishers (in Goff's view) of convention music, James D. Vaughan and the Stamps-Baxter Music Company. Parts III, IV, and V basically examine the flowering of quartet entertainment and follow southern gospel's growth and subsequent transformations amidst the rise of contemporary Christian music, giving profiles of the most significant artists along the way. Unlike its predecessors on the topic, Goff's book balances its biographical diversions with solid historical scholarship, unveiling the industry "warts and all." A historian at Appalachian State University, Goff unpacks several of southern gospel's embarrassing growing pains, including the recurring conflicts concerning remuneration for the "Lord's work," the overwhelming scrutiny inflicted upon star performers' personal lives, the resentment and bickering among competing groups, and never-ending dichotomies of sacred vs. secular and tradition vs. currency. Goff also gives Brumley the most thorough treatment yet seen in such a book, tying him into his discussion of the Hartford Music Company and locating the composer as a somewhat transitional figure, bridging the decline of the publishing giants and the rise of an entertainment-driven business.<sup>54</sup> While Goff mostly borrows his information from such previous sources as Hively, Malone, and Wolfe, his codified account of Brumley is the one of the best available to the general public. His labeling of the composer as "the best-known southern gospel songwriter of all time" and his music's popularity as "unprecedented in gospel music circles" is high praise from the premier book on the subject.<sup>55</sup>

Country music historiography also occasionally acknowledges Brumley's work. The work of Bill C. Malone is the best example in this regard. In addition to the

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<sup>54</sup> Goff, 92-96.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 93, 96.

important article cited above, Malone gives some attention to gospel music and Brumley in the revised version of his landmark book *Country Music U.S.A.* (rev. ed., 2002) and even more in *Southern Music, American Music* (rev. ed., 2003).<sup>56</sup> Queries into bluegrass and bluegrass gospel music have also produced literature touching on their relationship and connections to southern gospel.<sup>57</sup>

Certain published cultural studies—some specific to gospel music and some not—have proved a bountiful source of literature applicable to southern gospel scholarship and thus Albert Brumley. Investigations into regional, grassroots circles of convention-style shape-note singers are one example. William Lynwood Montell's *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990* (1991) is the best of these, covering both the history of convention singing practices as well as amateur entertainment groups. Other authors have produced smaller-scale portraits of similar communities in Georgia and Alabama.<sup>58</sup> A fine example of a recent cultural study is Douglas Harrison's "Why Southern Gospel Music Matters" (2008), which eschews previous claims of the music's escapist allure and instead treats it as "a network of

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<sup>56</sup> See Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 2d rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 12-13, 131, 224-25, 472-73; Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music/American Music*, Rev. ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 9, 67-70, 77-79, 116-18, 120-22.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Wayne W. Daniel, "Making a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord: The Gospel Roots of Bluegrass," *Bluegrass Unlimited* (Mar. 1985): 58-62; Randy Franks, "We're Having a Revival," *Bluegrass Unlimited* (June 1989): 66-70; Rev. Jay Hardy, "The Beginning of Bluegrass Gospel," *Pickin'* (Feb. 1977): 4-10; Joe Ross, "Give Me That Old-Time Religion: Gospel Music in Bluegrass," *Bluegrass Unlimited* (Oct. 2001): 58-61. More scholarly forays include Jack Bernhardt, "Cry Holy Unto the Lord: Tradition and Diversity in Bluegrass Gospel Music," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*, ed. Henry Willett (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1995), 101-10; Jack Bernhardt, "Performance, Faith, and Bluegrass Gospel: An Anthropological Journey with Jerry and Tammy Sullivan," in *Country Music Annual 2001*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 51-69; Kevin D. Kehrberg, "Original Gospel Quartet Music Recorded by Bill Monroe" (Master's thesis, University of Kentucky, 2005), 36-47, 124-47; Marshall, 3-43; Rosenberg, 28, 43-44, 48, 66, 142, 231-240.

<sup>58</sup> See Joyce Cauthen, "Shape-Note Gospel Singing on Sand Mountain," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*, ed. Henry Willett (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1995), 81-84; Fred C. Fussell, "Convention Gospel Singing in Alabama," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*, ed. Henry Willett (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1995), 85-88; David H. Stanley, "The Gospel-Singing Convention in South Georgia," *Journal of American Folklore* 95, no. 375 (1982): 1-32.

interconnected rhetorics and signifying practices that serve a multitude of public and private needs among its performers and fans—needs that are not otherwise met in evangelical culture.”<sup>59</sup> Scholars have also looked at the social agency of gospel music during the turn of the twentieth century, and even cultural geography has used southern gospel quartet singing as a basis for study.<sup>60</sup>

In *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (2003), Stephen A. Marini spends a chapter examining contemporary Christian and gospel music’s massive commercialization and its effects on the cultural meaning of religious music in America. Interestingly, Marini chooses to interview two current top bluegrass gospel artists (as opposed to more mainstream Christian pop artists), but he lacks a complete understanding of southern gospel—he labels Brumley as a “bluegrass gospel composer.”<sup>61</sup> While this is intriguing simply from the standpoint of current cultural perceptions of Brumley and his music, bluegrass as an acknowledged genre was not really “born” until 1946 (the tail end of Brumley’s days as a “hit” gospel songwriter), and Brumley never consciously wrote a bluegrass or country song.<sup>62</sup> Studies of country music culture—as opposed to sacred music culture—can also give insight into southern gospel

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<sup>59</sup> Douglas Harrison, "Why Southern Gospel Music Matters," *Religion and American Culture* 18, no. 1 (2008): 27-58. This quote appears on p. 58.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Gavin James Campbell, "'Old Can Be Used Instead of New': Shape-Note Singing and the Crisis of Modernity in the New South, 1880-1920," *Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 436 (1997): 169-88; James C. Downey, "Revivalism, the Gospel Songs, and Social Reform," *Ethnomusicology* 9, no. 2 (1965): 115-125; A.D. Horsley, "The Spatial Impact of White Gospel Quartets in the United States," in *The Sounds of People and Places: A Geography of American Folk and Popular Music*, ed. George O. Carney (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 177-90.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 304. Marini’s discourse on gospel music comes in chapter 11, “Gospel Music: Sacred Song and the Marketplace,” pp. 296-320.

<sup>62</sup> 1946 is the year Bill Monroe first released recordings featuring his new banjo player, Earl Scruggs. Most consider this Monroe band the “first” bluegrass band. See Rosenberg, 68-94. On Brumley’s personal disconnect with writing country music, see Malone, "Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer," 76.

music, for sacred material (often written by the likes of Brumley and similar convention music composers) has long been a crucial facet of country music's standard repertoire.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, the only published scholarly volume topically devoted to southern gospel music other than Goff's is an edited collection of rhetorical studies. *More Than Precious Memories: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel Music* (2004), edited by Michael P. Graves and David Fillingim, includes a variety of essays analyzing various aspects of the southern gospel industry including song lyrics, audience demography, cross-cultural issues, and matriarchal figures. In fact, rhetorical studies of country music's gospel repertoire—and thus southern gospel to some degree—are not uncommon. Fillingim's other book, *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as Theology* (2003), is one example.<sup>64</sup> Another recent book in a similar vein is *Honky Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (2001) by Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth.<sup>65</sup>

Theoretical research from a musical standpoint is less common among published literature. An older but still good example is William H. Tallmadge's article "The Responsorial and Antiphonal Practice in Gospel Song" (1968). Using a host of examples from the 1820s to 1960s, Tallmadge attempts to trace one of gospel music's signature textural mannerisms.<sup>66</sup> Also worth noting is Shirley Beary's "Stylistic Traits of Southern

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<sup>63</sup> Some examples are Ellison, 102-60; Ted Olsen, "Your Inner Voice That Comes from God': Country Singers' Attitudes toward the Sacred," in *Country Music Annual 2000*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 4-21; Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 167-93.

<sup>64</sup> For examples of this book's specific dealings with southern gospel, see Fillingim, 23-42.

<sup>65</sup> Yet another example—though earlier and less thorough—is Marshall: 3-43.

<sup>66</sup> William H. Tallmadge, "The Responsorial and Antiphonal Practice in Gospel Song," *Ethnomusicology* 12, no. 2 (1968): 219-238.

Shape-Note Gospel Songs” (1979), an article drawn from her dissertation which is discussed below.<sup>67</sup>

Lately, there has been an encouraging swell of scholarly attention to convention singing in particular, especially focusing on its status as a living tradition. Dr. Stephen Shearon, a musicologist from Middle Tennessee State University, has almost single-handedly led this effort. In 2008, he helped organize—along with Paul Wells of MTSU’s Center for Popular Music—the first academic conference devoted specifically to the practice.<sup>68</sup> In 2009, he successfully proposed a panel presentation on convention music at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Society for American Music in Denver, Colorado.<sup>69</sup> Most recently, he has produced and directed a documentary titled *Keep on Singing: The Southern Gospel Convention Tradition* (Middle Tennessee State University, 2010).

Perhaps due to interest generated as a result of the 1960’s folk revival, unpublished dissertations tackling specific topics of convention music and/or southern gospel history began appearing in the 1970s.<sup>70</sup> The first of these is Jo Lee Fleming’s “James D. Vaughan, Music Publisher, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, 1912-1964.” Vaughan founded the James D. Vaughan Music Company, a pioneer in convention songbook publishing, and he was the first real titan of the industry. Fleming’s study contributes more than just biographical work, including discussions of nineteenth-century

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<sup>67</sup> Shirley Beary, "Stylistic Traits of Southern Shape-Note Gospel Songs," *The Hymn* (Jan. 1979): 26-33, 35.

<sup>68</sup> This was “Father Along”: A Conference on the Southern Gospel Convention-Singing Tradition, held April 4-5, 2008, on the campus of MTSU in Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>69</sup> The title of the panel was “The Southern Gospel Tradition,” and it featured three research papers by Shearon, Kevin Kehrberg, and Gregory Straughn as well as a corresponding lecture-recital by Tracy Phillips on convention-style piano and an evening demonstration of a singing convention.

<sup>70</sup> Worth noting here is Curtis Leo Cheek, “The Singing School and Shaped-Note Tradition: Residuals in Twentieth-Century American Hymnody” (D.M.A. diss., University of Southern California, 1968). While the title may imply a topical relationship to southern gospel, the actual document is concerned only with nineteenth-century shape-note music and its remnants in twentieth-century American church hymnals.

antecedents to Vaughan's business as well as the typical format of Vaughan's singing schools and normals over the years. He also gives a general overview of convention gospel's textual and musical style, although it is heavily dependent upon George Pullen Jackson's previous observations.<sup>71</sup>

Stanley H. Brobston's 1977 dissertation "A Brief History of White Southern Gospel Music and a Study of Selected Amateur Family Gospel Music Singing Groups in Rural Georgia" is perhaps the first scholarly attempt at a complete, general survey of southern gospel music history. The first portion is devoted to this objective, while the second provides a field study of current amateur gospel music making in southern Georgia. As to be expected from the broad focus of Part I, Brobston affords Albert Brumley and his activities only a brief mention.<sup>72</sup> However, the field research is particularly valuable for providing another case study of amateur gospel music culture. Within a randomly selected field of twenty-five (out of 177) amateur performing groups, Brobston probes such aspects as performance practice, church affiliations, sources/methods for new material (e.g., sheet music, songbooks, recordings), and favorite songs. Such information helps illuminate an understanding of overall cultural trends among southern gospel music enthusiasts and participants in the mid-1970s.

Perhaps inspired by Fleming's work, Shirley Beary's "The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company: A Continuing American Tradition, 1926-1976" examines the company that supplanted Vaughan as the premier publisher of convention songbooks

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<sup>71</sup> Jo Lee Fleming, "James D. Vaughan, Music Publisher, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, 1912-1964" (S.M.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1972), 78-88. See also Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 380-87.

<sup>72</sup> See Stanley H. Brobston, "A Brief History of White Southern Gospel Music and a Study of Selected Amateur Family Gospel Music Singing Groups in Rural Georgia" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1977), 162-63, 190-92.

during the early twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> Through Brumley's involvement as a staff songwriter with Stamp-Baxter, Beary's document does offer more information about the composer, but only as it pertains to the company's history. She also presents a general stylistic synopsis of convention music based on a study of "several hundred songs," and while her application of poetic metrical analysis offers some fresh insights into textual conventions of gospel song poetry, her musical analyses basically restate previous findings by Jackson and Fleming.<sup>74</sup>

Taken together (and in tandem with the first books published on the subject), this small cluster of theses perhaps indicates a surge in academic interest involving convention music/southern gospel topics during the 1970s. If so, the interest seems to have waned during the subsequent decade except for one 1987 dissertation, parts of which used certain southern gospel songs as bases for rhetorical analysis.<sup>75</sup> The next thesis to address fully a southern gospel topic does not appear until 1999, with David Charles Deller's "Sing Me Home to Gloryland: Arkansas Songbook Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century." Arkansas occupies a disproportionately large role in the history of convention singing, possessing ties to various important figures and institutions. Deller's work first presents a cultural historical account of the complex social infrastructures of

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<sup>73</sup> Shirley Beary, "The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company: A Continuing American Tradition, 1926-1976" (D.M.A. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977).

<sup>74</sup> See Beary, "Stylistic Traits of Southern Shape-Note Gospel Songs," 26-33, 35. This quote appears on page 33. Based on her dissertation, this article presents a good condensed version of Beary's analytical conclusions.

<sup>75</sup> This is Gary R. Drum, "The Message in the Music: A Content Analysis of Contemporary Christian and Southern Gospel Song Lyrics" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1987). There are two other theses from around this time period that should also be mentioned: Thomas Henry Porter, "Homer Alan Rodeheaver (1880-1955): Evangelistic Musician and Publisher" (Ed.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981); Joel F. Reed, "Anthony J. Showalter (1858-1924): Southern Educator, Publisher, Composer" (Ed.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976). While important to an understanding of southern gospel music history, it would be inaccurate to label these "southern gospel" topics. Showalter largely predated the southern gospel convention-singing boom, and Rodeheaver, headquartered in Chicago, published mostly in round notes and falls more appropriately within the urban Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century.

what he calls “songbook gospel” singing in Arkansas, painting a vivid picture of the intricate, localized system of singing schools, singing classes, and the various scales of conventions (e.g., district, county, state) that thrived in the state during the first half of the twentieth century. He then spends his final chapters examining four crucial figures—all with strong connections to Arkansas—that occupy major places in convention music history: William M. Ramsey, Luther G. Presley, E.M. Bartlett, and finally, Albert E. Brumley.

While Deller’s biographical treatment of Brumley is largely informed and superceded in scope by Hively’s book, his twenty-two-page chapter on the composer unquestionably represents the most thorough scholarship involving Brumley’s music to date.<sup>76</sup> He examines nineteen Brumley songs in all, beginning with a few early examples and covering many of his most popular works such as “Rank Strangers to Me,” “If We Never Meet Again,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “Turn Your Radio On,” and “I’ll Fly Away.” As a thesis in American literature, Deller’s textual analyses are often thoughtful and engaging despite their brevity. Moreover, his musical analyses go deeper than what one might expect from a non-specialist. He displays a command of musical terminology and makes some insightful observations into Brumley’s melodic craftsmanship and ability to wed text and tune creatively.<sup>77</sup>

With only one chapter at his disposal, however, Deller is unable to probe Brumley’s music and career completely. His song analyses certainly represent the largest such study yet written, but they are uneven in depth. Interestingly, some of Brumley’s more ubiquitous “hits” (e.g., “Turn Your Radio On,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,”

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<sup>76</sup> See Deller, 166-88. For a full citation of Deller’s dissertation, see footnote 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 176, 181-83. Deller’s discussions in these pages of “When I Looked Up And He Looked Down,” “Rank Strangers To Me,” and “Nobody Answered Me” are good examples.



“I’ll Fly Away”) are ones that receive less scrutiny, especially from a musical angle.<sup>78</sup> Their greatness is seemingly left to rest on their widespread popularity, with Deller’s explanations not moving much beyond value-laden accolades. Other well-known Brumley songs—“Jesus, Hold My Hand,” “I Just Steal Away and Pray,” “I’d Rather Be an Old-Time Christian,” “Did You Ever Go Sailin’?”—are conspicuously absent from analysis. Moreover, a truly comprehensive understanding of Brumley’s compositional approach requires a general survey of every existing piece, and the brevity of Deller’s chapter does not afford that.

Perhaps another casualty of his limited space, Deller gives no real consideration to Brumley’s legacy and impact outside of southern gospel in the broader American cultural climate. Other than restating the oft-mentioned accomplishments one finds in any portrait of Brumley (the great numbers of recordings and printings, hall-of-fame memberships, artists with recordings of Brumley songs, etc.) and labeling him a “songwriting superstar,” Deller does not investigate the extent of assimilation achieved by Brumley’s material. His chapter is valuable, but more is needed to fully explore questions of *why* Brumley’s songs crossed over so successfully (as opposed to those of, say, his contemporaries Luther Presley and E.M. Bartlett).

### **Organizational Overview**

This thesis consists of six chapters followed by two appendices and a bibliography. Following this introductory first chapter, chapter two represents the study’s biographical component, beginning with Brumley’s early family life and continuing through the stages of his musical training and professional activity. With the use of new

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 184-86. These pages contain Deller’s discourse involving the three songs mentioned.

primary source material, part of its objective is to give a clearer chronology of his time at Hartford as well as the decades after his marriage. It also focuses on Brumley's career as a music publisher. In 1943, he founded a publishing company which he owned and operated until turning it over to his sons in 1976. Still in operation today, Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Incorporated has had to reinvent itself over the years to stay in business. This chapter covers Brumley's keen sense of promotion and reinvention as a gospel music publisher as well as his successful navigation of the industry's transition from convention songbook publishing to professional southern gospel quartet entertainment.

Chapter Three introduces the thesis's analytical focus by summarizing past approaches to convention music analysis and providing a broad overview of Brumley's typical style, preferences, and conventions as a composer. This basis of this overview is a complete thematic catalogue of Brumley's published compositions (Appendix A) that scans both musical (key, meter, form, etc.) and non-musical traits (theme, textual incipit, etc.). In conclusion, this chapter provides plausible explanations concerning Brumley's unparalleled success with writing gospel songs.

From the complex (and often inaccurate) early recording history of "I'll Fly Away" to recent treatments by diverse performers, Chapter Four and Chapter Five examine aspects of this song's impact and manifestations within the bounds of American culture. Chapter Four investigates historical and social contexts behind the song's creation and subsequent rise to popularity, while Chapter Five traces the cultural "work" it has carried out since, showing how the song's meaning evolved considerably as it has grown into a gospel "classic" and began to permeate the realms of secular popular music

and entertainment. In more recent music, television, and film, inter-textual and/or abstracted settings of “I’ll Fly Away” have troped the song’s meaning to produce altogether new implications and associations. These chapters construct an elaborate “song profile” of “I’ll Fly Away,” utilizing an interdisciplinary mix of methodology that includes history, music and film analysis, cultural theory, and migration studies. As a result, explanations emerge for the song’s enduring appeal among both white and black artists as well as its ability to transcend such stylistic boundaries as country, reggae, rock, and hip-hop. Through a careful look at these and other stylistic incarnations, this research reveals “I’ll Fly Away” as a truly significant vehicle for various cultural expressions in America.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter, presents a summary of this study and its findings, reviews the musical and cultural importance of continuing research in the music and career of Albert E. Brumley, and clarifies avenues for further research involving both Brumley and the broader fields of convention singing and southern gospel. Most importantly, it reiterates Brumley’s importance as a major figure of America’s musical life who profoundly influenced the development of religious and popular music in this country.

Two appendices and a bibliography follow the concluding chapter. Appendix A constitutes the Brumley Thematic Catalogue described in the “Delimitation and Methodology” subsection of this chapter. Appendix B is a large discography that documents commercially recorded versions of Albert E. Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” from 1940 through 2010. The author began compiling this database—the only known attempt at accurately documenting these recordings—in 2008, and it currently numbers over 730

entries. This discography serves as the basis for various findings presented in Chapters Four and Five. As part of an electronic dissertation, both appendices are available in a Microsoft Excel file format, enabling interactive user interface that permits custom filtering and reordering of the data. Please see the appendices for further explanation of both their contents and their electronic access. Finally, the bibliography is organized according to general medium and each item's status as primary or secondary source material.

## **Conclusion**

Albert E. Brumley's music occupies an important chapter within the story of American music, representing a critical juncture in America's long history of creating and enjoying music that is both sacred and popular. The unprecedented development and international success of the American music industry during the twentieth century have made the issues surrounding this sacred/secular dichotomy more important than ever before. Innumerable popular music superstars have incorporated Brumley works into otherwise secular performances, albums, and repertoires, and his music is equally as common among certain amateur music circles that are not strictly sacred.<sup>79</sup> In a largely secularized popular music culture where outward religious display is often taboo, why are Brumley's songs—firmly connected with evangelical Christianity—embraced and accepted? This is another central question into which this thesis will provide insight.

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<sup>79</sup> Bluegrass music, folk, old time music, and related genres are examples of such music circles.

Admirers have bestowed Brumley with various titles including “the Gershwin of the Rural Route” and the “Hoagy Carmichael of Gospel Music.”<sup>80</sup> In many ways, he is also the “William Billings” and the “Stephen Foster” of twentieth-century America. Billings’s popular psalmody traversed the same sacred-secular dichotomy in the eighteenth century as Brumley’s music did in the twentieth, winning similarly great admiration from the public along the way. With an American self-determination not unlike Billings, Brumley continued composing in spite of unfavorable odds and took publishing into his own hands. As Foster did in the nineteenth century, Brumley displayed a gift for writing songs that became “standards” within just a few decades, finding universal appeal among disenchanted Americans searching for a sense of identity in both the past and a heavenly hereafter. Most telling, Billings, Foster, and Brumley were all “untrained” composers whose music was (and still is in the case of Brumley) shunned for a perceived lack of sophistication despite its wide acceptance among the general populace. Albert E. Brumley is a twentieth-century equivalent of these luminaries in American music history. It is time to put to rest the superficial concerns—his music’s so-called “commercialism,” its link with evangelical Christianity, its technical “inferiority”—that have prevented serious inquiry into his work and recognize him as an emblematic figure of American music deserving inclusion within the ranks of its greatest contributors.

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<sup>80</sup> The former is from Gene Gideon, "About the Author," in *Albert E. Brumley's Songs of the Pioneers*, ed. Albert E. Brumley, Sr., et al. (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1970), ii. The latter is from Larry Scott, "Gospel Music's Mentor, Albert Brumley," in *The Best of Albert E. Brumley*, ed. Albert E. Brumley, Sr., et al. (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1966), 149.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Life of Albert E. Brumley

#### **Introduction: Indian Territory at the Turn of the Century**

Albert E. Brumley's life spanned over seventy years. He was born on October 29, 1905. It was early in the new century, and a new beginning in many regards for life in America. In the previous ten years, the country had seen the Progressive Era supplant the end of the Gilded Age. The Spanish American War had increased America's colonial presence in both the Caribbean and the South Pacific. The landmark Supreme Court decision *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) had firmly cemented "separate but equal" segregation in the United States. Just a few weeks before Brumley's birth, the Wright brothers—perhaps in a coincidental nod to the future composer's most famous work—recorded their longest flight yet on October 5, 1905, taking their Wright Flyer III to the air for 39 minutes near Dayton, Ohio.

Brumley, however, entered the world far removed from these significant historical events. In fact, he was born in rural Indian Territory, a full two years before Oklahoma's statehood, and grew up in what became La Flore County, which lies along the border with Arkansas in far eastern Oklahoma. The area was rich in cotton production, and it was ultimately this crop that had brought Brumley's parents to the region and shaped his upbringing that would later inspire some of his most enduring songs.

## **William Sherman and Sarah Isabelle Brumley**

Very little information has surfaced about Albert Brumley's parents. According to Brumley's son Robert, the composer seldom spoke about his parents or childhood.<sup>1</sup> This essentially leaves Brumley's nostalgic, sentimental songs as the largest source of first-hand information on his past, which is at best problematic and at worst fictitious. There are, however, a few details that have emerged.

Brumley's father, William Sherman Brumley (1868-1941), had roots in Tennessee, but he reportedly came to the Oklahoma area from Missouri between 1889 and 1895, during one of the territory's several land runs.<sup>2</sup> Despite being lured by the prospects of free land, William ended up tenant farming in the cotton fields of eastern Oklahoma like many other aspiring homesteaders. During these rough years of sharecropping, William courted Sarah Isabelle Williams, a young woman whose family had migrated to Oklahoma from Illinois. By 1902, they were married and had an infant son named William. In 1905, Albert was born, and a third son, Thomas, followed in the next few years.

Brumley spent his early childhood near Spiro, a small town in Le Flore County that claimed 962 residents in 1907, the year of Oklahoma's statehood. Spiro gained its name from the Spiro Mounds, a nearby series of earthen mounds built by prehistoric Mississippian peoples that remains one of the most significant pre-Columbian archeological sites of Native American culture. Brumley recalled living "300 yards or so"

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Brumley, phone conversation with the author, 10 Mar. 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Bill C. Malone, "Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 21 (July 1986): 69-77. Malone states that Brumley's father arrived in Oklahoma during "the land run of 1899" (page 70), but there was no Oklahoma land run in 1899. There *was* a major land run in 1889, as well as several others in the early 1890s.

from the Arkansas River, and some of his earliest memories were his family's narrow escapes from the river's flooding banks after particularly heavy rains.<sup>3</sup>

For many, including the Brumleys, sharecropping was a fragile and unpredictable way of life. Brumley's older brother Bill died of typhoid fever at the tender age of eight. Another byproduct was frequent relocation. During Brumley's second year of public schooling at Harper School, just northwest of Spiro, his family picked up and left for nearby Williams, Oklahoma. Brumley was just eight years old. Around the time that he was ten or eleven, they moved again, this time settling in the small community of Rock Island, also in Le Flore County and just two miles from the Arkansas state line. However, the Rock Island move was also cause to celebrate. Brumley's father had finally earned enough to purchase his own farm.

### **Rock Island, Oklahoma**

Rock Island was a relatively new community. It began around 1904 as Maney Junction, where the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad and the new Midland Valley Railroad (MVR) intersected in the Choctaw Nation. The MVR was a new line connecting Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Muskogee, Indian Territory, and eventually continuing all the way to Wichita, Kansas. In 1905, the establishment of the Rock Island Post Office signaled a new name for the community. The inspiration behind the change was likely Rock Island, Illinois, the namesake of the prominent Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad Company, colloquially known as the "Rock Island Line."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kay Hively and Albert E. Brumley, Jr., *I'll Fly Away: The Life Story of Albert E. Brumley* (Branson, MO: Mountaineer Books, 1990), 12.

<sup>4</sup> See Charlene Williams Dunn. "Rock Island," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/R/RO011.html> (accessed 23 Mar. 2010).



Coal was one of the major industries that utilized the Midland Valley Railroad. Coal production in eastern Oklahoma was booming in the early twentieth century, and Rock Island was no exception. During the town's peak years, "as many as fifty men worked in the slopes and three times as many with muscle and horse power in the strip pits" that surrounded Rock Island.<sup>5</sup> Between 1907 and 1920, Le Flore County's population nearly doubled from 24,678 to 42,765, and this population increase occurred almost entirely in its rural areas.<sup>6</sup> In 1918 (about when the Brumleys arrived), Rock Island's estimated population of twenty-five boasted a grocer, sorghum mill, and a brand new public school. By 1924, residents had added a two-year high school, and at one point the school's total enrollment reportedly swelled to 275 pupils.<sup>7</sup> Brumley's own account of his Rock Island childhood corroborates this growth, and he attributes the increase to a specific aspect of the town's cultural life.

Well, I can remember when we first moved to Rock Island, the school attendance was around 50. When we moved away from there in 1925, after all these singings that we had, we had about 150 enrolled there in that little school there. And that was just a rural community, understand, no town at all. Just a railroad crossing, one store, no filling station because they didn't have filling stations much back then, a post office, and a depot was about all we had there. But the population increased about threefold in the five years that I lived there, and I think it was because Rock Island was noted for a singing community with a lot of singing activity.<sup>8</sup>

On their new family farm, the Brumleys raised cotton as well as corn. Albert continued his public schooling in Rock Island and was one of the first students to attend

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<sup>5</sup> David Tucker. "Rock Island History," *Rockislandok.com*, <http://www.rockislandok.com/page10.htm> (accessed 16 Mar. 2010). "Slopes" refers to slope mines, a form of coal mining.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Contents-Oklahoma," in *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), 17.

<sup>7</sup> See Tucker.

<sup>8</sup> Albert E. Brumley, recorded interview with J. M. Gaskin, 12 Oct. 1976, Albert E. Brumley and Sons Archive, Powell, MO (AEBS). In an earlier interview from 1962, Brumley claims that his family moved to Rock Island when he was ten or eleven years old. Thus, he likely lived in Rock Island longer than five years. See Albert E. Brumley, recorded interview with Gene Bartlett, 9 Jan. 1962, AEBS.

the town's new two-year high school. Although their home life was humble, the Brumleys maintained an active social schedule, attending weekly church gatherings or house parties where music was a common feature. Brumley's father was a fiddler of local renown, and his services were surely employed for some of these occasions. His mother was especially fond of popular parlor songs and enjoyed singing such favorites as "Little Rosewood Casket" and "Silver Threads Among the Gold."<sup>9</sup>

The Brumley parents involved their sons in the family's music making. Brother Tom played the guitar and accompanied his father's fiddling. Brumley himself reportedly learned to play some "square dance fiddle," and he also "played an old-fashioned organ which was badly in need of repair" (probably an old pump organ).<sup>10</sup> Brumley had four piano lessons with his high school music teacher, which became his only music education not connected with convention gospel music.<sup>11</sup>

Sacred music was another such outlet for the family. Unfortunately, there is very little information about Brumley's church environment in his early years. His parents took their faith seriously, and they apparently identified themselves as Campbellites. Campbellites were essentially Christian believers rooted in the Restoration Movement of the early nineteenth century. Two figures, Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), were integral to this American religious movement—sometimes also called the Stone-Campbell Movement—that most notably produced the present-day

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<sup>9</sup> Malone mentions Sarah Brumley's fondness for "sentimental parlor song, such as 'Little Rosewood Casket.'" See Malone, "Albert E. Brumley, Folk Composer," 70. In "Dreaming of a Little Cabin" (1940), one of Brumley's more popular sentimental songs, he writes about hearing his mother sing "Rock of Ages" and "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

<sup>10</sup> See David Crawford, "Albert E. Brumley: Ozark Gospel Musician" (paper presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the Sonneck Society, Lawrence, KS: 1982). The latter quote is from Otis J. Knippers, *Who's Who among Southern Singers and Composers* (Hot Springs National Park, AR: Knippers Brothers, 1937), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

Protestant denominations of the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ. Basically, the goal of Stone, Campbell, and the Restoration Movement was to restore Christianity to the patterns outlined by the first-century church of the Bible's New Testament.

As Albert Brumley was a lifelong member of the Church of Christ, his parents most likely aligned themselves with this particular group of Campbellite followers. The dictates of the Churches of Christ include an anti-Calvinist doctrine of salvation, baptism by bodily immersion, simple church architecture, and—perhaps most famously—the strict exclusion of musical instruments in worship services. Their worship singing is entirely *a cappella*.<sup>12</sup>

While Brumley's Rock Island church activities may remain somewhat mysterious, his formative encounters with sacred music outside of church do not. As he mentioned in his comments about the community's growth, convention gospel singing was very popular in and around Rock Island. The region in general had been a hotbed of singing activity for some time. In *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (1933), George Pullen Jackson gave a short profile of the Hartford Music Company in Hartford, Arkansas, located less than twenty miles from Rock Island. Jackson quotes from an 1880s letter to the *Musical Million* in which a singing-school master reports that “round notes are no longer used [in the Hartford area]. The seven-character notes have swept the field. I have sold about 300 of your [Ruebush-Keiffer] publications.”<sup>13</sup> Hartford had been a publishing hub for shape-note convention gospel songbooks since at least 1905, when the Central Music Company began operating out of the community. In nearby Stigler,

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<sup>12</sup> Outside of worship (e.g., recreational gospel singing), instrument use is perfectly acceptable among members of the Churches of Christ. As previously noted, Brumley and his family certainly played various instruments.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 369.

Oklahoma, just on the other side of Le Flore County, another music publishing firm—the Eureka Publishing Company—was in operation from 1886 until about 1915.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was a Hartford Music Company representative, Everett Anthony, that taught Albert Brumley’s first singing school. According to a 1937 biographical sketch in *Who’s Who among Southern Singers and Composers*, Brumley started singing in 1920.<sup>15</sup> He apparently did not attend his first singing school until a couple of years later. Brumley remembered Rock Island being host to “several singing schools,” and he finally agreed to go after the persistent encouragement of Brace Key, a family friend and well-known singer in the community who rented land on the Brumley farm.<sup>16</sup>

Brumley recalled 1922 or 1923 as the year of this singing school, but it was likely the summer of 1922. In another interview, he claimed that he wrote his first song at age sixteen, in the wake of attending his first singing school.<sup>17</sup> This would be 1922, and the summer—after most crops had been laid by—was generally the high season for rural singing schools. The school lasted ten nights, or nightly for two weeks excluding weekend nights. This was a popular format at the time, and Brumley’s tuition was probably around \$1.00 per week, or \$2.00 total. Anthony likely boarded with a family in the community for the duration of the school. Also commonplace was a special program at the conclusion of the school that coincided with a “pie supper” or “box supper,” the proceeds of which went to help pay the instructor.<sup>18</sup> For example, in October 1924, a

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<sup>14</sup> David Charles Deller, “Sing Me Home to Gloryland: Arkansas Songbook Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1999), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Knippers, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

<sup>17</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Maxine Sanford, 4 Aug. 1973, AEBS.

<sup>18</sup> Pie suppers and box suppers were very popular fund raising events in many rural communities of the South and Southeast. Females in the community would bake a pie (or put together a boxed dinner) and

singing-school box supper held in Ada, Arkansas (about 100 miles east of Rock Island), netted \$22.75 in funds.<sup>19</sup>

The school itself would have focused on teaching music “rudiments” (defined basically as pitch, rhythm, and dynamics), shape-note sight reading, part-singing, and perhaps—for an added fee and if time allowed—more advanced instruction in harmony and/or songwriting. Private lessons in voice or piano were also occasionally available. It was not uncommon for students to attend multiple singing schools, sometimes in the same year and often covering virtually the same material. Such repetition helped reinforce concepts, and they provided social interaction in an environment where such opportunities were few and far between.

Brumley also became a member of the Rock Island Singing Class. A singing class was a formally organized group of convention gospel singers from the community, often including a president, vice president, and secretary as well as recognized song leaders. They typically comprised between twenty and fifty members and met one evening a week, usually on Fridays. In many cases, classes were formed into a larger district that held its own convention once every other month or so, hosted by each class on a rotating basis. The districts were part of the larger county convention, which met quarterly or biannually and usually over an entire weekend (i.e., Friday, Saturday, and Sunday).<sup>20</sup> Like many of his peers, Brumley formed a close bond with his singing class, developing

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bring it to the supper. Each pie would be auctioned off, and the winning bidder would then eat it with the woman who prepared it. Thus, women could expect spirited bidding from their husbands or interested suitors. Brumley discussed pie suppers in a 1970s interview. See Brumley, recorded video interview with Guy Logsdon, [c. 1971], AEBS.

<sup>19</sup> Harry M. Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 1: 1921-1934* (Troy, MI: Lee Marks, 1997), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Beyond the county singing convention were annual state conventions and, beginning in 1936, the annual National Singing Convention. For a detailed discussion of singing schools, classes, districts, and conventions in western Arkansas during the early twentieth century, see Deller, 34-94.

a friendly reputation within it as “that hot-shot bass singer.”<sup>21</sup> The class left such an impact on the young singer that he later dedicated songs to it on two separate occasions. The first was “Dreaming of My Childhood Village” (Figure 2.1) in 1930, followed sixteen years later by “Never to Say Goodbye” (1946).

Another learning opportunity available to singing school graduates was the traveling normal, which was essentially a longer singing school (three to four weeks) that offered more advanced training—primarily in “harmony”—for individuals interested in writing songs and perhaps teaching on their own. Unlike singing schools, these normals often had more than one instructor. According to a certificate dated August 28, 1925, Brumley himself successfully completed a satellite normal of the Hartford Musical Institute taught by C. (Claude) L. Murphree, a charter member of the Hartford Music Company and one of its first employees.<sup>22</sup>

Most importantly, however, Brumley’s first singing school sparked his initial interest in composing. Everett Anthony made a point that the impressionable young singer never forgot. Brumley later recollected:

When [Anthony] said that all the songs and melodies that had ever been written came from that little scale up there on that blackboard...and all that ever would be written could be found in that scale...that set me afire! That’s when I decided that if other people could do it [write music], I could do it.<sup>23</sup>

Brumley would never feel the same about gospel music. Just a few years later, he made the short trip to Hartford, Arkansas, that would change the direction of his life forever.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Hively and Brumley, 19.

<sup>22</sup> This was one of Hartford’s itinerant normals, organized in much the same manner as rural singing schools and not to be confused with the flagship Hartford Musical Institutes held each year in Hartford, Arkansas. Information on the latter appears later in this chapter. For more discussion of music normal schools, see Chapter One.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 18.

Figure 2.1. "Dreaming of My Childhood Village" (1930), showing dedication.<sup>24</sup>

**No. 138 Dreaming of My Childhood Village**  
 A. E. B. Dedicated to the Rock Island, Okla. Singing Class **Albert E. Brumley**

1. One day while dream - - ing in the twi - light.....  
 2. I heard the vil - - lage choir a sing - ing.....  
 3. Those days are gone ..... but not for - got - ten, .....  
 4. There is a vil - - lage o'er the riv - er.....

By my lit - - tle cot - tage home; ..... My tho'ts turned  
 Dear old songs..... I used to know; ..... It was so  
 Days so hap - - py and so gay; ..... If I could  
 Where our tran - - scient dreams un - fold; ..... It is the

back..... to that old vil - lage..... Where in  
 sweet..... to sit and list - en..... To their  
 on - - ly live them o - ver ..... In the  
 vil - - lage of my child - hood - - But its

REFRAIN D. S. - And my  
 FINE

child - hood days I roamed..... I was dream - - ing  
 voic - es sweet and low.....  
 good..... old-fashioned way.....  
 streets..... are paved with gold..... Dreaming, I was dreaming

hap - - py child - hood days.

in the twi - light..... With my wea - - ry heart a -  
 dream - ing in the twi - light With my wea - - ry

heart ablaze; Dream - ing of..... that lit - tle vil - lage.....  
 heart ablaze; Dreaming, I was dreaming lit - tle vil - lage

<sup>24</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Dreaming of My Childhood Village," number 138 in *Glory Gleaner* (Hartford, AR: The Hartford Music Co., 1930).

## **Hartford, Arkansas**

As a teenager, Brumley was well aware that he lived just twenty miles from the Hartford Music Company of Hartford, Arkansas, one of the largest publishers of convention gospel music in the South. Everett Anthony had been a Hartford representative, and Brumley also had the fortune of meeting the company's president, E. M. (Eugene Monroe) Bartlett, a man whom the youngster had come to idolize. "He came to Rock Island to a singing we had there," remarked Brumley in a 1976 interview, "He had written some very famous songs before I knew him: 'Just a Little While,' 'Everybody Will Be Happy over There,' and a number of others... I had studied his songs, and as a consequence, he had become my idol as a songwriter."<sup>25</sup> An accomplished singer and orator, Bartlett entertained the Rock Island audience with a solo and delivered a speech.<sup>26</sup> Promoting Hartford Music publications at singings and singing conventions was an important part of Bartlett's job that frequently took him into areas of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma.

E. M. Bartlett (1885-1941) was an imposing figure in both demeanor and build. "He looks like Babe Ruth; he prays like George Whitfield; he sings like [Ira] Sankey," claimed a piece of literature promoting a circa-1930 revival at which Bartlett was set to appear.<sup>27</sup> Bartlett was born in Waynesville, Missouri, into a large family of Irish descent. He grew up in Hackett, Arkansas, just fifteen miles due north of Hartford, and he epitomized the American success story. Forced to abandon his childhood schooling for unknown reasons, Bartlett purportedly returned to the fourth grade at age twenty-four, a grown man in a 240-pound frame. Recalling the experience to Brumley later in life,

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<sup>25</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Gaskin.

<sup>26</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

<sup>27</sup> Emmaline Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939* (Troy, MI: Lee Marks, 1997), 5.



Bartlett remarked, “it sure was embarrassing to sit there with those little sixty-pound...kids and be in the same class with them.”<sup>28</sup>

Regardless, Bartlett caught up quickly, moving through two to four grades each year and eventually attending four different collegiate institutions: William Jewell College, Connell State School of Agriculture (formerly in Helena, Oklahoma), the Hall-Moody Institute in Tennessee (inherited by Union University in 1927), and Magazine Industrial Institute (formerly in Magazine, Arkansas). He earned four baccalaureate degrees: an A.B., B.S., Bachelor of Music, and Bachelor of Oratory; and his academic experience spanned everything from teaching primary grades to a stint as president of Doyle College (formerly in Doyle, Tennessee).<sup>29</sup>

Bartlett discovered gospel music at age twelve, and he studied it with some of the music’s top figures including Benjamin C. Unseld, James H. and Will H. Ruebush, and Homer Rodeheaver. As a young man, he befriended David Moore and Will M. Ramsey, two men responsible for founding the Central Music Company in Hartford, Arkansas, in 1905. From its first publication, Bartlett was a regular contributor to Central’s songbooks. After Ramsey moved Central’s office to Little Rock around 1911, Bartlett continued writing songs for Ramsey and by 1912 had become an officer in the company. Soon, however, Bartlett convinced Moore to partner with him in starting a new songbook publishing firm in Hartford.

In 1918, the Hartford Music Company was born with Bartlett as president and Moore as business manager. Their first songbook, *Living Songs of Truth*, sold 15,000

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<sup>28</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Gaskin. See also Bartlett’s 1941 funeral service program in Emmaline Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 3: 1939-1949* (Troy, MI: Lee Marks, 1997), 68-72.

<sup>29</sup> Much of this information is from Knippers, 21. See also "The Bartlett School of Music," (Harrison, AR: E. M. Bartlett, 1937). This flyer is in the files of the W. J. Hamilton Memorial Museum, Hartford, Arkansas (WJHMM).

copies. In 1921, Bartlett's success was enough that he began the Hartford Musical Institute, a three-week pedagogical school held twice a year in January and June. Bartlett's was the latest in a line of shape-note teacher-training institutes—or “normals” as they were often called—that stretched back to the Reubush-Kieffer Virginia Normal Music Schools of the 1870s.<sup>30</sup> The first session of the Hartford Musical Institute attracted 75 teachers.<sup>31</sup> In the mid-1920s, over 100 teachers were enrolling from several states including Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas.<sup>32</sup> By 1929, Bartlett had opened enrollment to beginner students as well as teachers, and attendance that year reportedly reached 300 pupils from ten different states.<sup>33</sup>

The returns on the Hartford Musical Institute were manifold. Not only did the company collect tuition (\$7.50 for teachers and \$5.00 for non-teachers in the early 1930s), but it also flooded the region with singing-school masters who used Hartford publications. By January 1922, the company was worth \$12,000.<sup>34</sup> Ten years later, Hartford songbooks were selling 100,000 copies annually at thirty-five cents each and \$3.60 per dozen, and they were shipping to thirty-five states and two foreign countries.<sup>35</sup> At a time when America was in the throes of the Great Depression, these were impressive numbers.

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<sup>30</sup> A. J. Showalter and James D. Vaughan also founded music normals, the former in Georgia (1885) and the latter in Tennessee (1915). For more discussion of music normal schools, see Chapter One.

<sup>31</sup> Mary L. Couch, "Music from the Hills and Valley," *The Key: Official Publication of the South Sebastian County (Arkansas) Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (1976): 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Earl Haynes, "Arkansas Music Publishing Company Finds Depression Has No Depressing Effect Upon Demand for Religious Song Books," ([unknown newspaper] 16 Jan. 1932; reprint, in *Gospel Music Scrapbook: 1922-1939*, Vol. 2, comp. Emmaline Wakefield, 11. Troy, MI: Lee Marks, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Copy of stock certificate, Hartford Music Company, 14 Jan. 1922 (author's personal collection). This certificate certifies the sale of four shares of Hartford Music Company stock to J. A. McClung at \$25 per share. It lists the "capital stock" of the firm at \$12,000.

<sup>35</sup> Haynes.

In January of 1926, Brumley arrived virtually penniless at E. M. Bartlett's Hartford office. He was wearing a new suit that his father had purchased on credit for \$15, and he had just spent fifty cents on bus fare traveling from Rock Island to Hartford. Left with just two dollars and fifty cents to his name, Brumley had "about a million dollars worth of faith" in E. M. Bartlett and asked to enroll at the renowned publisher's Hartford Musical Institute.<sup>36</sup> After realizing that Brumley did not have enough money for either his tuition or his room and board, Bartlett graciously took the young man under his wing, allowing him to enroll anyway and even providing board at his own home. This great act of generosity made a deep impression on the awestruck Brumley. "Well, that would be...just like the President of the United States saying, 'When you're in Washington, you come over to the White House and board,'" Brumley remarked fifty years later, "[T]o stay in his home was a special honor to me."<sup>37</sup> From that day forward, the young composer forever credited Bartlett as the chief mentor and inspiration behind his music.

Bartlett was probably privy to the musical aptitude possessed by the young man he had once met in Rock Island. Brumley acknowledged that someone had surely recommended him prior to his arrival in Hartford.<sup>38</sup> His 1937 biographical sketch states that "his talent was first discovered by Claude Murphree," the Hartford associate who had conducted the 1925 summer normal that Brumley attended.<sup>39</sup> Little did Bartlett know, however, that his new boarder would soon become one of Hartford's finest staff songwriters.

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<sup>36</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

<sup>37</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Sanford; and Brumley, recorded interview with Gaskin.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

<sup>39</sup> Knippers, 28.

The subjects available to students at the Hartford Musical Institutes of the 1920s and 1930s included advanced rudiments, harmony and composition, sight-reading, directing, “evangelistic” singing, voice culture, and piano tuning as well as applied instrument instruction.<sup>40</sup> The institute employed several faculty members. Brumley recalled Dr. J. B. (John Banyan) Herbert as the “head teacher” of his first Hartford Musical Institute in January 1926, with Dr. S. J. (Stephen Jesse) Oslin, J. A. (John Alexander) McClung and Bartlett as additional faculty. Herbert (1852-1927) had apparently been the principal instructor of the Hartford normal since its inception. He came from northern revivalist circles and had compiled a number of round-note gospel song collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was also the author of *Herbert’s Harmony and Composition* (1897) and *How to Write an Accompaniment: Helps and Hints for Students and Young Composers* (1903), two texts that one 1914 publication labeled as “among the best theory works of their class.”<sup>41</sup> Another Herbert book, *Voice Culture in Classes* (1909), was still appearing in Hartford Music Company product advertisements of the late 1940s. During his later years, Herbert was associated with Chicago’s Rodeheaver Company—perhaps the largest of the northern revivalist gospel music publishers—and compiled the well-known *Rodeheaver Collection for Male Voices* (1916).

Oslin (1856-1928) was an Alabama native who had founded the short-lived Eureka Publishing Company in Stigler, Indian Territory, in the 1880s. He also began a shape-note music normal, the Eureka Normal School of Music, and was the primary author and publisher behind two important texts. *The Eureka Sunlight Glees* (1904) was a

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<sup>40</sup> See newspaper clipping in Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Hall, *Biography of Gospel Song and Hymn Writers* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), 311. Hall (pp. 308-312) presents one of the few extant accounts of Herbert’s life.

short, popular treatise on music rudiments and shaped notes, and *The Eureka Harmony Method* (1910) is a book still in use today among shape-note singing schools.<sup>42</sup> One of Oslin's former Eureka Normal students was J. A. McClung (1891-1942), an Oklahoman who moved to Hartford, Arkansas, following his service in World War I. A gifted student, McClung attended the Hartford Musical Institute and was promptly hired as an instructor upon finishing his first session. In fact, his own signature appears as one of the faculty members listed on his 1927 Hartford Musical Institute Teacher's Certificate. He also sang in one of Hartford's first company quartets in 1922 along with Claude Murphree.<sup>43</sup> McClung became invested in Hartford both literally and figuratively. He bought four shares of stock in the firm in 1922, paying \$25 per share and becoming one of its "partners" in the process. He stayed with the company for the rest of his life, eventually succeeding Bartlett as Hartford's president in 1931.

Brumley studied with other important teachers in subsequent sessions of the Hartford Musical Institute, including L. (Leonard) D. Huffstutler, Homer Rodeheaver, James Rowe, brothers James H. and Will H. Ruebush, and probably Scott Crotts.<sup>44</sup> Huffstutler (1887-1977) was a tireless champion of convention gospel music and, by all accounts, a household name among southern singers in the early twentieth century. A 1937 biographical sketch attempted to summarize his renown:

[Huffstutler] has been teaching music, singing in revival meetings and training choirs for thirty years; his work has been in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New

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<sup>42</sup> Outside of his publications, very little information exists on Oslin.

<sup>43</sup> A photo dated 1922 shows an early—possibly the first—Hartford Music Company quartet; see Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 1. A copy of McClung's 1927 Teaching Certificate appears in Deller, 310. For an early account of McClung's life see Knippers, 98. Other information came from Thelma Jean (McClung) Gibson, recorded interview with the author, 17 May 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Brumley mentions all of these teachers except for Crotts in multiple interviews. See, for example, Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett; and Brumley, recorded interview with Sanford. Crotts taught Teacher Training—a course in which most pupils enrolled—at the Hartford Musical Institute during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Mexico and Louisiana; has probably furnished more song books to conventions and all-day singings than any other person in the South that isn't a music publisher; has taught as many as forty-six weeks in one year; has enrolled thousands of pupils; ... mails out thousands of song books from Dallas, Texas, each year; attends a singing or convention somewhere every Sunday...<sup>45</sup>

Rodeheaver (1880-1955) was most known for his longtime work as music director for the legendary evangelist Billy Sunday. However, he achieved greater success with the Rodeheaver Company, his Chicago-based gospel music publishing firm that sold songbooks—printed in standard notation—at Sunday's revival meetings. Rowe (1865-1933) was perhaps the most influential hymn writer in America since Fanny Crosby.<sup>46</sup> James H. Ruebush (1865-1948) had been president of Shenandoah College in Dayton, Virginia, from 1910 to 1922, and he became the principal instructor of the Hartford Musical Institute following the death of J. B. Herbert in 1927. James and his brother Will H. Ruebush (1873-1957) were famous heirs of Ruebush, Keiffer and Company, an important shape-note music publishing firm of the late nineteenth century founded by their father, Ephraim Ruebush, and uncle, Aldine S. Kieffer.<sup>47</sup>

At the Hartford Musical Institute, each faculty member handled a different aspect of instruction. A newspaper report on the 1932 January normal lists Bartlett as teaching poetry and harmony; McClung, rudiments and harmony; Huffstutler, directing and rudiments; and Crotts, piano tuning and teacher training.<sup>48</sup> James Ruebush taught several subjects including advanced harmony, composition, music history, “public school

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<sup>45</sup> Knippers, 75-76.

<sup>46</sup> For a 1930s account of Rowe's contributions, see Jackson, 374-77.

<sup>47</sup> Ephraim Reubush and Aldine Kieffer had learned the shape-note publishing trade from their grandfather, Joseph Funk (1778-1862), a legendary pioneer of American sacred music composing and publishing. Ruebush entered into the Funk family through marriage to Kieffer's older sister Lucilla, and he apprenticed alongside Kieffer. A succinct history of the Funk music legacy appears in James R. Goff, Jr., *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 42-54.

<sup>48</sup> Haynes.

music,” and “development of the singing voice.”<sup>49</sup> Private lessons in voice and “any instrument” were also available.<sup>50</sup>

Classes at the Hartford Musical Institute began in the morning and continued through the afternoon. To accommodate as many students as possible, some sessions of the institute offered evening classes as well. Class length varied from forty-five minutes to an hour, and there was often a two-hour daily singing session during which pupils could practice their new directing and singing skills. Each week often ended with a Friday night concert in which participants performed everything from choruses and quartets to solos and instrumental pieces, comprising both sacred and secular material. Final examinations took place during the normal’s last couple of days. A daily worship time was also common, and Bartlett—a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Hartford—frequently preached sermons at the close of each institute, inviting pupils to “live the song that they were singing about the Lord” and “give their hearts to Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

Lodging in Hartford was limited with just one small hotel above the local funeral home. Thus, many students boarded at neighborhood homes in the community while others stayed with faculty members or other housing affiliated with the institute. At one time, Hartford Music Company owned a five-room bungalow across the street from Bartlett’s home that it used to board out-of-town pupils. Purchased around 1930, it soon became affectionately known as Bachelor Hall. Years later in an recorded interview, Brumley chuckled as he recalled one instance in which he “scrubbed the entire house

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<sup>49</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 19.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Gene Bartlett, recorded interview with J. M. Gaskin, 12 Oct. 1976. Bartlett’s son Gene briefly discusses his father’s sermons in this interview. For more on the structure and curriculum of the institute, see Deller, 137-39.

with one gallon of water,” providing a glimpse into the kind of non-musical tasks sometimes assigned to Hartford’s apprenticing students.<sup>52</sup>

Brumley’s experience at his first Hartford Musical Institute must have been special. After the session was finished, he stayed in Hartford, presumably working for the company in various capacities until the June session came around. Brumley also started composing in earnest. By October 1926, he already had two songs in Hartford’s new 1927 songbook, *Gates of Glory*.<sup>53</sup> “I Can Hear Them Singing over There” was his first completely original work, and he wrote the music for “Dear Mother—She’s Gone,” a sentimental lyric by Reed Basinger (probably a fellow Hartford student). Regarding the former, Brumley related the following anecdote about its publication in a 1962 interview, revealing yet another reason for his admiration of E. M. Bartlett:

Back in the twenties, it was customary for a new writer to pay for the printing plates for these songs that’s required in the printing process. So I told Mr. Bartlett that I had a song that I’d like for him to look at and if he would publish it, I’d pay for the plates. So...he looked at it and said it looked very good and he went ahead and published it. Of course, I didn’t have money at that time, but I told him later on that I would pay him for the plates. And later on, after the book came out and the song was used rather extensively where the Hartford books were being used, why, I told Mr. Bartlett I was ready to pay up. So, I had bought some songbooks and a music chart and other things from him, and that’s all he gave me a statement for. And I asked him, I said, “Now what about these plates I owe you for?” So—this was quite an inspiration to me—Mr. Bartlett patted me on the back and says, “You just forget about what you owe on these plates. You just write me some more songs like this one.” I didn’t need any more incentive than that [to keep writing].<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett. On lodging in Hartford, see also Gene Bartlett, "Preface," in *All Day Singin' with Dinner on the Ground: Arrangements by Gene Bartlett*, ed. Gene Bartlett (Waco, TX: Rodeheaver, 1978).

<sup>53</sup> New books usually hit the market around the first of the year, but *Gates of Glory* was an earlier release. Minutes from a Vinson Chapel, Arkansas, district convention on October 24, 1926, mention Bartlett’s presence and his unveiling of the “new” 1927 Hartford songbook. See Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett. In the printing process for convention gospel songbooks, a skilled compositor arranged very small pieces of type for each piece being published. The printing plates were plastic molds cast from each finished composite. The plates were then used in the actual printing of



In another interview several years later, Brumley described “I Can Hear Them Singing over There” and its reception:

It was wrote in 2/8 time and it was pretty fast and it made...quite a splash. I came nearer to getting a big head then than I ever did afterwards. ‘Cause everywhere I’d go, they’d say, “Boy, they got a song in that new Hartford book by a writer and his name’s Albert E. Brumley.” And I’d hear them talking [about it]. They didn’t know me personally then, you know. I’d go to these county singings ten miles away, [and] I wasn’t known.<sup>55</sup>

The popularity of “I Can Hear Them Singing over There” (Figure 2.2) with singing convention audiences is unsurprising. It incorporates a snappy, march-like antiphonal texture throughout (the meter is actually 4/8) that is simple and effective. The melody is basic and tonic-centered but also very tuneful. The joyful text addresses heavenly reward, but it is also about *singing*, thus creating a kind of metasong that surely connected with enthusiastic convention gospel singers. A spring 1927 district singing convention in Blackwell, Arkansas, provides evidence of the song’s success. “I Can Hear Them Singing over There” was one of two “special” songs from the afternoon that warranted specific mention in their convention minutes.<sup>56</sup>

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the books. See Frank Chappell, "Singing Printers Go Happily About Song Publishing Work," *The (Dallas) Daily Times Herald*, 9 Feb. 1947, Part IV, 1, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Sanford.

<sup>56</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 45. The mention occurs in a newspaper clipping titled “Report of District No. 2,” probably originally published in the Hartford Music Company’s newsletter, *Herald of Song*. The author identifies the song only by its number (116) within *Gates of Glory*. The date of the convention was April 1, 1927.

Figure 2.2. "I Can Hear Them Singing over There," Brumley's first published work.<sup>57</sup>

**94 I Can Hear Them Singing Over There**  
 Copyright, 1964, by Hartford Music Co., in "Songs Of Delight". All Rights Reserved  
 A. E. B. Albert E. Brumley

*Moderato.*

1. There's a band..... of singers grand O-ver yon-der on that hap-py  
 2. Sweet-est mu-sic thrills my soul As they let the hal-le-lu-jahs  
 3. Voic-es dear..... I seem to hear, Voic-es of the friends I used to

shore, (bright shore, (Where the sun ..... shines on and on; And the  
 roll, (roll, roll,) They are free; ..... so glad and free; For they've  
 love, (to love,) They are sing-ing songs of praise Round the

soul of man lives ev-er-more; (e'ermore;) Heaven's air ..... is ring-ing  
 reached their final, happy goal; (life's goal; Pain and care, ..... rough roads and  
 shining throne of heaven's Dove; (we; Dove;) I am long-ing to go

clear, With the songs of peace and love and cheer, (so dear,) I can  
 fear, Nev-er both-er in that land so fair, (so fair,) They're a-  
 there And to min-gle with that band of cheer, (of cheer,) I am

hear ..... their voices sweet, I can hear them singing o-ver there.  
 glow ..... with song I know; For -I hear them singing o-ver there.  
 long-ing to go now, For I hear them singing o-ver there.

**I Can Hear Them Singing Over There 95**

CHORUS.

I can hear..... them singing there..... In that hap-py, hap-py  
 I can hear them sing-ing there

home, sweet home, Sounds to me..... like mil-lions there, .....  
 sweet home, Sounds to me like millions there,

Sing-ing 'round the Sav-ior's pearl-y throne; I can hear ..... the  
 sing on; I can hear

ech-oes sweet ..... Com-ing from the mys-tic land so fair, so fair, I can  
 the ech-oes sweet

hear..... them call-ing me, I can hear them singing o-ver there.  
 I can hear them calling me, somewhere.

According to the popular biography written by Kay Hively and Albert E.

Brumley, Jr., Brumley stayed through the first 1927 session of the Hartford Musical Institute before moving back home to the family farm.<sup>58</sup> Presumably, he left to lend a hand with the cotton crop, and his parents were probably desperate for the additional help. A nationwide bumper crop in 1926 had bloated the cotton market, dropping prices

<sup>57</sup> This reprint comes from *The Best of Albert E. Brumley* (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1966).

<sup>58</sup> Hively and Brumley, 24.

to just thirteen cents per pound and putting a strain on most farmers.<sup>59</sup> Brumley returned to Hartford sometime in 1928, likely after the planting season and in time to attend the June session of the institute. However, he was back in Rock Island at harvest time, and while he might have rather stayed in Hartford that fall, his decision to return home turned out to be crucial for his songwriting career. As he toiled in the cotton fields during the harvest of 1928, inspiration struck the young composer and he came up with a “plot” for a new song. Its theme drew upon the image of a person “flying away” from earthly burdens to a heavenly home of unending joy. That fall, Brumley began fleshing out the idea for his most successful song, “I’ll Fly Away,” but he wouldn’t complete it for another few years.<sup>60</sup>

Despite being on the move, Brumley managed to keep publishing new works in Hartford’s annual songbooks. *Morning of Joy* (1928), featured “‘Twill Be Sweet When We Meet,” the first of many Brumley songs built on a theme of heavenly reunion with family and friends. He had three more songs in *Matchless Melodies* (1929), two of which were collaborations.<sup>61</sup> He wrote music for Luther G. Presley’s sentimental text “Dreams of Childhood,” marking the only joint effort between these two future titans of convention gospel composition. Presley worked in Hartford’s editing and mail order departments from 1928 to 1930, just before moving to Stamps-Baxter and becoming one of that company’s most revered songwriters. Brumley also contributed the text to “When We Pass thru [*sic*] the Eastern Gate,” a song for which Claude Murphree—one of his early mentors—wrote the music.

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<sup>59</sup> Bernard Gelles, "Cotton Expert Believes 1927 Crop Must Be Cut One-Fourth If Good Price Is to Be Had," *The Spartanburg (South Carolina) Herald*, 6 Feb. 1927, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter four provides more detailed information behind the composition of “I’ll Fly Away.”

<sup>61</sup> “Where the Soul Will Never Die” was Brumley’s song of sole authorship in *Matchless Melodies*.

In 1929, after the January session of the Hartford Musical Institute, Brumley began performing with one of the Hartford Music Company's professional quartets. During the late 1920s, Hartford maintained four to five quartets that traveled around the region giving concerts and promoting the latest company publications.<sup>62</sup> Brumley sang bass and also shared in the piano accompaniment duties. For one to two months at a time, the group toured Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and sometimes as far away as Mississippi and Louisiana. Quartet members earned a good salary of \$50 per month, but it was grueling work beset with poor road conditions and frequent automobile repair.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Brumley continued occasionally performing with quartets through at least the late 1930s.

Quartet repertoire at the time consisted of sacred songs, but also a surprising amount of secular material. In particular, comedic songs and routines formed an important part of a group's program. Examples of such material appear in the logs of three recording sessions by a Hartford quartet in May 1930.<sup>64</sup> Directed by E. M. Bartlett, the quartet recorded eighteen selections, eight of which were comic songs with such titles as "My Nose," "I'm Always Out of Luck," and "Oh How It Hurt." At least three of the eight were Bartlett's original works: "The Men Will Wear Kimonos Bye and Bye," "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down," and "Take an Old Cold Tater (and Wait)," a song that became a smash hit for Grand Ole Opry star Little Jimmie Dickens in 1949. The Hartford Music Company also compiled and sold such publications as *Four Comic Readings* (c. 1930), a collection of humorous skits, including one entitled "The Duck." Brumley

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<sup>62</sup> Haynes.

<sup>63</sup> Some information on Brumley's quartet activities appears in Hively and Brumley, 26-30. See also Brumley, recorded interview with Gaskin.

<sup>64</sup> Information on these sessions appears in Tony Russell and Bob Pinson, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96.

himself was part of a Hartford Music Company quartet that performed at a meeting of the Pulaski County (Arkansas) Singing Club on March 29, 1931. A brief report of the event in a subsequent issue of Hartford's newsletter, *The Herald of Song*, lauded the quartet's singing before adding, "Prof. McClung's laughing song was a decided hit with all the folks."<sup>65</sup>

## Marriage

Besides the quartet, Brumley also earned income from teaching his own singing schools in Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. He apparently started teaching after completing his first session of the Hartford Musical Institute in 1926, conducting between fifty and a hundred singing schools before his marriage in 1931.<sup>66</sup> The school format was much the same as those Brumley had attended as a student just a few years before.

Following Hartford's June institute of 1929, Brumley made his first teaching trip into Missouri. According to Hively's biography, J. A. McClung traveled with him and helped him get started.<sup>67</sup> His first engagement was a ten-night school at Roller School House in far southwestern McDonald County, which lies at the heart of the Ozark region's Springfield Plateau. Participants recalled admission dues of \$1. Brumley stayed

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<sup>65</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 12.

<sup>66</sup> In 1976, Albert recalled, "I went through that [first] term of school, and then I started teaching singing schools. That was another way of life. I [was] what we...refer to as itinerant teachers that traveled from one community to another." See Brumley, recorded interview with Gaskin. This conflicts with the account in Hively and Brumley, 30-32. Hively claims that Brumley's first singing school was not until 1929. More likely, however, is that 1929 was the year of Brumley's first *Missouri* singing school. A 1971 biographical sketch claimed that Brumley had taught "51 singing schools and music normals." See Mrs. J. R. (Ma) Baxter and Videt Polk, *Gospel Song Writers Biography* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, 1971), 24. However, in a circa 1971 interview, Brumley said, "I taught—I don't know—about close to a hundred singing schools during the years that I taught." See Brumley, recorded interview with Logsdon.

<sup>67</sup> Hively, 30-32.

with a local family and taught at least two more schools in the county, one at Powell (his future home) and another at Jacket.

At the Powell school, one of his pupils was seventeen-year-old Goldie Edyth Schell. Schell's father operated a local general store and was also in the tomato canning business. Brumley's host family had initially suggested Powell as another singing school site, and they had also told him about Goldie. Brumley was purportedly taken with the young student from their first meeting. She graduated from his singing school with a grade of ninety-eight percent, and their courtship followed.<sup>68</sup>

Brumley tried to visit Goldie as often as he could, but his itinerant schedule made it difficult and the couple had to rely largely on written correspondence. Thankfully, a handful of these letters between the two young admirers have survived, providing a glimpse into their relationship during these years. From November 1929 through early March 1930, Brumley was on the move almost constantly. First, he traveled to Rogers, Arkansas, probably for a music normal. He came back to Hartford but left again in early December for Southwest City, Missouri, making a quick stop in Powell along the way. He returned to Hartford just before Christmas and was able to spend the holiday with his family in Oklahoma. Back in Hartford on December 27, 1929, Brumley set out for Bristow, Oklahoma, the site of the upcoming Hartford Musical Institute. By early February, he was at Hartford's branch office in Hartshorne, Oklahoma. A month later he was in McAlester, Oklahoma, conducting back-to-back singing schools.

Moreover, Brumley's schedule was fraught with an uncertainty that put added strain on his courtship. "Sweetheart, I would like to see you again before I leave but don't

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<sup>68</sup> Hartford Musical Institute Certificate of Attendance for Goldie E. Schell, [n.d.], AEBS. On Brumley and Goldie's courtship, see Hively and Brumley, 32-34.

see how I can,” he wrote from Rogers, Arkansas, on November 11, 1929.<sup>69</sup> On Christmas Eve, Brumley bemoaned in his third letter to Goldie in as many days:

Will be [in Bristow] four weeks and after that I don't know where I will go. I wish I could see you. I am sorry I can't come to see you now but I am afraid it will be some time before I will get to see you. I hope you continue to trust me and please don't think anything about me not coming back because it takes all of my time to make a living. It is no pleasure to me to keep coming to see you and have to keep telling you I am not able to take you. Of course I'd love to see you more than anyone I know of but I am sure you are going to understand why I cannot come for some time.<sup>70</sup>

About three weeks later, Brumley mentions the couple's engagement, but his letter betrays the special challenges of a long-distance relationship:

I have been wondering if you really and honestly mean all that you write me or are you doing it just to be doing. If you really care as much for me as you say you do I guess I'd be alright. Of course, dear, I don't mean that you won't do as you say but I do wonder if you really mean what you say.<sup>71</sup>

Another source of tension was Brumley's profession. Convention gospel music was still a relatively new phenomenon in the 1920s, and its commercialism and popular music sensibilities troubled many mainline Protestants.<sup>72</sup> On multiple occasions, Brumley addressed Goldie's apparent apprehensions about “church music,” sometimes with relatively lengthy arguments in defense of its purpose and respectability.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, stable employment in the convention gospel music business was tenuous at best, and, as shown above, it usually required large amounts of time spent on the road. On July 7, 1931, Brumley wrote from Jacket, Missouri, where he had just started a singing school: “I had a big crowd last night but don't think it will be a great

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<sup>69</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 11 Nov. 1929, AEBS.

<sup>70</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 24 Dec. 1929, AEBS.

<sup>71</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 12 Jan. 1930, AEBS.

<sup>72</sup> For evidence of this, see Goff, 39-41, 306. Apparently, E. M. Bartlett was particularly distressed by the refusal of his own denomination—the Southern Baptist Convention—to endorse convention gospel music during his lifetime. See Deller, 206-207.

<sup>73</sup> Brumley, letters to Goldie Schell, 6 and 12 Jan. 1930, AEBS.

success. We...are trying to have a pie supper Friday night to see what we can do. We may come out all right and we may not. If we don't I will quit Friday or Saturday night."<sup>74</sup> Early on in their courting, Brumley was frank about the unpredictable nature of his career: "I don't know what kind of business I will start or whether I will start one or not. I may never be able to do anything like that, but that's my plan when I am married. I hope you will understand that I have a long road to travel before I can take you and give you the comfort you deserve."<sup>75</sup>

Brumley was not the only one concerned about his means to support a wife and family. On August 4, 1931, less than a month before their wedding, he mailed Goldie a long letter from Fayetteville, Arkansas. Her mother, Della May, had apparently expressed reservations about her future son-in-law's vocation. Brumley did his best to reassure his fiancé:

Sweetheart, your mother is right about asking you questions as to what we are going to do after we marry. I guess she wants you to be sure of some way to live and I don't blame her for that... I think we can get things lined up before long. With your love and help I feel like I could do alright and I am hoping it won't be long till [*sic*] we can start down the long road together...

Mr. Bartlett and V. O. Stamps are planning on organizing a new company before long and if they do I can work for them a while till [*sic*] I get a little more ahead. I am getting tired of this kind of work tho [*sic*]. Guess it is because of the plans we have made.<sup>76</sup>

Brumley had good reason to be tired. His livelihood at the time was an exhausting medley of music jobs. The return address on his stationary read, "Return in five days to Albert E. Brumley, vocal music instructor, Hartford, Arkansas."<sup>77</sup> Singing schools

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<sup>74</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 7 Jul. 1931, AEBS.

<sup>75</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 22 Dec. 1929, quoted in Hively and Brumley, 34.

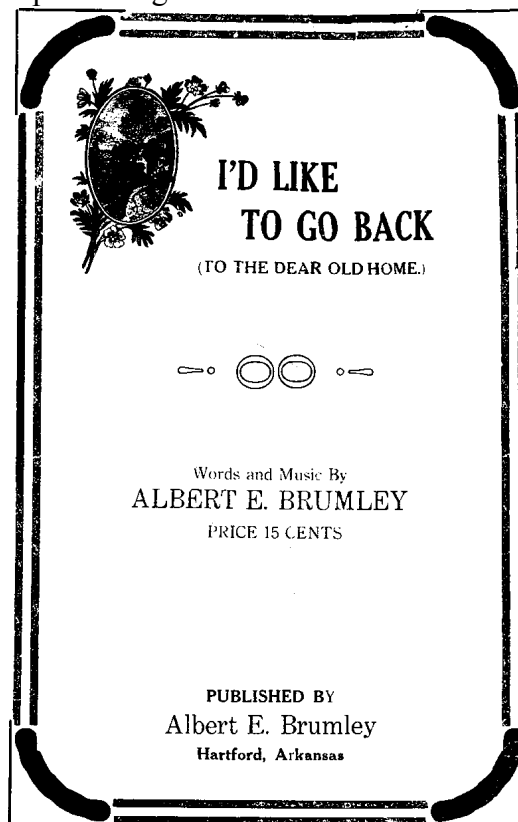
<sup>76</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 4 Aug. 1931, AEBS. Brumley's mention of a business alliance between E. M. Bartlett and V. O. Stamps (then-president of the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company of Dallas) is intriguing. It never happened, although Bartlett did end up working for Stamps-Baxter in the late 1930s.

<sup>77</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Schell, 23 Dec. 1929, AEBS.



probably accounted for most of this instruction, but he also kept performing and traveling with Hartford Music Company quartets. In addition, he continued composing. Hartford's 1930 book, *Glory Gleaner*, contained three of his new original songs—including his first sentimental song, "Dreaming of My Childhood Village" (see Figure 2.1)—and two more collaborations.<sup>78</sup> *Garden of Song* (1931) contained even more Brumley material: three new originals and three new collaborations, one of which was with J. A. McClung, Hartford's new president as of April 1931. The same year, Brumley also made his first foray into the publishing business with a two-page sheet-music copy of another new sentimental song, "I'd Like to Go Back (to the Dear Old Home)" (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Title page to "I'd Like to Go Back (to the Dear Old Home)" (1931), Brumley's first attempt at publishing under his own name.



<sup>78</sup> The other originals were "Glory-Land Is Nearing" and "It's Just a Little While." He collaborated with Marvin P. Dalton (music) on "Clinging, Clinging to His Hand" and J. C. George (music) on "When I Walk Along the Streets of Gold."

Fortunately, Goldie's mother decided not to stand in the way of her daughter's marriage. On August 30, 1931, Albert E. Brumley and Goldie E. Schell wed in Powell, Missouri. One report claimed that he even conducted a singing school in Powell during his wedding sojourn (perhaps he was capitalizing on his special trip to the area).<sup>79</sup> Regardless, for possibly the first time in his adult life, Brumley had acquired some stability. The young couple settled in Powell, a tiny, unincorporated community nestled amongst the winding streams and majestic limestone bluffs of the Ozark Mountains. Times were hard, money was scarce, and work was limited. The newlyweds had to move in with Goldie's parents just to get by. However, faced with being the head of a new household, Brumley began composing with renewed urgency and polish, and his hard work soon began paying off.

### **Powell, Missouri**

Brumley spent his first years in Powell doing various odd jobs. In addition to living with his in-laws, he began working in Joe Schell's general store in Powell, earning between fifty cents and one dollar per day. He also tuned pianos. With the prospect of a growing family on the horizon, Brumley had no interest in a job that frequently took him away from home. He largely gave up teaching singing schools, but he still occasionally went out with quartets. In early 1932, he was performing with a Hartford quartet that did radio broadcasts out of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and traveled throughout the region and into Oklahoma.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Stubblefield, "Old Tune Flying High: Gospel Songwriter Revives Ozarks Town," *Kansas City Star*, 15 Sep. 1976, C1.

<sup>80</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Brumley, 1 Apr. 1932, AEBS.

Following Brumley's marriage and move to Powell, the Hartford Music Company reportedly kept him as a staff songwriter for a period of time, paying him \$12.50 per month along with complimentary songbooks that he could then sell for his own profit.<sup>81</sup> For reasons that are not altogether clear, Brumley soon left his staff position and apparently declined an early contract offer from the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company (Dallas, Texas), opting instead to continue composing as a freelancer.<sup>82</sup> In addition to Hartford, he published new material in 1932 with various other concerns including the Morris-Henson Company (Atlanta, Georgia), the Sisk Music Company (Toccoa, Georgia), and, for the first time, Stamps-Baxter.<sup>83</sup> Exactly how much these publishers paid Brumley for his work is not known, but it was probably relatively low. During these years, Hartford allegedly paid him three dollars for each song that it accepted for publication.<sup>84</sup>

Brumley contributed six new songs to Hartford's 1932 book, *Celestial Joys*. Three were works of sole authorship and the others were collaborations, including another one with J. A. McClung.<sup>85</sup> *Celestial Joys* also contains what is arguably

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<sup>81</sup> Stubblefield, C1. According to Hively, Hartford would sometimes send Brumley "50 or 100" copies of a songbook that contained his new material. See Hively and Brumley, 41.

<sup>82</sup> In a letter dated November 6, 1931, E. M. Bartlett counsels Brumley against signing a contract with V. O. Stamps and instead gives the following advice, "I would...sell Stamps my songs outright for whatever [I] wanted...with no strings on me whatever, then hold the other proposition open, and take [it] if I wanted to later. There will be a lot of things come up after you have tied yourself up with a contract...to make you sorry that you did it... Better stand hitched for a while. I believe you will make money in the longrun [*sic*] by it." See Bartlett, letter to Brumley, 6 Nov. 1931, AEBS.

<sup>83</sup> Morris-Henson published "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way" (1932), Sisk published "Ride on, God's Careworn Children" (1932), and Stamps-Baxter published "I Can Hear the Harbor Bells" (1932).

<sup>84</sup> Hively and Brumley, 42, 64.

<sup>85</sup> The three new originals were "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way," "I Want Them to See Christ Jesus in Me," and "I've Changed My Way of Living Here." The new collaborations were "One by One" (J. E. Roane, music), "Singing" (Floyd E. Hunter, music), and "That Joy Will Be Mine Someday" (J. A. McClung, text).

Brumley's first major hit, "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way."<sup>86</sup> From 1932 to 1935, the song appeared in at least eight different convention songbooks from various publishers in Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>87</sup> Such active use indicates both the song's popularity at the time and the means through which it spread. Before this, no Brumley song had ever been reprinted more than once.

After "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way," Brumley seemed to have the golden touch. Over the next five years, almost every new Hartford convention book carried at least one new Brumley hit. First there was "I'll Fly Away" in *The Wonderful Message* (1933); then "Jesus, Hold My Hand" in *Gems of Gladness* (1934); "I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian" in *Song Path to Glory* (1935); "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy" in *Charming Bells of Spring* (1936); and finally, "I'll Meet You in the Morning" in *Lights of Life* (1937). Except for "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way" and "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy," all of these songs are arguably among Brumley's top ten most-successful songs. "I'll Fly Away" would eventually eclipse the rest in popularity, but it was nowhere near the most published Brumley song of the 1930s. While "I'll Fly Away" appeared in at least ten different songbooks during the decade, "I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian" appeared in thirteen; "I'll Meet You in the Morning" in twenty-four; and "Jesus, Hold My Hand" appeared in an astonishing thirty different songbooks during just the 1930s.

Perhaps it was Brumley's burgeoning family that inspired such an impressive streak of creativity. He had just finished building a modest log-cabin style home in

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<sup>86</sup> The copyright for this song was actually not with Hartford but with the Morris-Henson Company, appearing in its 1932 songbook *Songs of Praise No. 1* (Atlanta: Morris-Henson Co., 1932).

<sup>87</sup> In addition to Hartford, these publishers included Morris-Henson (see previous footnote), Sisk, Stamps-Baxter, the Parris Music Company (Jasper, Alabama), W. P. Ganus and Sons (Birmingham, Alabama), and the Tennessee Music and Printing Company (Cleveland, Tennessee).

Powell when his first son, William Jocephus Brumley (named after Brumley and Goldie's respective fathers), was born on July 11, 1932. Albert Edward Brumley, Jr. followed a little over a year later on October 11, 1933. Then came Thomas Rexton on December 11, 1935, and Robert Bartlett on December 7, 1937. Another son, Jackson Stamps, arrived on June 25, 1939, before their last child and first daughter, Betty Maybelle, was born on July 14, 1941. Like many convention gospel songwriters from his generation, Brumley paid homage to his musical mentors through the naming of his children, revealing his deep respect and gratitude for their guidance, tutelage, and friendship.

Fortunately for Brumley, he hit his creative stride just as the commercial recording business was blossoming into a full-fledged industry. Records offered a significant new outlet for Brumley's songs, and they also provide another historical measure of his music's popularity and reception. Tony Russell and Bob Pinson's mammoth reference work *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* is an important resource for locating the earliest recordings of Brumley material. The first one occurred on August 2, 1934, when the Mount Vernon Quartet recorded "I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian" for Bluebird Records in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>88</sup> The very next day, at the same location and for the same label, the Denson Trio of Alabama recorded "Jesus, Hold My Hand," but it was never issued.<sup>89</sup> Two more groups recorded "Jesus, Hold My Hand" a year later, and these were commercially released. The first was the Royal Quartette in New York City (August 8, 1935) for Decca Records, followed eight days

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<sup>88</sup> Russell and Pinson, 645.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

later by the Prairie Ramblers, also in New York but for Columbia.<sup>90</sup> Two years later J. B. Whitmire's Blue Sky Trio recorded "I'll Meet You in the Morning" and "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy" for the first time, both at the same August 5, 1937, session for Bluebird in Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, "I'll Fly Away" was still years away from its studio debut even though it would ultimately surpass these others many times over in total number of recorded versions.<sup>92</sup>

The royalties created by these releases provided a vital new revenue stream for Brumley. His authorship entitled him to a royalty on any commercially sold recording of his songs. A Decca Records royalty contract from October 1939 pledged to pay Brumley one cent for every copy of "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy" (performed by the Rangers Quartet) that sold at thirty-five cents or less. If the record's price was over thirty-five cents, his collection was two cents. By the end of the 1930s, at least nineteen different commercial releases of Brumley's songs had appeared, and he was no doubt becoming keenly aware of the potential income offered by record royalties.

Brumley's string of 1930s hit songs emboldened him to leave the steady but unfulfilling employment in his father-in-law's grocery store and devote himself to composing full-time. Goldie was supportive and encouraged the move. By 1936, he had secured a one-year contract with Hartford that paid him \$20 per month for a total of fifteen new songs. Of the \$240 total value of the deal, \$50 was paid with wholesale songbooks that Brumley could then sell for his own profit.<sup>93</sup> For its part, Hartford's

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 706, 815.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 953-54. At this session, Whitmire's Blue Sky Trio also made the first commercial recording of "It's an Unfriendly World" (1936), another popular Brumley song.

<sup>92</sup> J. M. Gates made the first recording of "I'll Fly Away" in 1940. Chapters Four and Five investigate the recording history of this song in detail.

<sup>93</sup> "Contract of Agreement," Hartford Music Company, 1 Jan. 1936, AEBS. This contract contains the signatures of Brumley and Bartlett, who was then "Manager" of the Hartford Music Company. Wholesale

investment certainly paid off. At least three of the contract's resultant songs—"I'll Meet You in the Morning," "It's an Unfriendly World," and "I Am Just a Pilgrim"—were major successes.

The relationship between Bartlett and Brumley continued to grow both personally and professionally during the late 1930s. Bartlett was the Hartford representative who signed Brumley's 1936 contract, and he no doubt played a role in orchestrating its terms. Brumley was contributing columns to *The Herald of Song*, the Hartford Music Company newsletter for which Bartlett served as editor. In November 1936, the two friends traveled together to represent Hartford at the very first National Singing Convention in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>94</sup>

### **Harrison, Arkansas**

Bartlett and Brumley surely spent part of their trip to Alabama hatching details for an exciting new business venture. Bartlett had recruited Brumley to manage the Bartlett Music Company, a brand new publishing firm that would be based in Harrison, Arkansas. With Bartlett's experience and Brumley's talent, the idea must have seemed foolproof to the two men. By early 1937, the Brumley family had relocated to Harrison, a town with a few thousand people located about ninety miles southeast of Powell and 165 miles

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convention songbook prices in the late 1930s were around sixteen cents per copy. Thus, Brumley could potentially make over 100% profit by turning around and selling the books at retail price, or thirty-five cents per copy.

<sup>94</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 33. See also Stella Benton Vaughan, "History of the Twenty-Five Years of the National Singing Convention, 1936-1961," *Vaughan's Family Visitor* 50, no. 50 (Oct.-Nov. 1961): 4-12.

northeast of Hartford.<sup>95</sup> Despite a lack of initial capital and a main office that doubled as a shoe repair shop, the Bartlett Music Company was soon up and running.<sup>96</sup>

In January 1937, Bartlett was traveling around the region to promote his start-up and its inaugural event, the first annual Bartlett School of Music in Harrison.<sup>97</sup> Bartlett scheduled it to begin directly following the Hartford Musical Institute's January session. Boasting an enrollment of 177, Bartlett's first school was successful enough that he planned a June session in Waldron, Arkansas, not thirty miles from Hartford. He also recruited many of the top faculty that had worked under him at his former employer. Lorain T. Allison taught rudiments and harmony and Lynn Utley, a gifted young pianist, gave private piano lessons. J. E. Roane, who taught rudiments and sight-reading, was a respected teacher who had been involved at Hartford since 1922 and was now operating an Oklahoma branch office for Bartlett's new company. Bartlett also hired his own son Gene—a promising singer in his own right—as an instructor of private voice. Bartlett himself managed the school and taught harmony, “versification,” and teacher-training courses. However, Brumley was the school's crown jewel. His picture appeared at the front and center of its promotional literature, which advertised his “lectures on song-writing” and labeled him as “one of the most notable song writers that has ever lived in

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<sup>95</sup> There are several indications that Brumley was in Harrison, Arkansas, by early 1937. After teaching at the first Bartlett School of Music in early February, he appeared with members of the Melody Four (a Harrison-based quartet) at local singing events in Russellville (Feb. 21) and Morrilton (Feb. 28). See Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 39, 41. Furthermore, a February letter to Brumley from the Library of Congress lists his address as Harrison, Arkansas. See C. L. Bouvé, letter to Albert E. Brumley, 12 Feb. 1937, AEBS.

<sup>96</sup> Sue Barger, "The Melody Four and Singing Convention Days," *Boone County (Arkansas) Historian* 21, no. 1 (1998): 5-10. The Melody Four was a Harrison quartet led by Hugh Taylor, who was also owner of the shoe repair shop that housed the Bartlett Music Company's office.

<sup>97</sup> See Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 2: 1922-1939*, 39. This page of Wakefield's scrapbook contains multiple newspaper clippings from January and February 1937 that mention Bartlett's first school.



the South.”<sup>98</sup> In case his name was not familiar enough to readers, it also listed six of his presumably most popular songs (among which “I’ll Fly Away” was notably absent).<sup>99</sup>

In addition to his work for Bartlett, Brumley also performed as pianist with the Melody Four while living in Harrison (Figure 2.4).<sup>100</sup> This was a local quartet led by Hugh Taylor, owner of the shoe repair shop that housed the Bartlett Music Company’s office. Taylor’s shop also contained a piano and provided a rehearsal space for the group. On weekends, they traveled to singings in the area, doing their best to promote Bartlett’s new company. They also secured a radio slot on station KWTO (Springfield, Missouri), singing for fifteen minutes every Tuesday afternoon from 2:15 to 2:30. The Melody Four undoubtedly sang a healthy amount of Brumley material, but at this point it was just one of many regional and national radio quartets that were popularizing his songs at a record pace. Stamps-Baxter sponsored numerous such groups (over forty by 1940) that were singing at stations all over the South, and all of them frequently sang Brumley’s songs.<sup>101</sup>

These radio performances inspired one of Brumley’s most famous works, “Turn Your Radio On” (1938). Station KWTO (Keep Watching The Ozarks) was reportedly his favorite radio station, and when he wasn’t performing there as part of the Melody Four, he was often tuned to AM 560. In Hively’s biography, Brumley recounted KWTO’s role in sparking his idea for the song:

“I wrote it [‘Turn Your Radio On’] when I lived at Harrison, Arkansas. By that time I got able to own a telephone. And if people knew I was home they would call me. I had songs I had written before...that were being used on the radio, especially...at KWTO, and people would call me up and say, ‘Turn your radio on,

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<sup>98</sup> “The Bartlett School of Music.”

<sup>99</sup> The six songs were “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” “I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy,” “I’d Like to Go Back,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “It’s an Unfriendly World,” and “I Looked All Over Heaven.”

<sup>100</sup> Much of this information on the Melody Four comes from Barger: 5-10.

<sup>101</sup> For more on circa 1940 Stamps-Baxter quartets, see Goff, 122.

Albert. They're playing one of your songs.' And I heard that so many times that I decided to use it for a song title."<sup>102</sup>

Figure 2.4. Melody Four (c. 1937): (left to right) Albert Brumley (seated), Hugh Taylor, Clay Richesin, Everett Cone, Tildon Dart.



Besides the music school, Bartlett and Brumley's other objective was compiling the first Bartlett Music Company convention songbook. The book, *Springtime Echoes* (1937), included 111 songs and listed both men as main compilers. It contained five new originals from Brumley, but his most important contribution was the musical setting of a new lyric by Bartlett, "Camping in Canaan's Land."<sup>103</sup> As close as they were personally and professionally, these two composers collaborated only twice throughout their careers.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Hively and Brumley, 47.

<sup>103</sup> Brumley's five originals in *Springtime Echoes* were "I Am a Stranger Here," "I Looked All over Heaven," "Led by the Master's Hand," "Speak a Little Word of Cheer," and "When Jesus Took Me by the Hand."

Their first attempt was unsuccessful, but “Camping in Canaan’s Land” was a major hit and became another one of Brumley’s top songs.<sup>104</sup>

Bartlett and Brumley’s other stroke of genius was publishing a new “special” book that capitalized on Brumley’s growing reputation as one of the best convention gospel composers in the business.<sup>105</sup> *Albert E. Brumley’s Book of Radio Favorites* (1937) was one of the first convention gospel publications to spotlight a single composer and also one of the earliest to use radio’s skyrocketing popularity as a selling point.<sup>106</sup> The cover graphic was a striking juxtaposition that combined the technological novelty of radio with a pastoral likeness of Brumley as a rural, rustic man of the Ozark folk. Both wave-emitting microphones and green pine trees flanked a portrait of the composer, with distant mountains and billowy clouds in the background (see Figure 2.5). An unknown melodic incipit (curiously in round notes) appeared above his picture while a caption beneath read, “The Boy from the Ozarks, the Land of a Million Smiles.”<sup>107</sup> The book’s front matter (Figure 2.6) further built upon the cover’s down-home theme with photographs featuring Brumley’s family and honoring his “teacher and publisher,” E. M.

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<sup>104</sup> Their first collaboration was “Memories Come Stealing” in *Roses of Spring* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Company, 1935).

<sup>105</sup> In addition to yearly convention songbooks, publishers issued so-called “special” books, or songbooks printed not specifically for singing school/convention use and containing—instead of mostly brand new songs—collections of new and old favorites from previously published convention books.

<sup>106</sup> The only earlier songbook dedicated to a single composer was *Pearls of Paradise*, a small collection (29 songs) published by Stamps-Baxter in 1934 that featured the music of Cleavant Derricks, the best-known African-American composer of convention gospel songs. The first major convention gospel book to use the word “radio” in its title was *Vaughan’s Sacred Radio Songs* (Lawrenceburg, TN: James D. Vaughan, 1936). In 1937, Bartlett and Brumley’s *Radio Favorites* appeared along with two new Stamps-Baxter publications, *Virgil O. Stamps’ Favorite Radio Songs* and *Virgil O. Stamps’ Radio Song Album*. Although Stamps was a composer, he was best known as a publisher, compiler, and all-around convention gospel impresario. Brumley’s fame, on the other hand, had arisen almost entirely from his work as a composer.

<sup>107</sup> “The Land of a Million Smiles” had become a widespread slogan among recent public efforts to increase Ozark tourism, particularly following its use as the title of Ozark booster song in 1925. For more information, see Brooke Blevins, “In the Land of a Million Smiles: Twentieth-Century America Discovers the Arkansas Ozarks,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2002): 1-35.

Bartlett. *Radio Favorites* was the first overt instance of a wholesome, rural folk imagery with which Brumley would continue to align himself for the rest of his career.

Figure 2.5. Cover of *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Radio Favorites* (1937).

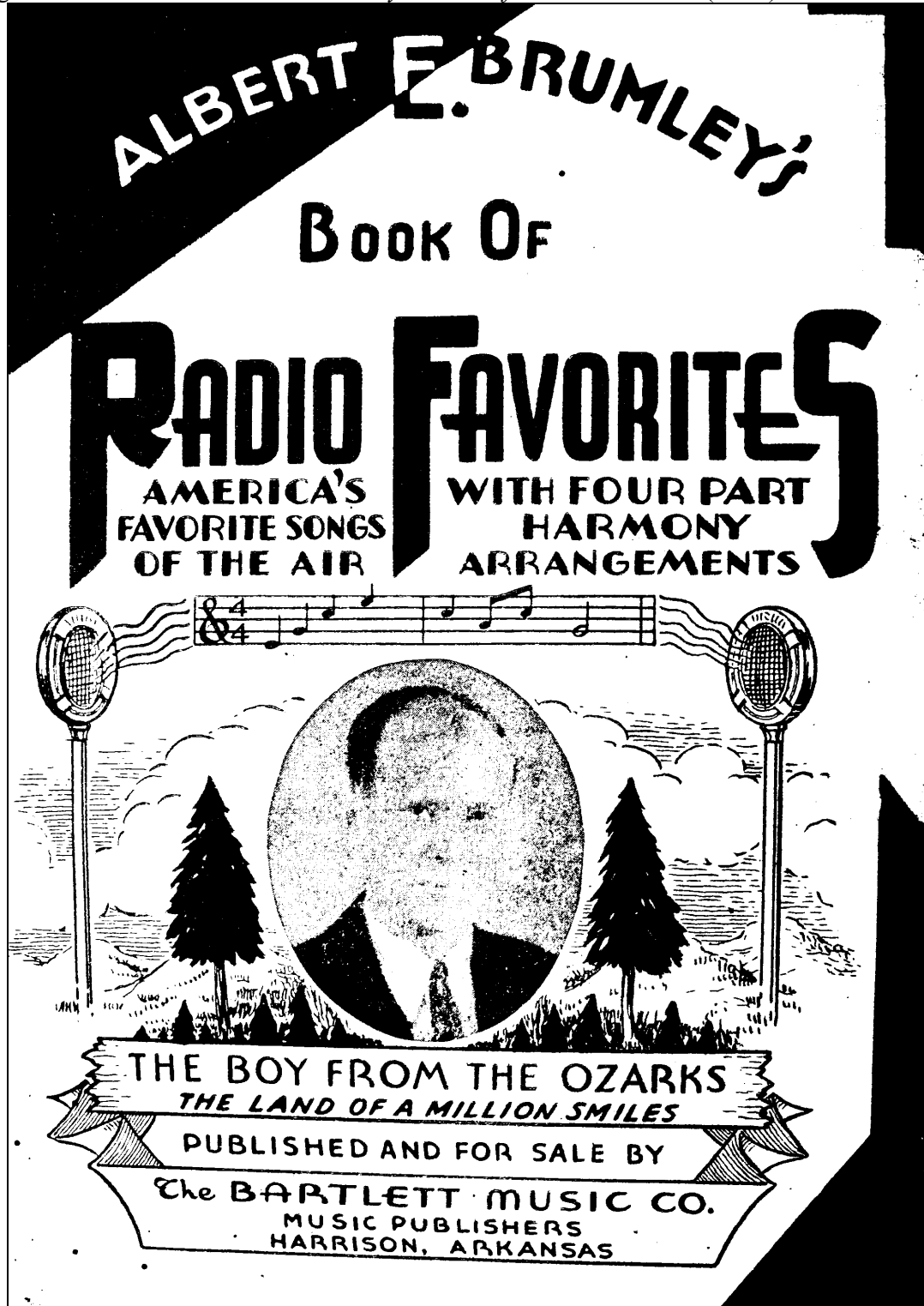


Figure 2.6. The second page of *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Radio Favorites* (1937).



Thomas  
Rexton

GOLDIE

Albert E.  
Jr.

Billie  
Joe

AND MY  
Teacher and Publisher



E. M. BARTLETT

Upon opening a copy of *Radio Favorites*, singers encountered the following subtitle:

A collection of Sacred, Sentimental and Western songs that have touched the hearts of thousands everywhere. An all purpose book that will be found a real

helper in radio broadcasts, quartet programs, family singings, community sings, and church programs.<sup>108</sup>

The conspicuous absence of Bartlett's name as a contributing editor or compiler implies that Brumley was largely responsible for the book's content. Fourteen of its eighty-one songs were previously published Brumley originals (five from *Springtime Echoes*), and it also contained his most successful arrangement, "This World Is Not My Home."<sup>109</sup> The use of the adjective "Western" in the subtitle is intriguing. While it further reinforced the book's rural theme, it was not altogether misleading. Indeed, such songs as "Cowboy's Dream," "Home on the Range," and "The Dying Cowboy" appeared alongside typical convention gospel fare, and at least one song—"We'll Be Rounded Up in Glory"—combined the two themes. There was other noteworthy secular and "sentimental" material as well, including "Home, Sweet Home," "Put My Shoes Away," "When the Work's All Done This Fall," and even Stephen Foster's "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground." While Bartlett and Brumley may not have realized it at the time, *Radio Favorites* was a landmark publication and a milestone in the latter's future career. Today, Albert E. Brumley and Sons—Brumley's eventual publishing firm—still publishes and sells new copies of the book's latest revision (1966), making *Radio Favorites* by far the oldest convention gospel publication still in print.

While he was managing the Bartlett Music Company and performing with the Melody Four, Brumley still found time to compose and publish songs as a freelance songwriter. He copyrighted several new songs with the Hartford Music Company in

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<sup>108</sup> Albert E. Brumley, *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Radio Favorites* (Harrison, AR: Bartlett Music Company, 1937), 1.

<sup>109</sup> The fourteen originals were: "Camping in Canaan's Land," "How I'd Like to Be," "I Am a Stranger Here," "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy," "I'd Like to Go Back," "I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian," "I Looked All over Heaven," "I'll Fly Away," "I'll Meet You in the Morning," "It's an Unfriendly World," "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way," "Jesus, Hold My Hand," "Led by the Master's Hand," and "When Jesus Took Me by the Hand."

1937, and he even published a new collaboration with the A. J. Showalter Company.<sup>110</sup>

Brumley also published three new songs in Stamps-Baxter's special radio books from 1937, *Favorite Radio Songs* and *Radio Song Album*.

### **Writing for Stamps-Baxter in Powell, Missouri**

Maintaining ties to Stamps-Baxter turned out to be a wise move. The financial difficulties that often accompany new business endeavors proved too great for Bartlett and Brumley, and the Bartlett Music Company closed its doors within the first year. Fortunately, Stamps-Baxter was happy to employ the two men, both of whom continued publishing songs with the firm throughout 1937. By the end of that year, they were both on staff at Stamps-Baxter. The company even issued a promotional sheet-music copy of a new Brumley song (Figure 2.7), implicitly announcing to the conventional gospel world that the new king of convention gospel songwriting was now part of the Stamps-Baxter empire.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> "When They Ring the Bells of Heaven" (1937), written with Marion W. Easterling (music), appeared in Showalter's songbook *Strains of Beauty*.

<sup>111</sup> Bartlett may have moved to Dallas as early as July 1937. A 1938 Library of Congress copyright catalog cites Brumley's "I Rocked Myself to Sleep" as having a July 1, 1937, copyright date and lists Bartlett—the publisher—as being located in Dallas. See Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Part III: Musical Compositions, 1938*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 5670. A Stamps-Baxter invoice to Brumley from December 1, 1937, shows Brumley purchasing 940 copies of "Radio Bks." Such a large purchase indicates the likelihood that Brumley was an agent of the company by then. Hively also gives 1937 as the year Brumley began his association with Stamps-Baxter. See Hively and Brumley, 52-53.

Figure 2.7. Stamps-Baxter sheet music copy of "I Rocked Myself to Sleep" (1937).

"I Rocked Myself  
to Sleep"

a new song by

A black and white portrait of Albert E. Brumley, a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a suit and tie. The portrait is framed by a decorative border with a scalloped edge and vertical lines on the sides. Two black dots are positioned on either side of the portrait.

Albert E. Brumley

●

**15c each, 2 for 25c**

●

Order from

***The Stamps-Baxter Music Co.***

DALLAS, TEXAS      —      —      PANGBURN, ARKANSAS  
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE



The details of Brumley's contract are unclear, but most sources claim that he earned an unprecedented sum of \$200 per month to write for Stamps-Baxter.<sup>112</sup> His deal probably required at least twelve songs per year.<sup>113</sup> *Guiding Star*, Stamps-Baxter's January 1938 convention songbook, contained seven brand new Brumley originals including the future megahit "Turn Your Radio On." By May of that year, Stamps-Baxter's newsletter, *The Southern Music News*, named both Brumley and Bartlett among its "Special Contributors."<sup>114</sup> Bartlett joined the faculty of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music, which had become the largest of the three-week convention gospel normal schools. Stamps-Baxter also took over publishing *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Radio Favorites*, adding a slightly revised version to its catalog in 1938.<sup>115</sup> Sometime around the middle of that year, Brumley happily moved his family from Harrison back to Powell, where he would remain for the rest of his life. As Brumley joked years later, "It was too much of a rat race in the city and I moved back [to Powell] to stay."<sup>116</sup>

Once he had returned to Powell, Brumley began composing in earnest. With few other teaching, administrative, or managerial obligations, Brumley was free to devote most of his attention to writing songs for perhaps the first time in his life. Per the terms of his contract, he wrote exclusively for Stamps-Baxter for the next several years. In 1939, he published twelve more songs with the company, including such hits as "He Set Me

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<sup>112</sup> Robert Brumley, phone interview with the author, 5 May 2010. See also Hively and Brumley, 52-53.

<sup>113</sup> In a letter dated April 2, 1940, Virgil O. Stamps (president of Stamps-Baxter) wrote Brumley, "I am hoping that you will put in a lot of time on your writing and that you can send me at least one good song every month." See Virgil O. Stamps, letter to Brumley, 2 Apr. 1940, AEBS.

<sup>114</sup> See *The Southern Music News* (May 1938): 6. Bartlett contributed a regular column called "Here, There, and Everywhere."

<sup>115</sup> The revision replaced most of the cowboy songs as well as some other secular songs with more gospel material.

<sup>116</sup> Stubblefield, C1. With just a few thousand people, Harrison was hardly a "city." A mid-1938 return to Powell would match a 1962 interview statement by Brumley that he lived "a year-and-a-half" in Harrison. See Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett.

Free” (upon which Hank Williams would base his “I Saw the Light” eight years later), “Her Mansion Is Higher Than Mine,” and “I’ve Found a Hiding Place.” In 1940, he published fifteen new songs; in 1941, twenty-one new songs; in 1942, another nineteen; and in 1943, twenty more.

Despite Brumley’s impressive salary, Stamps-Baxter was the one reaping most of the benefits from the contract. As works for hire, the company acquired ownership rights to each song that Brumley wrote and could collect publishing royalties—which in his case, it did so significantly—from printings, recordings, and any other applicable usage. Fortunately for Stamps-Baxter, Brumley hits kept coming in the early 1940s, with “Salvation Has Been Brought Down” (1940), “The Sweetest Song I Know” (1941), “I’ll Meet You by the River” (1942), “The Blood That Stained the Old Rugged Cross” (1942), and “Standing by the River” (1943) serving as some prominent examples.

For all of his success, the early 1940s were also particularly tough years for Brumley. First, Virgil O. Stamps, president of the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, passed away on August 19, 1940. He suffered a sudden heart attack following one of his routine early morning radio broadcasts and died six days later. For many singers, Stamps was the face of American convention gospel music. He was a larger-than-life figure whose company had become the industry’s top leader, and he relished the limelight. Brumley had become a close associate of Stamps, accompanying him on recent machinery purchases and staying at his Dallas home during trips to Texas singing conventions.<sup>117</sup> For Brumley, Stamps’s death was a “terrible shock,” representing the loss of not only a leader and boss, but also “a buddy, a pal, a big brother, and a father all at

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<sup>117</sup> See Albert E. Brumley, “Brumley Reports,” *The Gospel Music News* (Apr. 1940): 23; Virgil O. Stamps, “Kurrent Komment,” *The Southern Music News* (Oct. 1939): 6-7.

one time.”<sup>118</sup> He wrote and dedicated a song to Stamps in one of the company’s subsequent songbooks, *Faithful Guide* (1941). Titled “I Feel Like a Stranger in This World Below,” it carried the following inscription: “In loving memory of Virgil O. Stamps who is on his vacation somewhere ‘beyond the clouds.’ ‘My house is in order and I’m ready to go,’ was one of his last statements.”<sup>119</sup>

Then, less than six months after Stamps’s death, E. M. Bartlett died. Brumley’s longtime mentor, friend, and chief artistic inspiration had suffered partial paralysis and speech-impairment following a massive stroke in 1939.<sup>120</sup> While Bartlett continued to attend conventions occasionally and compose (it was during this time that he wrote “Victory in Jesus,” by far his most famous work), he was a shell of his former self. On January 25, 1941, Bartlett passed away. At his funeral, Brumley led a choir in singing Bartlett’s recently published “Victory in Jesus” to open the service. Later that year, he wrote a new song—“I’ll Meet You by the River”—and dedicated it to the memory of E. M. Bartlett.<sup>121</sup> It would become one of his top ten songs.

As if the departures of Stamps and Bartlett were not enough, Brumley also lost his father in 1941 and his brother Tom in 1943. William Brumley had moved in with his son’s family shortly after the death of Brumley’s mother in the late 1930s. He stayed with them about three years before passing away. Again, Brumley memorialized his loved one

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<sup>118</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Condolatory Expressions from the Field," *The Gospel Music News* (Sept. 1940): 17.

<sup>119</sup> Brumley, “I Feel Like a Stranger in This World Below,” no. 115 in *Faithful Guide* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1941).

<sup>120</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Bartlett. See also Ace Collins, *Turn Your Radio On: The Stories Behind Gospel Music's All-Time Greatest Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 230-33.

<sup>121</sup> See Bartlett’s 1941 funeral service program in Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 3: 1939-1949*, 68-72. “I’ll Meet You by the River” was first published in *Lasting Peace* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1942).

in song, writing and publishing “I Will Never Forget My Dad” (1943). Tom was killed in a coalmine accident in Branch, Arkansas, leaving Brumley as the only remaining member of his immediate family before he was even forty years old.

In spite of his personal losses, Brumley’s professional career kept advancing at a rapid pace. In 1944, the success of *Radio Favorites* prompted Stamps-Baxter—now under the leadership of Jesse Randall “Pap” Baxter—to publish two additional books built around Brumley’s fame, *Albert E. Brumley’s Book of Sacred Songs* and *Albert E. Brumley’s Book of Log Cabin Songs*. *Sacred Songs* was essentially a Brumley songbook with nearly three-quarters of its contents (71 out of 97 songs) made up of his original compositions. *Log Cabin Songs* contained a concentration of Brumley’s more secular, sentimental material (e.g., songs about mother, home, and patriotism) alongside such ubiquitous favorites as “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “The Yellow Rose of Texas,” and a handful of Stephen Foster’s hits including “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Old Black Joe,” and “Old Folks at Home.”

Brumley, by now a veteran “agent” for Stamps-Baxter, advertised the new books in a promotional pamphlet that he mailed to potential customers. It drew heavily upon his fame as a songwriter, his wholesome rural image, and his seasoned industry experience:

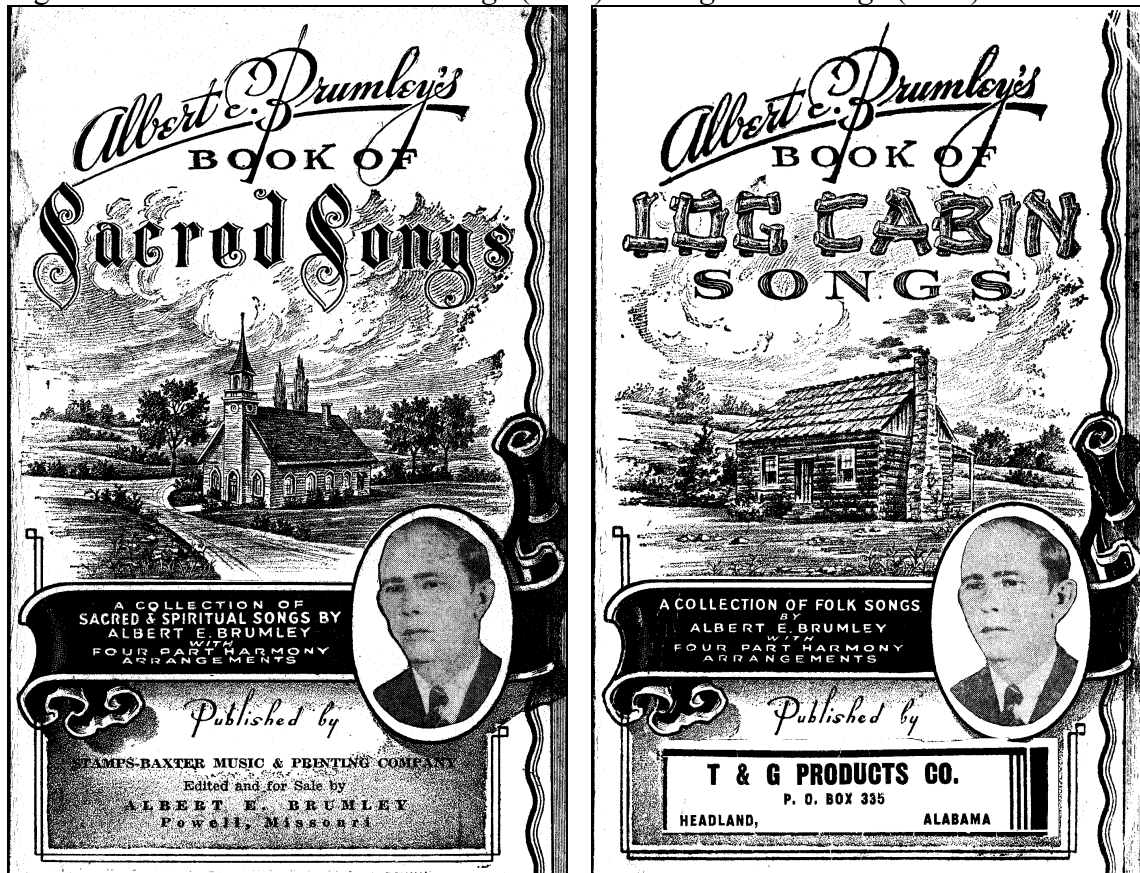
LOG CABIN SONGS and SACRED SONGS contain nearly all the songs written by Albert Brumley to date. Log Cabin Songs containing his folk songs with 32 pages of old time western and folk song classics; and Sacred Songs containing his sacred and spiritual songs. These two books represent more than fifteen years of “hard labor” in the business of writing sacred and folk songs. They represent the joy and tears and the ups and downs in his march from the cotton fields of Oklahoma to one of the top-ranking writers of these types of songs... Both books contain photos of the entire Brumley family.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Brumley, Stamps-Baxter sales pamphlet (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley, [c. 1944]), AEBS.

The cover of *Sacred Songs* featured a quaint roadside chapel situated amidst gently rolling hills, while *Log Cabin Songs* pictured a rustic log home with smoke rising from its chimney (see Figure 2.8). For the rest of his life, Brumley would use these two images—the country church and the log cabin—in his marketing. He cultivated them as symbols of the complimentary sacred and secular natures that characterized his work, using both in his emerging promotional campaign that fantasized Powell as a nostalgic, bucolic paradise recast with the name “Memory Valley” (Figure 2.9).<sup>123</sup>

Figure 2.8. The covers of *Sacred Songs* (1944) and *Log Cabin Songs* (1944).<sup>124</sup>



<sup>123</sup> This coexistence of sacred and secular expression had characterized convention music before Brumley’s time (recall, for example, this chapter’s previous discussion of quartet comedy routines). Such coexistence typified the repertoire of early commercial country music as well. See Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olsen, eds., *The Bristol Sessions: Writings About the Big Bang of Country Music* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2005). In this regard, Brumley’s deft marketing was his real innovation.

<sup>124</sup> On this copy of *Log Cabin Songs*, a local company pasted their own address label over the original Stamps-Baxter publication information. This practice was not uncommon among individuals or small businesses that sold Brumley’s books.

Figure 2.9. Brumley and Sons logo (c. 1957) incorporating Brumley's trademark country church/log cabin (i.e., sacred/secular) imagery and the Memory Valley slogan.



Radio and recordings continued to be an important advertising tool for Brumley as well. Performers were singing and recording his songs more than ever. Moreover, just as they used Brumley's material to attract listeners and fans, the composer discovered that he could use their celebrity status to attract more customers. The aforementioned promotional pamphlet ran an ad for *Radio Favorites* in which Brumley prominently mentioned that many of the book's songs "are featured by such well known radio singers as Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Lulu Belle and Scotty, The Prairie Ramblers, Fred Kirby, Doc Hopkins, The Callahan Bros., Hal Burns, The Daniel Quartet, The Famous Stamps Quartet and many other top-notch performers of national fame!"<sup>125</sup>

### **Albert E. Brumley and Sons and the Stamps Quartet Music Company**

Perhaps realizing how lucrative his songs' publishing rights had become for Stamps-Baxter, Brumley decided to organize his own publishing company in 1944. In mid-1943, he became interested in building his own song catalog and began contacting individuals involved with prior publications of his music, including E. M. Bartlett's widow Joan, Robert E. Winsett (of the R. E. Winsett Music Company), and Theodore

<sup>125</sup> Brumley, Stamps-Baxter sales pamphlet.

Sisk (of the Sisk Music Company). Mrs. Bartlett offered to sell him all of the remaining Bartlett songs (66) and Brumley songs (4) in the family's possession for twenty dollars apiece, and both Winsett and Sisk gave him permission to use songs under their control in his future publications.<sup>126</sup>

Brumley's desire for full ownership of his songs appears to have been the main impetus behind his establishment of Albert E. Brumley and Sons in 1944. Although he may have had aspirations of actually publishing his own songbooks, Brumley had astutely realized that perhaps his greatest potential for income lay not with songbook or publication sales, but with the *use* of his songs in the new media of radio and recordings. As a result, Brumley made another important move in 1944. With the help of R. E. Winsett, he signed up with the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC), one of America's relatively new performing rights organizations.<sup>127</sup> By the early 1940s, SESAC had acquired more sacred music than any of its competitors and had become the premier organization for gospel music publishers.<sup>128</sup> Beginning in 1944, Brumley's representation with them has now become the longest-standing active relationship in SESAC's catalog.

However, it was not long before Brumley's involvement in another gospel music start-up drew him temporarily away from his own enterprises. After the death of Virgil O.

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<sup>126</sup> Joan Bartlett, letter to Brumley, 9 Jul. 1943, AEBS; R. E. Winsett, letter to Brumley, 4 Oct. 1943, AEBS; Theodore Sisk, letter to Brumley, 6 Oct. 1943, AEBS. A few years before his death, Bartlett had sold several of his and Brumley's songs to Stamps-Baxter.

<sup>127</sup> Winsett, letter to Brumley, 22 Dec. 1943, AEBS. Established in 1930, SESAC is the second oldest of America's three main performing rights organizations, the others being ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) and BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.). While it originally catered specifically to European artists, SESAC soon expanded to include artists from across the globe and has long preferred the acronym as its official name. See "About Us", SESAC, Inc., <http://www.sesac.com/aboutsesac/about.aspx> (accessed 16 Jan. 2008).

<sup>128</sup> For a discussion of SESAC's gospel music dominance, see David Crawford, "Gospel Songs in Court: From Rural Music to Urban Industry in the 1950s," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 3 (1977): 551-67.

Stamps in 1940, his younger brother Frank—a popular quartet singer—became Vice President and Sales Manager under Baxter. In 1945, Frank abruptly left Stamps-Baxter and formed a competing publishing firm, the Stamps Quartet Music Company. In addition to exploiting the Stamps name and duplicating the products and services offered by Stamps-Baxter, Frank convinced many of the company’s top quartets to follow him.<sup>129</sup> His biggest coup, however, was luring away its most-prized songwriter, Albert E. Brumley.

In March 1945, Brumley traveled to Nashville along with other Stamps Quartet representatives (presumably including Frank Stamps) to work on compiling the company’s first publication, *Stamps Quartet Specials*. Nashville was the base of John T. Benson, a prominent convention gospel publisher who had agreed to print the books for them. Benson’s price was seven cents per copy in lots of ten thousand, a deal that was, according to Brumley, “slightly under Pap [Baxter].”<sup>130</sup> Brumley was the book’s main compiler and had received permission from several publishers—except Stamps-Baxter—to use their songs in the special book. The final selection contained many of each company’s top songs, including seven of Brumley’s most popular Hartford hits.<sup>131</sup> Before he left Nashville, Brumley took the opportunity to attend a Saturday night performance of the Grand Ole Opry and meet Roy Acuff. Regarding his encounter with the legendary star, Brumley’s only remark was that “he is a very nice fellow.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> The Blackwood Brothers were one quartet that switched over to the Stamps Quartet Music Company. For more on the historic Stamps schism, see Goff, 123, 158.

<sup>130</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Brumley, 24 Mar. 1945, AEBS. With *Stamps Quartet Specials* retailing for \$1.00 per book or five for \$4.00, the company’s potential profit margin was substantial.

<sup>131</sup> Brumley received publishing permissions from Hartford, the J. M. Henson Music Company (Atlanta, GA), Winsett, and James D. Vaughan (Lawrenceburg, TN). His songs in *Stamps Quartet Specials* included “I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy,” “I’d Rather Be an Old Time Christian,” “I’ll Find a Sweet Rest,” “I’ll Fly Away,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “It’s an Unfriendly World,” and “Jesus, Hold My Hand.”

<sup>132</sup> Brumley, letter to Goldie Brumley, 25 Mar. 1945, AEBS.



After *Stamps Quartet Specials* was in production, Brumley and Frank Stamps went to work on the company's first convention songbook, *Divine Praise*. Brumley wrote five new songs for the book and collaborated on two others. Frank Stamps desperately needed a signature song to ensure the viability of his new company, and Brumley more than delivered. Number 115—which had become one of Brumley's "regular" numbers during his time with Stamps-Baxter—was "If We Never Meet Again," another wildly successful Brumley hit.<sup>133</sup> In advertising *Divine Praise*, Frank Stamps took advantage of Brumley's star power, issuing an advance release of two of his new songs in a promotional leaflet (Figure 2.10).

Brumley's first year with the Stamps Quartet Music Company seemed to be a triumph of achievement. *Divine Praise* was a huge success, sparking additional Brumley compilations including *Select Radio Songs* (1945), *World Wide Revival Songs* (1946), and their next convention songbook, *Perfect Peace*. He was also a special contributor to the *Stamps Quartet News*, and company quartets were recording and releasing his songs on the Stamps Quartet record label.<sup>134</sup> However, by October 1946, Brumley and the Stamps Quartet Music Company's honeymoon period had ended, apparently because of irreconcilable differences between him and Frank Stamps.<sup>135</sup> That month, the cover of Stamps-Baxter's *Gospel Music News* proudly announced the return of their old friend, Albert Brumley, "back home" to the Stamps-Baxter fold (Figure 2.11). The newsletter

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<sup>133</sup> At least by the late 1930s, Stamps-Baxter and other major publishers had begun assigning certain song numbers as "regulars" to specific composers. As a result, when new annual songbooks became available, singers could quickly turn to the latest songs of their favorite songwriters. For example, Brumley's new songs regularly appeared as numbers 6 (one page long), 96 (one-and-a-half pages), and 115 (two pages) in Stamps-Baxter's convention books.

<sup>134</sup> The July 1946 issue of the *Stamps Quartet News* lists Brumley as a contributor of "special articles" (p. 8) and advertises recordings (p. 10) of "I'll Meet You in the Morning" (by the Stamps Quartet) and "I Am a Stranger Here" (by Lester's Stamps Quartet).

<sup>135</sup> Robert Brumley, phone interview with the author, 5 May 2010.

devoted nearly an entire page to editorials welcoming Brumley's decision to rejoin the ranks of Stamps-Baxter.<sup>136</sup> If nothing else, this issue of the *Gospel Music News* represents unequivocal evidence that by 1946, Brumley had firmly established himself as the greatest living composer within the convention gospel music industry.

Figure 2.10. Promotional leaflet from the Stamps Quartet Music Company (1945). Note the prominence of Brumley's name throughout the advertisement.

## **"Divine Praise"**

OUR FIRST CONVENTION BOOK  
WILL BE READY

### **Sept. 1st, 1945**

160 pages of New Songs. You will want this book for your singing class and convention, also quartet and special singing.

PRICE:

35c per copy; \$3.60 per dozen; \$13.00 for 50;  
\$25.00 for 100, postpaid.

Have you seen

## **"Stamps Quartet Specials"**

One of the greatest books ever published. A special collection of 190 Favorite Sacred and Spiritual Songs for use in Radio Broadcasts, Congregational Singing and Evangelistic work. Compiled by Albert E. Brumley and the Stamps Quartets.

\$1.00 each; 5 for \$4.00.

### *"BRUMLEY'S RADIO FAVORITES"*

114 of your Favorite Songs. Ready to mail now—  
50c each; 5 for \$2.00.

*STAMPS QUARTET PHONOGRAPH RECORDS*

are now available. Write for complete list and prices.

Send all orders to

**STAMPS QUARTET MUSIC CO.**

Box 4366  
DALLAS 8, TEXAS

"Come on Down to the House of the Lord"  
"As I Go Traveling On"  
Two New Songs By  
ALBERT E. BRUMLEY



THE STAMPS QUARTET



LESTER'S STAMPS QUARTET

<sup>136</sup> Bernard B. Edmiaston, Jesse Randall Baxter, and Homer F. Morris, "Welcome 'Home,' Albert," *Gospel Music News* (Oct. 1946): 19, 26. This issue also contains the most public—albeit cryptic—remarks concerning the frictions that led to Brumley's departure from Stamps Quartet. In his column, Homer F. Morris rhetorically asks, "[I]s it any wonder that Albert E. Brumley refused to continue being accused of editing songs he never saw until they appeared in the book, and decided to come back home to Stamps-Baxter." See Homer F. Morris, "God Governs in the Affairs of Men," *Gospel Music News* (Oct. 1946): 7.

Figure 2.11. Cover of the *Gospel Music News*, October 1946.

**GOSPEL MUSIO NEWS**  
209-211 South Tyler  
DALLAS 8, TEXAS  
Return Postage Guaranteed

Sec. 562 P.L.&R.  
U. S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Dallas, Texas  
Permit No. 739

# GOSPEL MUSIC NEWS

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

**DEDICATED TO THE INTEREST OF GOSPEL MUSIC PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY AND BETTER HOMES**

Volume 13, Number 2      DALLAS, TEXAS, OCTOBER, 1946.      Fifty Cents a Year

## Albert E. Brumley Back Home . . .



Stamps-Baxter friends everywhere will be happy to know the good news carried in the caption above. One of the outstanding song writers of all time is joining hands with his old friends in spreading the Gospel in Song.

With his whirlwind Stamps Quartet experience behind him and a rekindled Stamps-Baxter contract, Brumley could once again focus on composing. However, his aspirations of growing his own company began to resurface. Serendipitously, the Hartford Music Company, Brumley's old employer that had given him his start in the business, was struggling to remain afloat and was ripe for acquisition. Brumley saw the opportunity to acquire not only his own publishing equipment, but also the entire catalog of Hartford's songs, including the many popular ones he had written for them during the 1930s. He wasted little time in making his move.

### **Purchase of the Hartford Music Company**

J. A. McClung, who bought the Hartford Music Company from Bartlett and became its president in April 1931, maintained the firm's prominence and success throughout the 1930s. However, his untimely death on July 23, 1942, created a sudden leadership vacancy that sent the company reeling. W. Oliver Cooper, a longtime faculty member of the Hartford Musical Institute and senior songbook editor, appears to have taken Hartford's reigns in the interim.<sup>137</sup>

In late 1943, Hartford announced three new co-owners, Odis Echols, Floyd E. Hunter, and Waldo Pool.<sup>138</sup> Echols served as President and Pool as Manager. All three were based in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and had more extensive backgrounds in the quartet business rather than publishing (a harbinger of the broader industry's eventual shift towards performers and away from publishers). Although they kept the printing plant in

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<sup>137</sup> Deller, 143. In 1943, Hartford published just one new songbook, *Victory Bells*.

<sup>138</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 3: 1939-1949*, 88. This page of Wakefield's scrapbook contains an article titled "Meet the New Owners of Hartford Music Company" [c. 1943], probably clipped from an issue of the *Herald of Song*.

Hartford, they made Hot Springs the company's new headquarters and the site of 1944's January normal. Echols began widely promoting the company throughout the region with his new quartet, the Hartford Melody Boys.

Hartford's new owners tried to revive its slumping status by quickly publishing three new titles in 1944, two convention songbooks and one special book, *Hartford's Radio Specials*. Brumley—with whom Echols and Pool were friends—actually lent his services in helping compile *Radio Specials* and designing the cover (perhaps one of the first jobs for Albert E. Brumley and Sons).<sup>139</sup> The company was apparently doing well enough that it scheduled back-to-back music normals that summer, one in Hot Springs and another in Little Rock.<sup>140</sup>

However, by early 1946, Hartford was struggling again. Echols sold his share of the business and left for Stamps-Baxter. Hartford's new owners included brothers Olen and J. W. Payte, two Hartford songwriters that had become increasingly involved with the company during Echols's short tenure. On November 10, 1946, J. W. Payte enlisted the services of Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. to determine Hartford's credit status, citing a "decreased volume" as a result of the war.<sup>141</sup> The report estimated its total assets at just six thousand dollars, with machinery and merchandise (aka songbooks) accounting for \$4,500. The company's total liabilities were \$2,639, generating a net worth of only \$3,361, a distant cry from Hartford's boom years of the 1930s.<sup>142</sup> Less than two months later on January 7, 1947, the Paytes sold their 25% share of interest in the company to

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<sup>139</sup> Odis Echols and Waldo Pool, letter to Brumley, 11 Jan. 1944, AEBS.

<sup>140</sup> Wakefield, ed., *Gospel Music Scrapbook, Vol. 3: 1939-1949*, 95.

<sup>141</sup> Hartford Music Company statement for Dun and Bradstreet, Inc., 15 Nov. 1946, AEBS.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

Hubert and Delbert Gilmore for one thousand dollars.<sup>143</sup> As for the remaining 75% of the company, it had ended up in the hands of Earl E. Branscum, an associate with M. and P. Grocery Stores of Oklahoma who had also published songs with Hartford in recent years. Despite the ownership carousel, the Hartford Music Company still managed to publish one songbook—ironically titled *Happy Voices*—in 1947.

Meanwhile, Brumley was methodically building the Brumley and Sons song catalog. While Odis Echols was president of the Hartford Music Company, he agreed to assign Brumley the rights to some of his most popular Hartford songs, including “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” and “I’ll Fly Away.” On August 25, 1947, Brumley arranged a purchase agreement with the remaining family members of his mentor, E. M. Bartlett. Through it, Brumley and Sons gained the complete rights to all of the songs that Bartlett owned at the time of his death, including those written by others.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps more importantly, they also obtained renewal rights for all of E. M. Bartlett’s songs, even those currently owned by other companies. This included Stamps-Baxter, to whom Bartlett had sold the rights to “Victory in Jesus” and many of his other more famous works.<sup>145</sup>

Then, less than two months later on October 22, Brumley began one of the most important business moves of his career by purchasing a majority ownership in the

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<sup>143</sup> Hartford Music Company Contract of Sale, 7 Jan. 1947, AEBS.

<sup>144</sup> The purchase price was “One Dollar (\$1.00) and other good and valuable considerations.” See Bartlett Family Bill of Sale and Assignment, 25 Aug. 1947, AEBS. The low price is intriguing. Perhaps the family was glad just to have Brumley managing E. M. Bartlett’s songs, or perhaps the other “considerations” may have been of a more appropriate value.

<sup>145</sup> At the time, copyright law stipulated that a song’s copyright could be renewed twenty-eight years after its initial date. For example, Bartlett copyrighted “Victory in Jesus” in 1939 (and sold it to Stamps-Baxter shortly afterward), which means it came up for renewal in 1967. When it did, Brumley had the legal right to renew it under his company (which he promptly did).

Hartford Music Company and, in the process, saving it from impending dissolution.

Branscum sold Brumley a fifty-one percent interest, described as consisting of:

one Lee [cylinder] Press, 3 Job Presses, one folding machine, one diamond [paper] cutter, one typewriter, one stitching machine, approximately 12,000 song plates, and all other visible and invisible assets including the name, The Hartford Music Company, Inc., now located in the town of Hartford, Arkansas. Also, all copyrighted songs and other copyrights.<sup>146</sup>

Based on the Payte's sale contract earlier that year, the "other visible and invisible assets" appear to have included various office furniture, "750 lbs. of type," and an inventory of approximately 15,000 songbooks.<sup>147</sup> In hindsight, the remarkable steal here was again the copyrighted songs.

In his later years, Brumley claimed that he bought the company for just \$1,200.<sup>148</sup> Perhaps this was his personal share, as surviving promissory notes from July 15, 1948, show Brumley—along with Branscum and N. J. Gaines—paying four six-month installments of \$750 dollars (or \$3,000 total) to David Moore.<sup>149</sup> Moore was one of the Bartlett's initial partners in the Hartford Music Company back in 1918. He was also a successful businessman, owning a cattle operation and multiple farms in the Hartford area by 1940. In addition, Moore had served as president of the town's First National Bank for eleven years.<sup>150</sup> He also remained active with Hartford Music, and Brumley claimed that it was Moore who had tried to sell "I'll Fly Away" out from under him in the mid-1940s.<sup>151</sup> While his status with the company in 1948 is unclear (he was not a

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<sup>146</sup> Hartford Music Company Bill of Sale, 22 Oct. 1947, AEBS.

<sup>147</sup> Hartford Music Company Contract of Sale, 7 Jan. 1947.

<sup>148</sup> See Stubblefield, C1.

<sup>149</sup> Six-month, twelve-month, eighteen-month, and twenty-four month Arkansas Notes, 15 Jul. 1948, AEBS. Each note carried an eight-percent interest rate.

<sup>150</sup> See Jean Winkler, "Singing by Shape Note: Arkansas Songbook Publishers Conduct Headquarters of a Regional Movement Which Perpetuates the Musical Culture of the South's Early Years," *Arkansas Gazette Sunday Magazine*, 15 Dec. 1940, 3, 6.

<sup>151</sup> For more on this anecdote, see Chapter Four.

designated owner), Moore had probably financed the ownerships of Branscum and others, and it was from him that Brumley ultimately bought his first share. As for Brumley, he finally acquired the Gilmore interest (which had been sold to Burl Carter of Port Neches, Texas) in 1956 and Branscum's interest (which had been sold to T. A. "Dolphus" Duff, also of Port Neches) in 1957.<sup>152</sup> Thus, ten years after beginning the purchase process, Brumley was sole owner of the Hartford Music Company and all of its songs.

Brumley's first order of business was printing the Christmas 1947 issue of *The Herald of Song*. The newsletter proudly announced Hartford's new president and officers (Figure 2.12) and their aspirations to help Hartford "reach heights never before attained."<sup>153</sup> A new convention book, *Grace and Glory*, would appear in January 1948, and a new church hymnal, revival book, and other special books were also in the works along with plans for a retail music store in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and four annual normal schools. The other officers were Branscum (Secretary-Treasurer) and natural gas tycoon N. J. "Pappy" Gaines (Vice President). Gaines was an important investor who owned the Gaines Butane Company, described by the newsletter as a "million dollar concern" that served Oklahoma and Arkansas.<sup>154</sup> There was also a board of directors that included J. E. Roane and Sam J. Henderson.

After the publication of *Grace and Glory*, Brumley held his first session of the Hartford School of Music in the junior high school building of Fort Smith from June 28 to July 17, 1948. The school was apparently a great success, attracting 462 pupils from

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<sup>152</sup> Hartford Music Company Bills of Sale, 8 Aug. 1956 and 16 Dec. 1957, AEBS.

<sup>153</sup> Albert E. Brumley, N. J. Gaines, and Earl E. Branscum, "A Word from the New Managers," *The Herald of Song* (Nov.-Dec. 1947): 3.

<sup>154</sup> *The Herald of Song* (Nov.-Dec. 1947): 2.



twelve states and prompting Brumley to continue summer sessions for the next several years (the plan for four annual sessions was never really viable).<sup>155</sup> However, by April 1949, there were indications that Brumley was having trouble maintaining the company. *The Herald of Song* appeared sporadically, with several months during which no issue appeared. The company's publication office had moved to Powell, indicating that the plant in Hartford had shut down. There were even rumors that Brumley had sold his interest and resigned as president. In fact, Brumley had done no such thing. Rather, he had joined forces with Robert S. Arnold, a quartet singer, songwriter, and publisher who had founded the National Music Company in 1937.<sup>156</sup>

Figure 2.12. An ad in the first *Herald of Song* published under Brumley (November-December 1947), announcing his presidency.

**ALBERT E. BRUMLEY**

**NAMED PRESIDENT**

OF NEWLY ORGANIZED

**Hartford Music and Printing Co., Inc.**

**N. J. (PAPPY) GAINES, Prominent Oklahoma Business  
Man, Named Vice-President**

**EARL E. BRANSCUM, To Serve As Secretary-Treasurer**

Arnold and Brumley's decision to work together was a wise one. In the late 1940s, the convention gospel publishing business was waning as quartets continued to

<sup>155</sup> The number of years that Brumley offered a Hartford School of Music—as well as his consistency in offering one annually—is unclear. Extant surviving promotional materials cover only the following years: 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1962.

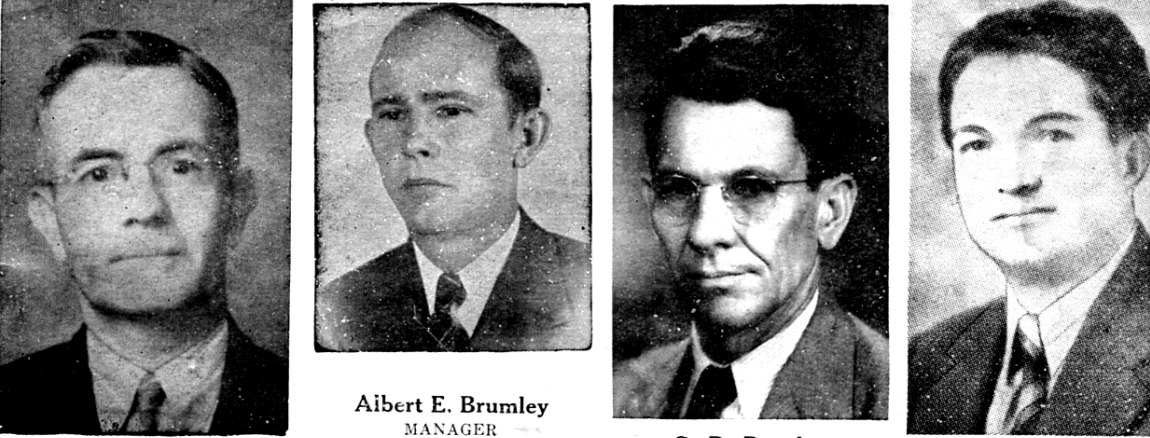
<sup>156</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Facts Concerning the Hartford Music Company," *The Herald of Song* (Apr. 1949): 2.

supplant publishers as the industry's nucleus. With a joint agreement that allowed both Hartford and National to retain their separate assets, Brumley and Arnold created a business cooperative in which they shared the labor and cost of publishing books and benefited from wider circulation into each other's markets. Hartford and National also teamed up for their summer music normals (Figure 2.13). In the end, the bond was one of the most lasting in the business, remaining intact through Brumley's death in 1977.

### **The 1950s and 1960s**

Except for about five years during the late 1950s, Brumley continued collaborating with Arnold and the National Music Company in publishing a convention songbook almost every year until his death. Meanwhile, convention gospel music continued to decrease in popularity throughout the 1950s and 1960s as the professional quartet industry gradually supplanted it. Fortunately for Brumley, he realized early on that records, radio, and professional entertainment were the future markets for convention gospel music and its consumers.

Figure 2.13. Promotional flyer for a 1949 Hartford-National School of Music.




**J. E. Roane, Supt.**  
I. t. Har. Teacher Training


**Albert E. Brumley**  
MANAGER

**G. D. Peoples**  
RUDIMENTS

**Robert S. Arnold**  
VOICE

Esther Stewart  
Piano



Betty Russ  
Piano

THE COMBINED

## Hartford-National School of Music

3 WEEKS TERM

GREENWOOD, ARK.—AUG. 8 to 27  
In The High School

TUITION:

GENERAL TUITION; ALL CLASSES .....	\$ 7.50
PRIVATE VOICE .....	\$12.00
PRIVATE PIANO .....	\$12.00
ACCORDIAN .....	\$12.00
QUARTET TRAINING; (Each group, per lesson) .....	\$ 2.00

Boarding Rates Will Be Reasonable—More Reasonable Than In Recent Years

A Welcoming committee will be on hand at all hours at the bus station beginning Saturday, Aug. 6, and will assign you to a boarding place or sleeping room.

Make arrangements now to attend. We make but one claim—your money back without question if not completely satisfied.

The school will close with a 4-hour concert in the Junior High School Auditorium at Ft. Smith, Saturday, Aug. 27, 8 p. m. to 12 p. m., and will feature some leading quartets, directors & speakers.

**FOR ANY INFORMATION NEEDED**

Write: J. E. Roane, Lavaca, Ark., Joe Peoples, Greenwood, Ark., Ft. Smith, Ark., or any office of

RUTH  
CONOWAY  
Registrar

W. OLIVE  
COOPER  
Adv. Harm  
Versification

**THE HARTFORD-NATIONAL CO.**  
Powell, Mo.                      Ft. Worth, Tex.  
Hartford, Ark.                      Cullman, Ala.

Where other publishers may have seen this transition as a threat, Brumley saw opportunity. Beginning in 1944, his *Radio Favorites*, *Sacred Songs*, and *Log Cabin Songs*

had included a special advertisement to all “Ministers, Evangelists, Radio Stations, Radio Entertainers, Quartet Managers and Book Agents.”<sup>157</sup> It offered a service that allowed individuals or groups to purchase—in minimum orders of 500—personalized copies of these songbooks that listed their own name, address, picture, etc., on the cover. An ad on the back cover of a Brumley and Sons sheet music song reveals how he had expanded this service by 1949.

#### PUBLISH YOUR OWN SONGBOOK

We specialize in printing and binding custom made hymn books for the trade. We furnish songs and printing plates. You compile your book from the world’s greatest pool of copyrighted and P.D. [public domain] hymns, gospels, spirituals and folk songs. 2000 minimum order. We also offer a number of stock books that we will bind with your cover and imprint. 500 minimum order. Let Albert E. Brumley and Sons put you in the song book publishing business.<sup>158</sup>

An early example of this service is a circa-1948 songbook for the Goodwill Family, a local gospel group that performed on KWTO (Figure 2.14). More projects followed, and in 1951, he secured a large contract with John Lair, the mastermind behind Renfro Valley and one of the largest names in barn dance radio programming.<sup>159</sup> Lair, a voracious collector of American sacred tunebooks, wanted to create his own commemorative collection of sacred songs called the *Renfro Valley Hymn Book*. Brumley helped compile and design the book (Figure 2.15), which was published with shape-notes and similar in size to a convention gospel songbook in order to “preserve authenticity.”<sup>160</sup> Lair began selling it on the air in November during his Sunday morning radio program,

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<sup>157</sup> Albert E. Brumley, ed., *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Sacred Songs* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1944), 1.

<sup>158</sup> Bartlett, E. M. “Take an Old Cold Tater (and Wait)” [sheet music] (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1949), 3.

<sup>159</sup> John Lair produced some of the most successful country music radio programs in America during the mid-twentieth century, broadcasting them from Renfro Valley in rural Rockcastle County, Kentucky.

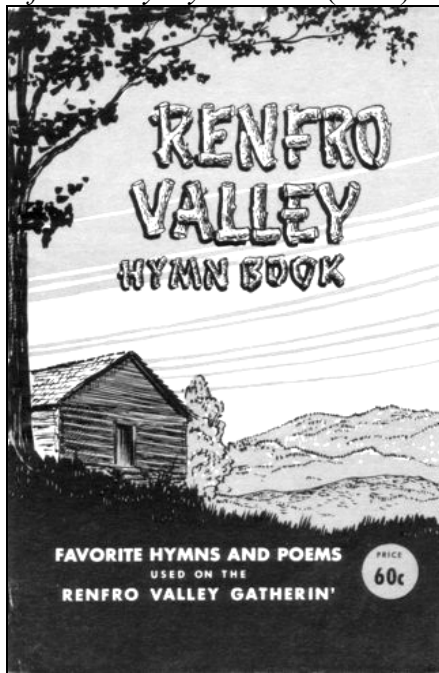
<sup>160</sup> Tom Wood, letter to General Foods Corporation, 4 May 1951, File 11-6, John Lair Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Berea College Hutchins Library (BCHL).

the *Renfro Valley Gatherin'*. By the end of March 1952, nearly 70,000 of the songbooks had sold.<sup>161</sup>

Figure 2.14. Goodwill Family songbook (c. 1948) published by Albert E. Brumley and Sons.



Figure 2.15. Cover of the *Renfro Valley Hymn Book* (1951).



<sup>161</sup> The exact number given by Lair was 69,243. See John Lair, letter to General Foods Corporation, 31 Mar. 1952, File 11-8, John Lair Papers, BCHL.

During the time he was running his own publishing company and purchasing another, Brumley still managed to keep composing. However, his productivity declined significantly in the midst of the new responsibilities. In the ten years prior to buying the Hartford Music Company, Brumley was averaging sixteen new songs per year. In the decade that followed, he averaged around seven. He temporarily stopped writing for Stamps-Baxter after acquiring Hartford, opting to write for himself instead. But by 1953, he was back with Stamps-Baxter and remained with them into 1960, writing about ten songs per year. After 1960, Brumley mostly wrote for Hartford-National except for a handful of songs published during the early 1960s with the Stamps Quartet Company.

In addition to a decrease in overall output, Brumley also produced fewer hit songs during these decades, and none of them achieved the same level of popularity as such earlier songs as “I’ll Fly Away,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” or “If We Never Meet Again.” However, there are a few works from this period that arguably stand among his twenty-five most popular songs. These include “I Cannot Find the Way Alone” (1954), “When I Looked Up and He Looked Down” (1955), and “I Want to Walk Just As Close As I Can” (1960). He also began writing songs with the help of his sons, who by the 1950s had become important contributors to the company’s artistic direction, general decision-making, and day-to-day operations. In fact, one of Brumley’s most popular songs from this period was a collaboration between him and his sons, “I’m Bound for That City” (1954).

In 1966, Brumley and Sons issued an anthology of Brumley’s music—*The Best of Albert E. Brumley*—that signaled his growing status as a living legend, especially within

the convention gospel and now southern gospel community.<sup>162</sup> The book contained one hundred songs that it claimed were “generally believed to represent the best of more than 600 Brumley songs.”<sup>163</sup> It also included biographical material, adulatory vignettes of E. M. Bartlett and Rock Island, several photos of Brumley and his family, and various etchings of log cabins, country churches, a singing school, and other rural scenes. The preface gave a summary of Brumley’s accomplishments, mostly listing his many hit songs but also claiming “more than 100 of his songs have been recorded” and that “several...have been translated into foreign languages and braille [*sic*].”<sup>164</sup> More telling was the preface’s final sentence and disclaimer, revealing how the composer’s “folk,” down-home image had become a centerpiece of his legacy persona:

Albert Brumley lives a plain, simple life, proud of his family, appreciative of his friends and neighbors, and mindful of his Creator. All biographical data, quotations and references concerning the career and personal life of Albert E. Brumley were taken from published records and oral statements by his friends and associates. He has never had a publicity agent. Instead, he has preferred to let his songs speak for him, his religious beliefs and his whole philosophy of life in general.<sup>165</sup>

While Brumley may have become the most successful living gospel music composer and ran a company that produced “a substantial portion of the nation’s song book and sheet music requirements,” readers, singers, and fans could rest assured that he was still “of the salt-of-the-earth” and—presumably like them—had remained true to the values reflected in his humble, rural beginnings.<sup>166</sup> Ironically, Brumley’s open refusal to use a “publicity agent” was in itself a form of publicity that meshed quite well with his image.

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<sup>162</sup> For a discussion of the terms “convention gospel” and “southern gospel” and how they are related, see Chapter One.

<sup>163</sup> Albert E. Brumley, *The Best of Albert E. Brumley* (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1966), 1. Brumley actually wrote around four hundred songs (see Chapter Three).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

Radio and recordings were probably the biggest factor in making Brumley's songs popular enough to inspire a "best-of" anthology. During the 1950s and 1960s, copyright management of his material made an increasing demand on Brumley's time. More artists were recording Brumley songs than ever before. A SESAC statement from November 3, 1949, shows "I'll Fly Away" alone earning \$124.88 in Columbia record royalties over the first nine months of the year.<sup>167</sup> Just under a decade later, various songs from Brumley's catalog generated \$621.04 in record royalties during just the first five months of 1958.<sup>168</sup> Considering that Brumley also earned royalties from radio and television airplay as well as through publishing, his hard work at managing his copyrights was certainly paying off.

### **Festivals and Final Years**

Instead of slowly fading into obscurity, Brumley spent the last ten years of his life forging new ventures and earning more accolades than ever before. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he still kept composing as well. By now, Brumley had been around long enough and his songs had become popular enough that the mainstream media were beginning to take notice. One of his first big breaks had occurred in the 1950s when Clint Bonner featured "If We Never Meet Again" and "Jesus, Hold My Hand" in his nationally syndicated column, *A Hymn Is Born*. Bonner had started the column in 1946, writing short, historical snapshots of some of America's most beloved hymns. By 1952, "millions

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<sup>167</sup> SESAC, Record Royalty Statement for Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 3 Nov. 1949, Files of the Southern Gospel Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Sevierville, TN (SGMHFM). Though unspecified, these royalties must have been from sales of the Chuck Wagon Gang's recent release (the only Columbia artist to record "I'll Fly Away" at the time), which sold quite well.

<sup>168</sup> SESAC, Record Royalty Statements for Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 7 Jan. through 22 May 1958, AEBS.



of Americans” were reportedly following the series “in newspapers from Maine to California.”<sup>169</sup> Bonner’s columns on Brumley’s songs emphasized the composer’s rural background and compared him to Stephen Foster, proclaiming, “Of current writers, none has produced songs better loved by the masses [and] the man of the street than a modest Midwesterner named Albert E. Brumley.”<sup>170</sup>

In July 1965, Nashville’s revered industry periodical *Music City News* carried a feature on Brumley with the subtitle, “A man can’t start out much more humbly than Albert Brumley did...and a song writer couldn’t be much more successful.”<sup>171</sup>

Then, starting around 1969, a flood of stories on Brumley began to surface. These appeared in both minor news outlets (*The Ozarks Mountaineer*, *Pea Ridge (Arkansas) Graphic*, *Carthage (Missouri) Press*) and major newspapers (*Tulsa Tribune*, *Kansas City Star*, and another feature in *Music City News*).<sup>172</sup> At the time of his death on November 15, 1977, Brumley’s fame was enough to earn him an obituary in New York City’s *Newsday*.<sup>173</sup>

Part of the reason for Brumley’s new exposure was surely due to the success of two new business endeavors. With significant help from his sons, Brumley launched two music festivals in 1969, the Albert E. Brumley Sundown to Sunup Singing in Springdale, Arkansas, and the Albert E. Brumley Hill and Hollow Folk Festival on the picturesque

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<sup>169</sup> "News-Tribune Religious Feature in Book Form," *Rome (Georgia) News-Tribune*, 18 Apr. 1952, 9.

<sup>170</sup> Clint Bonner, "A Hymn Is Born: Jesus Hold My Hand, from Cotton Patch to Nationally Known Song Writer," *The (Cape Girardeau) Southeast Missourian*, 9 Nov. 1957, 3.

<sup>171</sup> "Albert Brumley," *Music City News* 3, no. 1 (1965): 18.

<sup>172</sup> See Gerard Attoun, "Albert E. Brumley: One of America's Greatest Gospel Songwriters," *Carthage (Missouri) Press Weekender*, 17 Apr. 1975, 2-3; Gene Gideon, "In the Field of Gospel Music the Ozarks' Albert E. Brumley Is a Living Legend," *The Ozarks Mountaineer* (Oct. 1969): 20; Billie Jines, "Graphically Speaking," *Pea Ridge (Arkansas) Graphic*, 29 Oct. 1970, 6-7; Velma Nieberding, "'Fly Away' Song Booms Ozark Town," *Tulsa Tribune*, 13 Aug. 1971, 6C; Stubblefield, C1; Paul Stubblefield, "Brumley Is Ozark's Country/Gospel Songmaster," *Music City News* 14, no. 10 (1977): 25, 40.

<sup>173</sup> "Albert Brumley, 72; Famed Gospel Music Writer and Publisher," *Newsday*, 18 Nov. 1977, 43.

grounds of the Brumley and Sons headquarters in Powell. Brumley hatched the idea for the all-night singing with J. D. Sumner, one of the most famous southern gospel singers in the business. Large-scale all-night gospel sings went back as far as 1938 when V. O. Stamps sponsored his first one in Dallas to close that summer's session of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music. Ten years later in 1948, gospel singer and promoter Wally Fowler organized the first all-night sing to feature professional quartet singing exclusively. It was a smashing success and became a sensation within the southern gospel entertainment industry.<sup>174</sup>

The first “Brumley Gospel Sing,” as it came to be called, featured seven professional groups, including some of the most celebrated in the business (Figure 2.16). Following an amateur contest that began at seven o'clock, the entertainers took the stage at 8:30 on Saturday night, August 2, 1969, appearing in alternating slots and singing until dawn the next morning. To call the first Brumley Gospel Sing a financial success would be an overstatement. Bob Brumley—Brumley's son who was in charge of promotion that year—recalled their expenses totaling \$2,900 with a final tally of receipts coming to \$2,950, allowing Brumley and Sumner to profit just twenty-five dollars apiece.<sup>175</sup> Regardless, Brumley planned a second sing for the following year that generated greater returns. Word spread quickly about the new festival, and it grew so rapidly that by 1976 it had expanded to three nights instead of one (and, understandably, no longer had an all-night component). Now held in the air-conditioned Cowan Civic Center of Lebanon, Missouri (2000 was its last year in Springdale's outdoor rodeo arena), the Brumley

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<sup>174</sup> For more on the all-night gospel sing phenomenon within southern gospel, see Goff, 91-92, 165-66, 175.

<sup>175</sup> *40<sup>th</sup> Annual Brumley Gospel Sing: Documentary*, dir. Brian Covert (I'll Fly Away Productions, 2008).

Gospel Sing continues today as the largest and longest-running event of its kind, spanning four days over the first weekend of every August.

Figure 2.16. Flyer for the first Albert E. Brumley Sundown to Sunup Singing.

## COMING TO SPRINGDALE, ARKANSAS

Aug. 2  
1969

**FIRST ANNUAL SESSION**

*Albert E. Brumley*

Aug. 2  
1969

FEATURING A GALAXY OF THE NATION'S FOREMOST GOSPEL QUARTETS IN THE GREATEST GOSPEL SONG FESTIVAL EVER  
PRESENTED IN MID-AMERICA—Plus **BIG AMATEUR CONTEST...**

BLACKWOOD  
BROS.

STATESMEN

STAMPS QUARTET

PROPHETS

DIXIE ECHOES

MORLAN FAMILY

MESSENGERS

Saturday Night, August 2, 1969      7:00 P. M.

• PARSONS RODEO ARENA •

(Seats 13,000—Parking Area for 10,000 Cars—All-Night Food Service in Arena)  
In Event of Rain the Program Will Be Held in the Central Jr. High Gym

AMATEUR CONTEST 7:00-8:30 P. M. —PROFESSIONAL QUARTETS 8:30 P. M. Till ? ? ? ?  
Gates Open 6:00 P. M.

For Ticket Prices, Reservations, Motel/Hotel Accomodations, Information  
See Reverse Side of This Sheet

SPONSORED BY  
THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, SPRINGDALE, ARKANSAS

The Hill and Hollow Folk Festival was a different sort of event. It billed itself as an “old-timers and settlers reunion” that promoted the “folk-lore, arts, crafts, and music” of the Ozark region (Figure 2.17).<sup>176</sup> Held on a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in late September on the banks of Big Sugar Creek in Powell, it was essentially an arts-and-crafts fair that was free and open to the public. Artists applied for exhibit space and, if chosen, only had to pay a \$2 entry fee and a ten-percent commission on any sales. It extended an invitation to “folk singers, fiddle players, gospel and country music groups” to provide informal music and entertainment “under a brush arbor setting.”<sup>177</sup> Again, Brumley’s sons—namely Bill and Bob—played a major role in planning the event.

By its second year, professional gospel entertainment had become part of the Folk Festival’s Sunday activities, with amateur groups performing on the other days. The 1973 festival designated Saturday as a “Bluegrass Jamboree,” and soon such national bluegrass (and mostly secular) artists as Carl Story, Lonzo and Oscar, and Lester Flatt were appearing on Saturday to complement the Sunday gospel performers. The Hill and Hollow Folk event became another successful Brumley endeavor that continued well into the 1990s. Soon, however, the growth of the Brumley Gospel Sing coupled with the logistics of accommodating larger and larger crowds in Powell caused Brumley and Sons to discontinue the festival in favor of the Sing.

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<sup>176</sup> Promotional flyer, First Annual Hill and Hollow Folk Festival (1969), AEBS.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

Figure 2.17. Promotional flyer for the first Albert E. Brumley Hill and Hollow Folk Festival.



In many ways, these festivals embodied the essences of Brumley's career innovations. Two major components of his legacy were his success at navigating his industry's transition away from convention songbook publishers and towards

professional gospel entertainers, and his talent for writing songs from the perspective of both the “log cabin” and the “country church.” With the Brumley Gospel Sing and the Hill and Hollow Folk Festival, he had arrived as a major player within the new southern gospel entertainment industry while at the same time proclaiming his support for the traditional sacred *and* secular worlds that he loved to memorialize in music.

Brumley’s innovations did not go unrecognized during his lifetime. One of his most prestigious awards came in 1970 and serves as a testament to Brumley’s contributions to not only American sacred music, but American popular music in general. On October 12, 1970, the Nashville Songwriters Association inducted Brumley along with twenty other individuals as its first Hall of Fame class. The distinguished group included such popular music luminaries as Gene Autry, A. P. Carter, Pee Wee King, Jimmie Rodgers, Merle Travis, Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams, and Bob Wills.<sup>178</sup> Two years later, Brumley was among the first inductees into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. Another notable award followed in 1975, when the governor of Oklahoma declared September 13, 1975, as Albert E. Brumley Gospel Music Day in the state. This was only the beginning. Since Brumley’s passing, numerous organizations and associations have bestowed—and continue to bestow—awards and honors upon the composer.<sup>179</sup>

In 1975, Albert E. Brumley copyrighted his last song. His composition had tapered off over the last ten years to the point of writing just one song per year since 1972. Published in Hartford-National’s 1976 convention songbook *Echoes of Peace*,

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<sup>178</sup> “NASA [*sic*] Hall of Fame,” *BMI: The Many Worlds of Music* (Dec. 1970): 6.

<sup>179</sup> Examples include an International Bluegrass Music Association Award of Merit (1986), a SESAC Hall of Fame trophy for “I’ll Fly Away” (1987), the Spiro Historical Society Hall of Fame (1995), the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame (1998), a Western Swing Society Pioneer Award (1999), the International Country Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame (2001), the National Traditional Country Music Association Hall of Fame (2002), and the Arkansas Entertainers Hall of Fame (2005).

Brumley's last work bore an apt title, "Lord, Try Me One More Time" (Figure 2.18). Its melody, like many of Brumley's songs, was a tuneful air couched within a gentle rhythmic lope. The text made a heartfelt, final petition for forgiveness, seemingly from someone who had pled for it many times before and wanted "just one more chance."

Brumley turned seventy in October of 1975, and he retired the following January.<sup>180</sup> He was no doubt aware of the increased fragility of life that his septuagenarian age brought with it. Deaths among his friends and relatives were becoming more frequent, and the losses pained him. He reportedly discussed the topic of dying often in the year leading up to his passing.<sup>181</sup> On the morning of November 11, 1977, Albert E. Brumley died from a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm. He had helped build an entire gospel music industry in America, and now it deeply mourned his unexpected death. Bill and Bob Brumley continued managing their father's companies and keeping the legacy of his music alive, and today the little town of Powell, Missouri—down in "Memory Valley"—still houses a little-known publishing firm called Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Incorporated.

Drawing upon his dedicated work ethic, immense talent, and astute business sense, Albert Brumley was able to become the most influential gospel music composer of the twentieth century. Despite the immensity of his impact on American popular music, this distinction is probably not how he would want people to remember him. He was much more comfortable living a "plain, simple life, proud of his family, appreciative of his friends and neighbors, and mindful of his Creator."<sup>182</sup> As for his musical legacy, perhaps his own modest words offer the best explanation in this regard. "I'm just a

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<sup>180</sup> Malone, "Albert E. Brumley, Folk Composer," 75.

<sup>181</sup> Hively and Brumley, 123.

<sup>182</sup> Brumley, *The Best of Albert E. Brumley*, preface.

hillbilly,” Brumley said in a 1972 interview, “I had a pretty good understanding of rural people and I saw trials and tribulations they faced and I think that gave me the insight on what kind of songs these people wanted to hear.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Joe Boyle, “Hard-to-Find Community Is Home to Famous Ozarks Music Writer,” [unknown Missouri newspaper clipping], [c. 1972], AEBS. This article quotes Brumley’s age as 66 and describes the “green hills” surrounding Powell; thus, a date of 1972 is most plausible. This quote also appears in Kathy E. Ledbetter, “Albert E. Brumley: Gospel and Folksong Writer,” *Pickin'* (Oct. 1979): 14-15.



Figure 2.18. "Lord, Try Me One More Time" (1975), Brumley's last published composition.

# 6 Lord, Try Me One More Time

A. E. B. Albert E. Brumley

1. Lord, I'm un-wor - thy, and hu-man am I, But I have de -
2. All I would give, Lord, for just one more chance, At all of life's

cid - ed to make one more try; I am de- ter- mined to  
pleasures I'd cast not one glance; I'll face the fu- ture, what -

shoul- der my task, And just one more chance, Lord, is all that I ask.  
e'er I may find, For this is the one time I've made up my mind.

## CHORUS

Try me one more time, sweet Je - sus, Try me one more time;

Je - sus, I need Thee, take me and lead me, Try me just one more time.

©Copyright 1975 by Hartford Music Co. in "Echoes Of Peace"  
All Rights Reserved

## CHAPTER 3

### The Compositions of Albert E. Brumley

#### **Introduction: The Scope of Brumley's Music**

Over the course of his career, Albert Brumley wrote and published nearly four hundred works. About twenty percent were collaborations for which Brumley provided the text to someone else's tune or vice versa. For the rest, Brumley was the sole author. He also published nearly 150 arrangements during his lifetime. Most were simple arrangements of public domain material ("After The Ball," "Frankie and Johnny," "The Old Gray Mare," etc.) that he included in various "folk song" publications of the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> However, Brumley was arranging sacred material for Stamps-Baxter and other major publishers as early as 1937, and at least one of his arrangements—"This World Is Not My Home" (1937)—was a major success and became the song's standard version. Only eleven manuscripts of unpublished compositions currently exist, and of these just two are complete.

As a total number of original works, four hundred is far lower than most estimates, which usually range from six to eight hundred.<sup>2</sup> These estimates lack the accuracy of the current study, which utilizes extensive new primary source research from private songbook collections. Most of Brumley's original works appeared only one or two times in various shape-note gospel songbooks published from the 1920s to the 1970s, and the composer himself kept poor record of his compositions. Thus, these songbooks—

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are *Songs of the Pioneers* (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1970); *Songs of the Pioneers No. 2* (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1973); and *Lamplitin' Songs and Ballads* (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One for more on the various estimations of Brumley's output.

central to America's white gospel tradition—remain the best repository of Brumley's music. However, very few institutional libraries and archives contain holdings associated with this greatly understudied area of American music, and the few that do cannot rival the songbook collections held by such private individuals as Bobbie F. McLemore, an independent book collector in Jasper, Texas. McLemore's collection—one of the best in existence—comprises nearly 2,200 volumes and purportedly includes every songbook from the major publishers' catalogues. Furthermore, McLemore has indexed his entire collection, creating an electronic songbook database searchable via song title, author, songbook title, publisher, and the year of publication.<sup>3</sup>

Over three hundred digital images gathered during the summer of 2008 document every out-of-print Brumley work in McLemore's collection. Together with the hundred or so songs still in print, these images have been organized into a complete thematic catalogue, separating Brumley's arrangements from his original compositions and establishing, for the first time, an accurate estimate of his entire output.<sup>4</sup> The catalogue contains records for 396 original works. If one were to add Brumley's complete unpublished manuscripts to this number, the final total would be 398. Adding extant incomplete manuscripts (e.g., fragments, texts without music, lyric sketches) would raise this number to 407. In addition to title and publication information, the thematic catalogue documents each of Brumley's works according to aspects of melody, text, rhythm, harmony, texture, structure, and other specific musical traits.

This thematic catalogue also provides greater ease in following Brumley's collaborations, publishing volume, and his work's chronology. For example, except for J.

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter One for more information on McLemore.

<sup>4</sup> This thesis includes the catalogue as Appendix A.

E. Roane and Marion W. Easterling, Brumley rarely collaborated with the same individual more than once or twice. The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company published more of his songs (210) than any other concern, followed by the Hartford Music Company (135), with the Stamps Quartet Music Company at a distant third (24). In general, he did most of his writing during the 1930s and 1940s. The decade between 1937 and 1947 was by far his most prolific, yielding some 161 works. Although his productivity tapered off considerably, Brumley continued composing well into the 1970s, publishing his last composition in 1975, nearly fifty years after his first one and just two years before his death.

### **Analyzing “Convention” Gospel Music**

The first scholar to systemize the features of shape-note, “convention” gospel music—hereafter referred to simply as “convention music” or “convention gospel”—was George Pullen Jackson in *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (1933).<sup>5</sup> While Jackson was impressed with the thriving convention music industry at the time and applauded the “democracy” and “folk activity” represented by its lay songwriters, he was not as positive about the music itself.<sup>6</sup> “When one sees this quantity output of song,” he wrote, “one will not be too expectant as to its intrinsic quality.”<sup>7</sup>

In a short chapter titled “Rural Song Meets People’s Taste,” Jackson offered the following summation:

The melodies are all in the major mode. Minor has long since disappeared. The tunes run pretty uniformly along the popular progressions, using tonic, dominant,

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the term “convention” and its origins, see Chapter One.

<sup>6</sup> George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 373.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

and subdominant chords. The melodic progressions are usually by diatonic steps which are prevailing seconds and thirds, but with a goodly intersprinkling of the bigger intervals up to the octave.<sup>8</sup>

Jackson also discussed the music's predilection for pentatonicism (*do, re, mi, sol, and la*), "lively" and "jiggy" (6/8) gaits, characteristic syncopation, and general optimism of its texts. In describing its textural variety, he singled out the use of "after-beat" accompaniments and a penchant to distribute the melody among different parts in the same song, comparing the effect of the latter to the fusing tunes of William Billings.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to Jackson, there are examples of songwriters themselves articulating customary practices of shape-note gospel music composition. Occasionally, a songbook publisher's newsletter would feature articles on songwriting. Bernard B. Edmiaston served as the editor of Stamps-Baxter's monthly newsletter, the *Gospel Music News*, from 1940 to 1964. He was also an accomplished composer, and he submitted the following advice for aspiring songwriters in the February 1954 issue of the *News*:

The ordinary song of today (especially gospel songs) is composed of more than one stanza (erroneously called "verse" by some). All stanzas of a song (in our songbooks) are sung to the SAME music, and must, therefore, be uniform in length (number of syllables in corresponding lines and number of lines in stanza), metrical character (order of accent) and rhyme... Avoid writing long poems for use with music. In a large majority of cases more than three stanzas and a chorus is not essential to the expression of what is said in many stanzas in substance. Many of our best modern songs have only two stanzas and a chorus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 381-85. Jackson describes "after-beat" as the same technique "used for a long time by college glee clubs in their 'oom-pah oom-pah' songs" (p. 383). It is essentially a syncopated vocal accompaniment that alternates the melody with repeated off-beat accents (e.g., accenting every even-numbered eighth note in a measure of common time).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard B. Edmiaston, "Composing Song Words," *Gospel Music News* 20 (Feb. 1954): 7. Quoted in Shirley Beary, "The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company: A Continuing American Tradition, 1926-1976" (D.M.A. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 254-55.

Several years later, Luther G. Presley—one of convention gospel’s most revered composers and second only to Brumley in fame—wrote the following reflection in his *Gospel Music News* column:

It is amazing how much building material is available for the construction of songs. To begin with, there are the Major and Minor triads, chords of the 6th, 7th, and 9ths. Inversions, Modulations to the key of the subdominant, Passing tones, Accessory tones, Changing tones, Appoggiatures [*sic*], Suspensions, Modulations from the Major key to the Minor key etc., and if one wishes to move on into deeper water, there is sequence, Neapolitan sixth, French sixth, German sixth, American sixth, Modulations to the remote keys, Organ Point and Counterpoint. This of course does not mention the little in-betweens. However, the songs that live on, for the most part, are written in simple harmony, embellished here and there with a few Passing tones, Accessory tones, Changing tones, Modulations, etc. The melodies should be smooth flowing with no awkward skips or complicated rhythms. Such songs are easier to remember.<sup>11</sup>

Following Jackson, the next author to examine convention gospel from a scholarly perspective was Shirley Beary in her 1977 dissertation, “The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company: A Continuing American Tradition, 1926-1976.” Her fifth chapter, “Textual and Musical Characteristics of the Stamps-Baxter Songs,” contained findings from a study of “several hundred songs.”<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter, she also published a brief article in *The Hymn* titled “Stylistic Traits of Southern Shape-Note Gospel Songs” that summarized the chapter’s conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

For her study, Beary selected “every tenth song” from numerous Stamps-Baxter songbooks (she does not specify which books), presumably in an effort to get a random sample. However, there is one major problem with Beary’s selection process. At least by

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<sup>11</sup> Luther G. Presley, "Arkansas," *Gospel Music News* 38 (Jan. 1970): 3. Quoted in Beary, 294-97. An American sixth chord is simply an enharmonic spelling of a German sixth chord, using an augmented supertonic instead of a flatted mediant. For example, an American sixth chord in the key of C would be spelled A-flat, C, D-sharp (instead of E-flat), F-sharp.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 10 for bibliographic information. Chapter Five is pp. 250-306, and this quote appears on p. 289.

<sup>13</sup> Shirley Beary, "Stylistic Traits of Southern Shape-Note Gospel Songs," *The Hymn* (Jan. 1979): 26-33, 35.

the late 1930s, Stamps-Baxter and other major publishers had begun assigning certain song numbers as “regulars” to specific composers. As a result, when new annual songbooks became available, singers could quickly turn to the latest songs of their favorite songwriters. For example, Brumley’s new songs regularly appeared as numbers 6 (one page long), 96 (one-and-a-half pages), and 115 (two pages) in Stamps-Baxter’s convention books. Whether or not Beary was aware of this fact, her sample was likely compromised by some degree of author overrepresentation. A better approach would have been to take every tenth song while changing the starting number for each book (i.e., 10, 20, 30, 40, etc., for the first book; and then 1, 11, 21, 31, 41, etc., for the second, and so on).

Beary divided her examination between textual and musical characteristics. In her textual analysis, she first addressed thematic variance, writing that “almost every Christian belief has found expression in the texts of the Stamps-Baxter songs.”<sup>14</sup> More preferred themes included the brevity of life, the salvation of mankind, God’s love, parental love (i.e., “Mother” and “Father” songs), the Christian journey, the virtues of Christian living, death, and heaven. However, Beary used only the songs’ titles to decide their theme, rendering her conclusions cursory at best.

Beary also inspected the poetic meter and rhyme scheme of the song texts. She identified iambic and trochaic patterns as the most common with occasional examples of anapestic, modulated, and irregular devices. Common meter, long meter, and short meter appeared along with a host of other, less common patterns (8.7.8.7., 6.6.9.6.6.9., 10.6.10.6.). She recorded various rhyming devices including couplets, cross rhyme, ABCB, and more complex, irregular patterns.

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<sup>14</sup> Beary, “The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company,” 257.

In her investigation of musical characteristics, Beary begins with melodic range. She found that forty-two percent of the melodies in her sample did not exceed an octave, with twenty percent remaining within a fifth or sixth. Eighteen percent encompassed a ninth and only 7.3 percent comprised a tenth. In general, she found that soprano melodies seldom moved above the staff. Beary does not specify how she treated melodies that shift to different voices within the same song, a trait not uncommon in convention gospel music. She noted a variety of melodic contour (ascending, descending, curvilinear, static) with few large melodic skips. While modulation was rare, nonharmonic tones (neighbor tones, passing tones, changing tones) occurred frequently, often adding significant chromaticism to a song.

Many of Beary's selected songs exhibited traditional, hymn-like rhythmic movement, but there was also a disproportionate amount of uptempo and syncopated material. She describes syncopation as a "displaced accent normally associated with rag-time music and jazz" and credits it with giving gospel music a characteristic "jaunty" and "dance-like" quality.<sup>15</sup> She cites a preference for common time (4/4) as facilitating songwriters' preference for syncopation.

Stylistically, Beary identifies four major song groups: 1) hymn-like songs, 2) convention songs, 3) "afterbeat" songs, and 4) "contrapuntal" songs. Essentially these are textural distinctions, and her criteria for each one are as follows:

The hymn-like song has a straight rhythm with little or no syncopation. The meter can be 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/4, or 6/8, and the tempo can be slow or moderately fast. The harmony is usually quite simple.

[C]onvention song style is the statement and repetition style in which one voice carries the melody, while the others sing a harmonic repetition of each phrase, either literally or in an altered form. In this style the melody may migrate from one voice to another, or it may remain in one voice. Frequently the melody

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 275.



is carried by the bass voice, and the three upper voices sing the harmonic repetition, or it may be reversed with the melody in the soprano and the repetition figure in the lower three voices. The melody can also be in an inner voice.

[A] rhythmic device that caught the attention of gospel songwriters during the 1920s was the “afterbeat.” The afterbeat, a technique borrowed from band music, has one voice that clearly carries the melodic line, while the other voices sing a word or a syllable on the second half of the beat. Although in description the afterbeat seems similar to the statement-repetition style, it is, in reality, different in sound. The effect is similar to the ump-pah-ump-pah sounds heard in a brass band.

The fourth style, ...contrapuntal style, is atypical of the songs used at the conventions. Each voice is a melodic line with its own text. This style of writing gives evidence of a more advanced understanding of the principles of composition than does the average convention song.<sup>16</sup>

Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 give prime examples of each of these style categories from Brumley’s body of work. For purposes of clarity, this study will use the terms “homorhythmic” instead of “hymn-like” and “antiphonal” instead of “convention song style.” These changes reflect style classifications more apposite to their respective musical-textural distinctions.

Beary discusses the “spiritual” as an additional type of Stamps-Baxter song that may incorporate any of the above styles. “It is set apart from the other songs in that the tempo is faster and the rhythm jaunty,” and it often contains “many short notes to a measure.”<sup>17</sup> These spirituals also use “casual language...reminiscent of the early camp-meeting songs,” with speech patterns occasionally resembling “Negro spirituals.”<sup>18</sup> More directly, these were songs that actually had the word “spiritual” printed in parentheses beneath the title. They often made heavy use of “blue notes,” especially the flatted third, and employed lyrics or dialect thought to be redolent of authentic spirituals. Brumley

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 280-88. It deserves mention that Beary’s use of the term “contrapuntal” is not in the strict sense of counterpoint as defined within the Western art music tradition. Rather, she uses it more indiscriminately to classify those gospel songs with the least homorhythmic relationship among the voices.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 288-89.

himself published nineteen such ersatz spirituals between the years 1933 and 1957 (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.1. Homorhythmic (hymn-like).

**No. 14. Life Is Uncertain And Death Is Sure.**  
 A. E. B. Copyright, 1931, by E. M. Bartlett. Albert E. Brumley.

*Adagio.*

1. While we stand by the riv - er, By the side of the riv - er, And long for that  
 2. We weep while our kin-dred Are crossing the riv - er, We know that this  
 3. In fan - cy we see them In that beau-ti - ful cit - y, In pearl-y white  
 4. Too soon we'll be fall - ing 'Neath death's si-lent reap-er, And err from the

en - chant-ed cit - y so pure; We know not the moment, But soon we'll  
 life can-not ev - er en-dure; A - las! we must lin-ger In death's peace-  
 mansions so safe and se-secure; Some day we shall meet them. Where com-eth  
 pathway where e - vil al-lures; We'll be borne to that cit - y To in - her - it

*rit.* **CHORUS.**

be crossing, For life is un-cer-tain and death is sure.  
 ful slumber, For life is un-cer-tain and death is sure. Life is un -  
 no dy - ing, For life is un-cer-tain and death is sure.  
 a mansion, For life is un-cer-tain and death is sure.

cer-tain and death is sure, Have you a promise in God made secure? Have you a

mansion that is waiting in glo-ry? For life is uncertain and death is sure.

Figure 3.2. Antiphonal (convention style).

No. 99 **I'll Find the Way Home**  
 Copyright, 1941, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Ptg. Co.  
 A. E. B. in "Super Specials No. 2" Albert E. Brumley

1. Just a trav'ler am I ..... on the old gos-pel road.....  
 2. When my spir-it is low, ..... when I'm burdened with care,.....  
 3. Thru the val-ley of night ..... I've a friend by my side.....

Dai-ly plod-ding a-long..... to the bless-ed a-bode;.....  
 Then in si-lence I go ..... to my Sav-ior in pray'r;.....  
 And I know He will keep ..... what-so-ev-er be-tide,.....

Tho the light'nings may flash..... and the thunders may roll,.....  
 I am fear-ing no storm ..... for my hand He will hold,.....  
 He will pi-lot me on ..... thru the heat and the cold,.....

I'll find the way home ..... to that ci-ty of gold.  
 I'll find the way home ..... to that ci-ty of gold.

**Chorus**  
 I'll find the way home ..... thru the  
 I'll find the way home thru the darkness of night.....

darkness of night, I'll find the way home by His won-der-ful  
 I'll find the way home by His won-der-ful light; In the depths of God's  
 light; In the depths of God's love.....

love I have anchored my soul, I'll find the way  
 I have anchored my soul, I'll find the way  
 home to that ci-ty of gold. to that ci-ty of gold.  
 home.....

**Coda**  
 I'll find the way home to that city of gold.  
 I'll find the way home to that ci-ty of gold.

Figure 3.3. Afterbeat (excerpt of chorus). The meter is 4/4.<sup>19</sup>

CHORUS.

Don't you hear the Sav-iour now say? Haste, the Lord is  
 Won't you wield your scy-cle to-day?  
 Wag-es for your la-bor He'll pay. O haste a-way, the Lord is  
 need-ing you, need-ing you, work out in the  
 need-ing you To work out in the  
 field, in the bar-vest field; ripe, and reap-ers are so few,  
 field;..... The grain is ripe and reap-ers are so  
 are so few, Help to save the yield, save the pre-cious yield;  
 few, Go help to save the yield;.....  
 bright go work, go, haste a-way,  
 With scy-cle bright go work while yet 'tis

<sup>19</sup> From Lorain T. Allison and Albert E. Brumley, "Christ's Call For Reapers," number 109 in *The Garden of Song* (Hartford, AR: The Hartford Music Co., 1931).

Figure 3.4. Contrapuntal (excerpt of chorus). The meter is 4/4.<sup>20</sup>

FINE CHORUS

On the glit - ter - ing wings of gold. I'm gon - na sail a-

On the glit - ter - ing wings of gold.

way... I'm gonna sail a  
Sail a-way home... and meet the prophets of old,.....  
Sail a-way home and

Gon-na sail a-way,..... meet the prophets of old....

way... I'm gon-na sail a-  
Sail a-way home in - side the gates of gold;....  
Sail a-way home... in - side

And light in - side... the gates of gold; D. S.

round.  
Sail a-round when... I lay my bur - dens all down, (hal - le - lu - jah,)  
Sail around when I

When I lay my bur - dens down,

<sup>20</sup> From Albert E. Brumley, "I'm Gonna Sail Away," number 106 in *Boundless Joy* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1933).

Figure 3.5. “Practice What You Preach” (1954), an example of a Brumley “spiritual.”<sup>21</sup>

**134 Practice What You Preach**  
(SPIRITUAL)  
Copyright, 1954, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Co.  
in “Higher Ground” Albert E. Brumley

A. E. B.

1. If you would be a true dis-ci-ple, you've got to do it right,  
2. There is a page for "bus-y-bod-ies" and one for tat-tlers, too,  
You've got to read that dear old Bi-ble and read it day and night;  
A page for those with "good in-ten-tions" and one for "aim-ing to;"  
You've got to go like Paul and Si-las, the heath-en ones to teach,  
You ought to be a good ex-am-ple to those with-in your reach,  
And that ain't all, you've got to prac-tice, practice what you preach.  
So, preach His word and real-ly prac-tice,  
**CHORUS**  
So, practice what you preach, practice what you preach,  
O, my brother, un-to others,  
And three or four pag-es for "back-bit-in," So, practice what you preach.

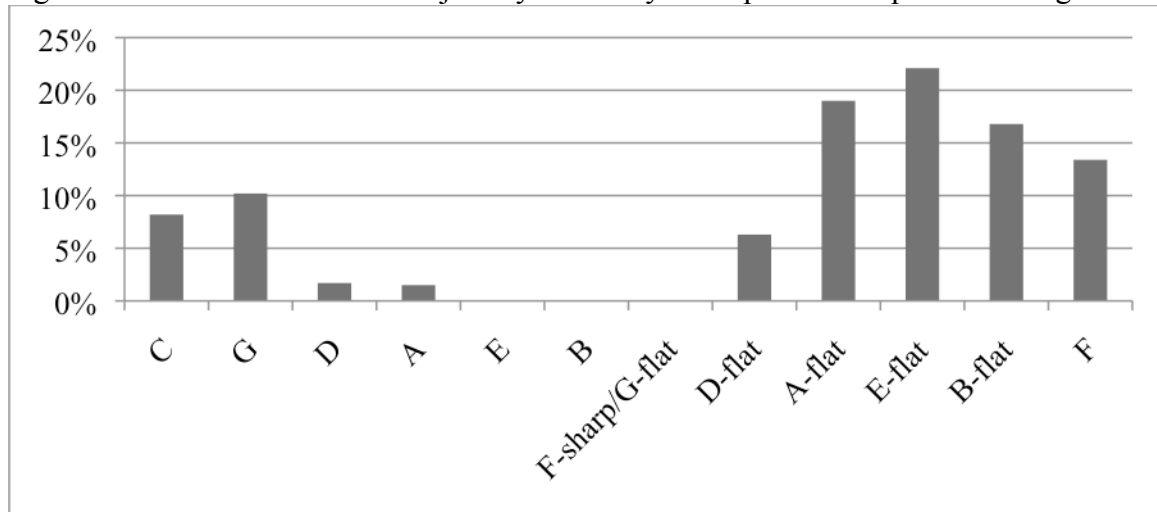
In her key analysis, Beary noted a preference for flat keys (see Figure 3.6).<sup>22</sup> Only three songs out of several hundred were in minor keys. Her interview with a former Stamps-Baxter songbook compiler uncovered both aesthetic and pragmatic explanations for the overwhelming use of major keys. “It [minor] is kinda on the sad side, and we want to stay on the happy side,” said the compiler, “For the average person in our convention,

<sup>21</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “Practice What You Preach,” number 134 in *Higher Ground* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1954).

<sup>22</sup> While noteworthy, discussions of key preference within convention gospel music are somewhat moot. In performance situations, keys may be raised or lowered at will by singers, song leaders, or pianists for greater ease in singing or accompanying. For example, a convention gospel pianist will often transpose a gospel song in G or A major—with or without the knowledge of the singers or song leaders—to the key of A-flat major, which pianists prefer for its ease of playability.

it is too hard to sing in the minor. They just do not get down and study, therefore they would rather have it [the music] in major.”<sup>23</sup> Modulation was also rare, with Beary locating only one example.

Figure 3.6. The distribution of major keys in Beary’s sample of Stamp-Baxter songs.<sup>24</sup>



Overall, Beary found the harmonic properties of her sample to be “somewhat stereotyped” and “simple...with an occasional complex chord.”<sup>25</sup> The amateur abilities of the intended singers required a simple harmonic approach that used progressions of mainly tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords. While cadential formulas were also fairly basic (e.g., V-I, IV-I, I-V), Beary noted that they were frequently decorated in a characteristic fashion, as exemplified by Figure 3.7.

With regard to her four style categories, Beary found homorhythmic songs to be the most common, followed by songs that mix homorhythmic and antiphonal sections (see Figure 3.8). The latter usually employed an antiphonal texture in the chorus to contrast with a homorhythmic verse, but there were other combinations as well (e.g.,

<sup>23</sup> Ezra B. Knight, interview with Shirley Beary, 5 Apr. 1976, Dallas, TX. Quoted in Beary, “The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company”, 291.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

alternating phrases of homorhythm and antiphony). Songs purely in the antiphonal style occupied Beary's third largest group, while afterbeat song finished fourth. For some reason, Beary does not give the percentage of contrapuntal works in her sample.

Figure 3.7. Measures 15-16 of "Beyond the Starry Sky" (1943), an example of a "decorated cadence" as defined by Beary. The meter is 4/4.<sup>26</sup>

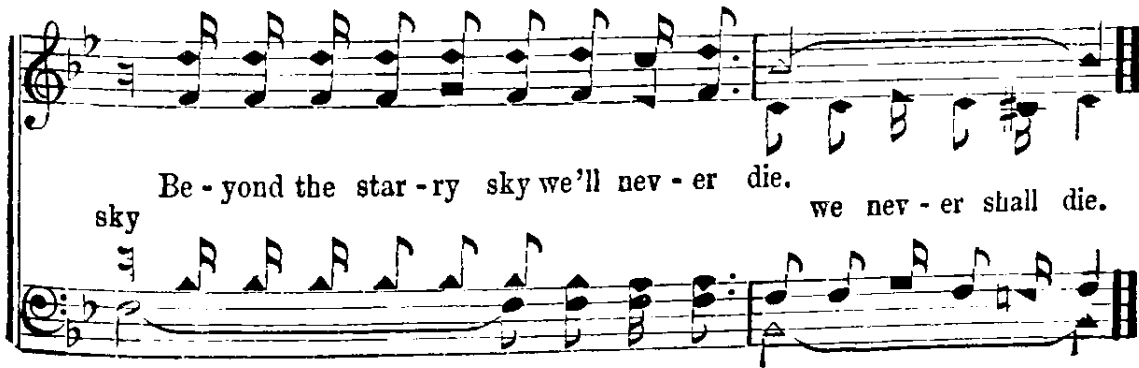
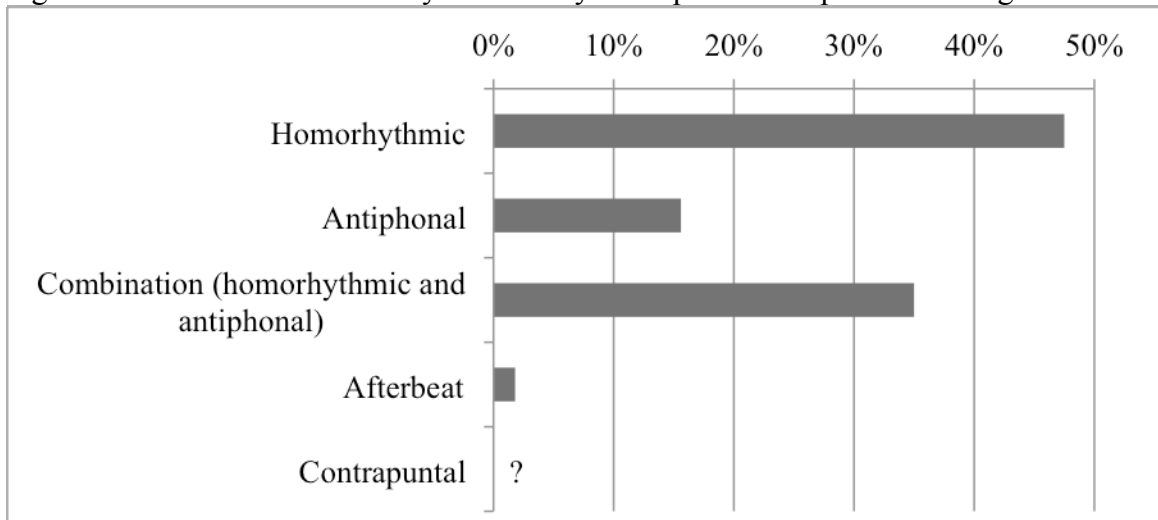


Figure 3.8. The distribution of styles in Beary's sample of Stamps-Baxter songs.



While Beary's study was the first of its kind, her debt to George Pullen Jackson is clear. She cites him liberally, and even borrows some of his terminology in her thematic categories ("brevity of life," "virtues of right living") and her definition of the afterbeat

<sup>26</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Beyond the Starry Sky," number 115 in *Anchored Faith* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1943). According to Beary, decorated cadences "are created by holding the two outer voices for a prescribed number of beats, while the inner voices change and create new harmonies." *Ibid.*, 297.



style. Nevertheless, her findings—namely her examinations of poetic meter, melodic range, and style preferences—are telling and a significant contribution to the study of gospel music.

Musicologist Gregory Straughn recently used large portions of Beary's methodology to analyze the output of Luther G. Presley, Stamps-Baxter's next most important composer after Brumley.<sup>27</sup> Presley joined Stamps-Baxter in 1930 as head of its branch office in Pangburn, Arkansas, and stayed with the company until his death in 1974. He was a regular contributor to the *Gospel Music News*, writing a column simply titled "Arkansas" that reported on anything and everything related to convention singing in the state. By the end of his career, Presley had allegedly written some 1,500 works, including "I'd Rather Have Jesus" (1935) and "I'll Have a New Life" (1940).<sup>28</sup>

Straughn examined 230 songs from across Presley's long composing career. His findings showed an affinity with Beary's, both in key distribution and style preference (Presley was surely one of the more represented composers in Beary's study). However, he took his thematic survey one step further than Beary's by quantifying his results (see Figure 3.9). Straughn has yet to present his research in a form other than a scholarly conference paper, limiting his scope to little more than brief analyses of specific Presley songs. In his study, he details the poetic craftsmanship of Presley's most famous song, "I'd Rather Have Jesus," and highlights the composer's seldom but noteworthy use of minor keys and tonalities. Straughn emphasizes Presley's use of rhythm as "the best indication of his compositional development."<sup>29</sup> To support this assertion, he cites

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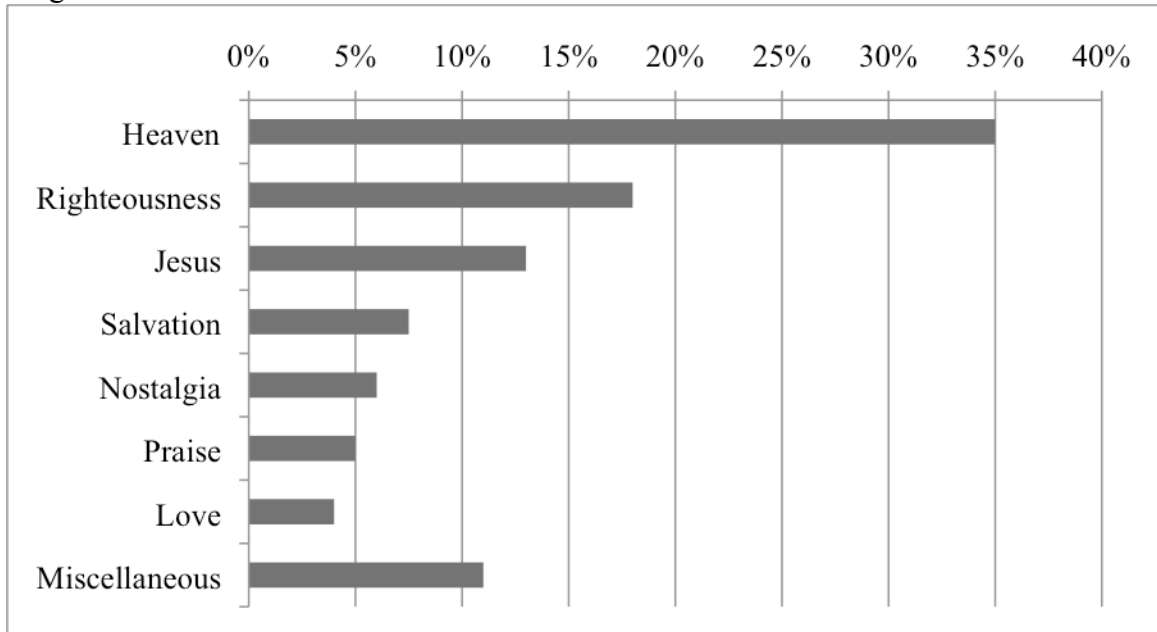
<sup>27</sup> See Gregory Straughn, "Stasis and Change in the Gospel Convention Songs of Luther Presley," (Paper presented at the 29th Christian Scholars' Conference, Nashville, TN: 2009).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

concrete examples of Presley’s melodic writing, rhythmic tone painting, precise text-setting, and polyphonic textures.

Figure 3.9. The distribution of themes in Straughn’s sample of 230 Luther Presley songs.<sup>30</sup>



### A Word on Convention Singing Performance Practice

The shape-note notation used in convention-style gospel singing and singing schools is a seven-shape system first devised by Jesse B. Aikin in 1846.<sup>31</sup> Students learn the shapes in order not only to read music, but also to become prodigious sight-readers. The objective of sight-reading is the reason that newly composed gospel songs are such a critical aspect of the convention singing tradition. Participants pride themselves on their ability to sight-read the most complex gospel songs, replete with difficult syncopations

<sup>30</sup> Straughn qualifies “righteousness” as “often associated with doing good deeds” and Jesus as “usually focusing on [Christ’s] sacrifice.” His “miscellaneous” category includes the following themes, each with fewer than five songs: rapture, grace, prayer, witness, Christmas, guidance, joy, trust, redemption, and thanksgiving. See *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Chapter One gives more history on shape-note pedagogy as well as Aikin’s system and its adoption by shape-note convention songbook publishers.

and intricate antiphonal textures, and they take particular enjoyment in the challenge of tackling each year's new songs.

Thus, the primary reason for the shapes is to enable a student to become a skilled sight-reader in a short amount of time. In convention music, the shapes' purpose generally stops there. Unlike nineteenth-century traditions of shape-note music (e.g., *Sacred Harp*), convention gospel singers normally do not sing through the shapes using the solmization syllables (*do, re, mi*, etc.) before singing a song's text. In this way, the use of shape-notes in convention music remains true to its original intent. It is a pedagogical tool for learning how to read music, not an anachronistic, romanticized ritual in and of itself. If singers know how to read the music, there is no reason for them to sing the shapes. Today, a song leader at a gospel singing or singing convention will occasionally ask participants to "sing the syllables" or "sing the notes" (i.e., sing through the shapes) before singing the text of a particular song, but this is little more than an amusement for the singers and a "tip of the hat" to the music's singing-school heritage.

Convention singers' enthusiasm for sight-reading complex songs explains, to an extent, the music's penchant for antiphonal textures. Passages that spotlight individual parts (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) are a common feature of such textures, not unlike the popular fusing tunes of nineteenth-century shape-note music. As a result of the formal preferences that convention music inherited, namely a strophic verse-refrain form with similarities to 32-bar popular song, the through-composed anthems and longer set pieces found in *The Sacred Harp* and other nineteenth-century shape-note tunebooks became obsolete. In their place, the elaborate antiphonal and contrapuntal writing of the

convention songwriters more than satisfied the need for singers and new singing-school graduates to flex their music-reading muscle.

Another crucial aspect of convention music performance is the piano accompaniment. Present-day singing conventions will always have a piano—and sometimes two or a piano and an organ—accompanying the singing. Like the song leaders, accompanists will take turns, ensuring that all the pianists wishing to play receive an opportunity to do so. Until the 1920s, the pump organ was a more common keyboard instrument used to accompany convention singing, apparently because pianos were not as available in some rural areas.<sup>32</sup> As their affordability increased, pianos quickly became the preferred accompaniment instrument among convention singers. The rise of professional quartet singing, which often included hotshot pianists, also increased the instrument's appeal in addition to influencing the convention-singing style of accompaniment. In this regard, one of the most influential players was Dwight Brock (1907-1988), an Alabama native who joined Stamps-Baxter's top quartet, the Frank Stamps Quartet, in 1927. This was the first major quartet to add a "fifth man." Until then, a quartet's accompaniment, if any, simply fell to one of its existing four members. Frank Stamps forged new territory by hiring Brock as a permanent addition to his quartet as a pianist, first and foremost. Brock's distinctive, rhythmic improvisations revolutionized piano accompaniment in the industry at a time when the ties between quartet singing and convention music were the strongest.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> David Deller interviewed two longtime convention music participants who remarked on the ubiquity of the pump organ as opposed to the piano in the early 1920s. According to one of them, "there were no pianos outside of cities in those days." See David Charles Deller, "Sing Me Home to Gloryland: Arkansas Songbook Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1999), 42, 63.

<sup>33</sup> For more on Brock's influence, see James R. Goff, Jr., *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 121.

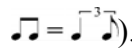
Convention pianists employ particular styles of playing that differ from more typical, prescribed, and unadorned “Sunday-morning” hymn accompaniment techniques. There are two main piano accompaniment styles in convention music. One is called “unit rhythm,” a slower technique possessing similarities to the characteristic gospel piano styles of African-American sacred music traditions.<sup>34</sup> Participants often label the faster accompaniment style as a “swing” or “ragtime” style. Both unit rhythm and the ragtime style heavily utilize a stride-type movement in the left hand, which normally alternates a root/fifth bass line (in octaves) on the strong beats with higher-register chords on the weak beats. The following would be an example of left-hand unit-rhythm stride accompaniment in common time: beat one (root), two (chord), three (fifth), four (chord). In the faster ragtime style, the pianist performs the stride motion with a “double-time” feel, doubling the pulse, for example, from a 4/4 meter to 8/8. In the right hand, convention pianists play a harmonized version of the melody, often incorporating “fill-ins,” or decorative ornamentations. Subdivisions—eighth notes in unit rhythm and sixteenth notes in the double-time style—often reflect a swing interpretation (e.g., ). Improvisation is rampant in convention-style piano accompaniment. The printed songs in the convention songbooks—which only contain the four vocal parts—serve as the only basis for a player’s accompaniment. Furthermore, convention song leaders depend on pianists to play a short introduction—again based on the vocal score—before they bring in the singers.

Figure 3.10 provides an example of convention-style piano accompaniment next to an excerpt of its corresponding song, “Does Your Life Count for God?” The example

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<sup>34</sup> A very good introduction to convention piano style, including discussions of unit rhythm and the faster ragtime style, appears in the recent documentary *I’ll Keep on Singing: The Southern Gospel Convention Tradition*, dir. Stephen Shearon (Middle Tennessee State University, 2010).

comes from *Stamps-Baxter Piano Studies*, an instructional book by Clara Wallace that Stamps-Baxter published in 1947. This accompaniment is in the faster ragtime style, and the fourth full measure displays a typical ornamentation in the right hand—or “fill-in”—at a half-cadence point. Convention pianists would most likely swing the sixteenth notes here.

Figure 3.10. Song excerpt with corresponding convention-style piano accompaniment.

a) Excerpt of “Does Your Life Count for God?” (1946).<sup>35</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the song "Does Your Life Count for God?". It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active right hand with sixteenth-note patterns. The lyrics are printed below the vocal line.

1. As you live your life each day, Do you while your time a -way? Does your  
 2. Do you speak a word of cheer To a down-cast brother here? Does your  
 3. As you jour-ney on the road, To the Sav-ior's blest a -bode, Does your

life count for God each day? When you see a man in need, Are you then a  
 life count for God each day? Do you tell Him of the love Of the Sav -ior  
 life count for God each day? Are you turn-ing err-ing men From the path of

<sup>35</sup> Virgil O. Stamps, “Does Your Life Count for God?,” number 2 in *Shining Path* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1946).

Figure 3.10. (cont.)

- b) Sample piano accompaniment for “Does Your Life Count for God?” copied from *Stamps-Baxter Piano Studies* (1947).<sup>36</sup> Note the double-time stride style in the left hand as well as the “fill-in” (circled) in measure four.

The image shows a piano accompaniment score for the song "Does Your Life Count for God?". It consists of two systems of music. The first system has four measures. The second system has four measures, with the third measure circled. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The right hand plays chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a double-time stride pattern. A circled "fill-in" in the right hand of the third measure shows a triplet of eighth notes.

In convention singing, the piano introductions can have a particularly powerful effect on the singers’ performance of the music. For example, a pianist’s decision to use unit rhythm or the double-time feel of the ragtime style directly influences a song’s performance and rhythmic interpretation. Furthermore, many songs lend themselves well to both styles. Song leaders, like the conductor of an orchestra, will affect a song’s rendition as well. Taken together, these variables of convention music performance—to say nothing of the assorted arrangement styles among professional southern gospel entertainers—make considerations of performance practice an area that deserves its own special course of inquiry. For this reason, these considerations remain outside the scope of the current study, which limits its analyses to the published compositions of Brumley as they exist in printed form.

<sup>36</sup> Clara Wallace, *Stamps-Baxter Piano Studies* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1947), 61.

## The Brumley Thematic Catalogue Criteria

The thematic catalogue of Brumley works used in this study follows the precedent of Jackson, Beary, and Straughn, but it also incorporates many more data fields. In addition to typical publication information (title, author(s), arranger(s), copyright date, book title, publisher), it also records the songbook number assigned to each work's first publication. This allows one to follow the use of "regular" numbers in convention gospel publications and adds insight to the timeline of Brumley's success as a composer.

In terms of musical data, the Brumley catalogue acknowledges the importance of choruses or refrains in his compositions, a trait shared by nearly all conventional gospel music. Not only does the catalogue record melodic incipits for each work, but it does so for the first eight syllables of both the verse *and* refrain. It also contains the first line of text in both the verse and refrain of each song, and a song's entire text—not just the title—determines its theme. In addition to key, the catalogue documents tempo markings, dynamics, meter, and performing forces (solo, solo with piano, duet, quartet, etc.). It bases its textural taxonomy on Beary's, but it uses "homorhythmic" and "antiphonal" instead of "hymn-like" and "convention-style" and measures the verse and the chorus separately. In antiphonal settings, it documents Brumley's general arrangement and the part to which he assigns the melody.

The catalogue supplements a reading of structural length (number of measures) with a classification of form that proceeds from popular-song parlance. An alphabet letter ("A") corresponds to a particular section or phrase with an apostrophe indicating "prime" status, designating close but not exact similarity to a previous section/phrase. Two typical forms used by Brumley are AA'BA' and AA'BB'. The latter is a basic binary form,



while the former—sometimes colloquially called “thirty-two-bar form”—resembles the structure of a *da capo* aria and commonly appears in American popular song of the twentieth century. A related field measures specific end markings (*D.S.*, *Coda*, first and second endings, etc.)

As with most convention gospel music, the harmonic properties of Brumley’s works are fairly static and formulaic. However, the catalogue does include a field that roughly documents the harmonic variety present in a song. For example, a “3” appears in this field for a work that contains only three major harmonic changes (e.g., I, IV, and V). If a song’s refrain begins on a harmony other than the tonic, the catalogue records this as well.

Two final fields document any special indications or traits. The first includes any written material, including dedications, words about the song’s composition, and/or specific performance instructions. The second is a more general field for critical comments and observations, including errors, melodic or textual similarities, and unusual features. Figure 3.11 provides a sample of entry information from the Brumley catalogue for “Life Is Uncertain and Death Is Sure” (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.11. A sample of catalogue entry information for “Life Is Uncertain and Death Is Sure” (see Figure 3.1). A blank field indicates information that is not applicable.<sup>37</sup>

Title	Life Is Uncertain and Death Is Sure
Author(s)	AEB
Composer(s)	AEB
Arranger(s)	
Copyright Year	1931
First Publication	<i>The Garden of Song</i>
First Publisher	Hartford Music Company
Song Number	14
Theme	Death
Verse Melody Incipit	55+2321u11
Refrain Melody Incipit	5+23215u11
Melodic Range	9
Verse First Line	While we stand by the river
Refrain First Line	Life is uncertain and death is sure
Meter	6/8
Tempo Markings	Adagio; rit.
Dynamic Markings	
Key	D-flat major
Harmony at Refrain	I
Verse Texture	Homorhythmic
Refrain Texture	Homorhythmic
Afterbeat	
Length in Measures	16
Form	AA'A''A'
End Markings	
Harmonic Variety	4
Dedications/Instructions	
Special Comments	

### Performing Forces, Key, Meter, and Tempo

Unsurprisingly, Brumley overwhelmingly scored his works for four vocal parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. By the time he was writing songs, improvised piano accompaniment had become standard in both convention singing and quartet

<sup>37</sup> The entire Brumley catalogue is available in Appendix A, with a full explanation of each field. As part of an electronic dissertation, the catalogue is available in a Microsoft Excel file format, enabling interactive user interface that allows custom filtering and reordering of the data. See Appendix A for more information.

performance, and as early as 1931, Brumley began inserting piano cues into his songs (see Figure 3.12). Called “grace notes” by practitioners of convention gospel music, over one quarter of Brumley’s songs contain such cues.

Though rare, there are thirteen Brumley songs written for performing forces other than four voices. Most of these are “sentimental” or nostalgic songs containing a melody with piano accompaniment and/or chord symbols.<sup>38</sup> Some were never even intended for gospel songbook publication (e.g., “Abraham Lincoln,” “Call of the Whipporwill” [*sic*], “Don’t Marry Too Soon”). Others use a quartet on the refrain (Figure 3.12). While there are several Brumley quartet songs that include instances of bass notes doubled at the octave (catering to singers’ ranges), one unique collaboration with Thomas J. Benton (Brumley contributed the text) features a complete six-voice refrain: a duet accompanied by a quartet.

As a composer, Brumley’s key of choice was E-flat major. Of all the songs for which he wrote the music, thirty-one percent are in that key. The next most favored keys are G (21%), B-flat (19%), D-flat (11%), A-flat (10%), C (5%), and F (4%). Similar to Beary and Straughn’s findings, sharp keys (other than G major) and minor keys are mostly absent from Brumley’s body of work. In fact, the only instance of a minor key is an unpublished, manuscript solo song in D minor.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Sentimental” is the word Brumley used to describe his more secular, nostalgic songs with themes of home, mother, childhood, etc.

<sup>39</sup> See Albert E. Brumley, [“I never hear from home anymore”] (n.p., n.d.), AEBS. This manuscript song bears no title, but it heavily uses the refrain “I never hear from home anymore.”

Figure 3.12. Excerpt of “They Are Calling Me Back” (1941), showing a Brumley solo work that uses a quartet in the chorus. Note the optional duet part (small, round notes above the shape-note melody) in the verse, the piano “grace notes” in the chorus, and the nostalgic, “sentimental” text.

**No. 132 They Are Calling Me Back**  
Copyright, 1941, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Ptg. Co.  
A. E. B. in “Super Specials No. 2” Albert E. Brumley

1. Oft in dreams I hear them sweetly calling, Voic - es from the long a - go,  
2. For the old folks I am al-ways yearning, And the days that used to be,

**Chorus**  
Like the evening shadows they are falling, While the lights are burning low. O yes, they're  
That's the way my thots are always turning, For I hear them calling me.

calling me back, To that old ramshackle shack, To that  
cabin of mine beneath the whispering pine, I hear them calling me back,  
I hear a voice that I know And I am longing to go, For in

opt. duet

“grace” notes

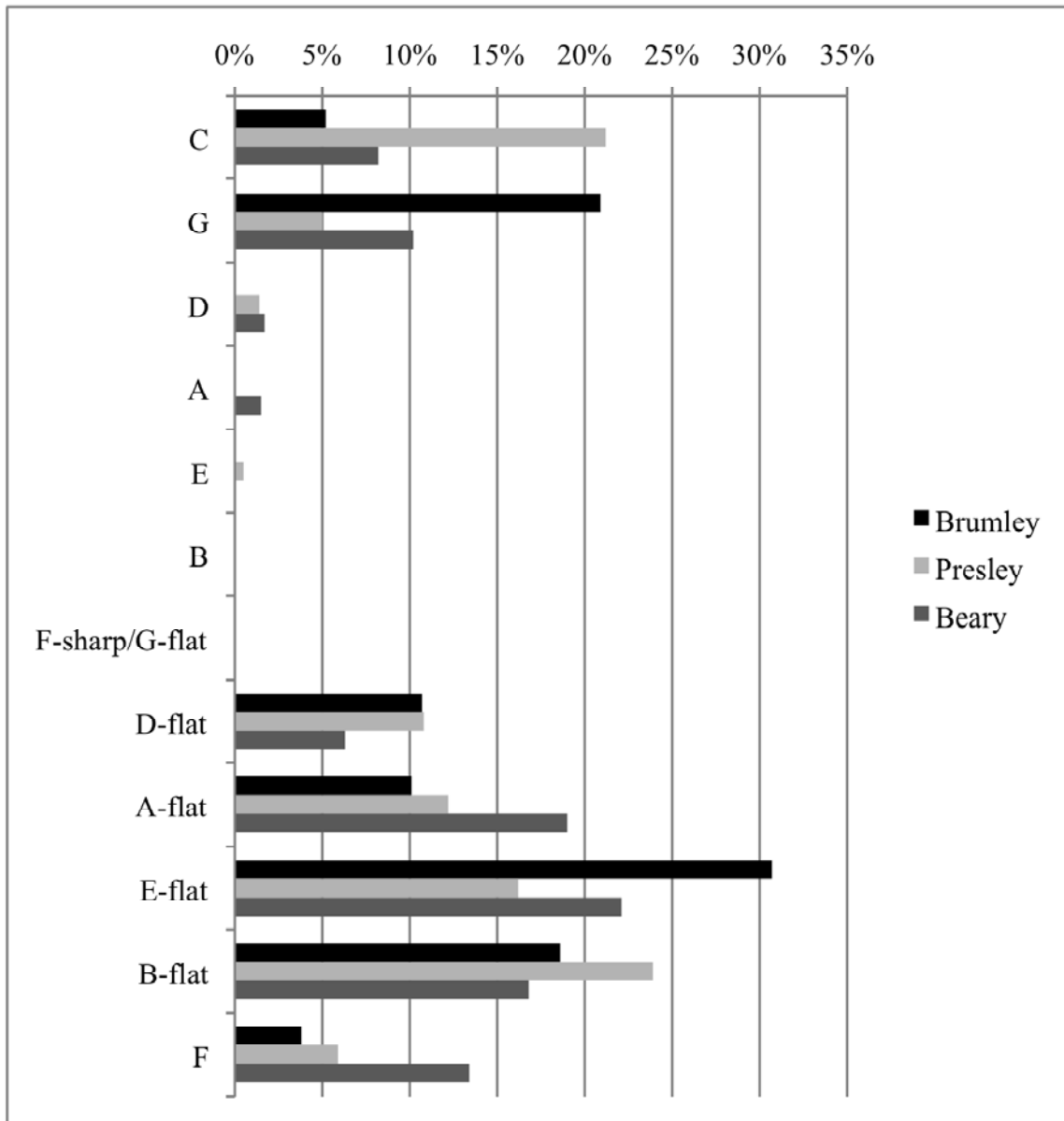
Figure 3.13 compares Brumley's key distribution with Straughn's Presley research and Beary's Stamps-Baxter data. While there are general similarities, one interesting difference is Brumley's significantly greater preference for G major. A possible explanation for this is Brumley's awareness of his music's popularity within secular country music and related genres. He had personal relationships with such country stars as the Delmore Brothers, Charlie Monroe, and Renfro Valley impresario John Lair. In these genres, the guitar—as opposed to the piano—served as the primary mode of accompaniment, and G major was certainly one of the most preferred keys among such guitar players.

While knowing Brumley's key preferences is beneficial to understanding his music, any discussion of key within convention gospel music is a relative matter. When performing, convention singers, song leaders, or pianists typically raise or lower keys at will for greater ease in singing or accompanying. On more than one occasion, Brumley himself specifically addressed such transposition practices in his songs. “Transpose to a lower key if desired,” he wrote beneath the title of “‘Twill Be Sweet When We Meet” (1928), the third song he ever published. In a later work, he inserted a note at the bottom of the page informing singers that a “more spiritualistic effect can be obtained by transposing to [the] key of E-flat and letting alto or high tenor sing the melody all the way thru [*sic*], other parts improvising to obtain full harmony.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “I Cannot Touch the Hem of His Garment,” number 98 in *Higher Ground* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1954).

Figure 3.13. A comparison of Brumley’s major-key distribution with Straughn’s Presley sample and Beary’s Stamps-Baxter data.



Other than Beary’s observation that many songs use “quadruple meter,” neither she nor Straughn examined meter preferences in their samples. Brumley certainly favored simple duple meter, using it in seventy-two percent of his published music (mostly 4/4 with a few cases of 2/4 and 4/8). He also preferred duple groupings when using such

compound meters as 6/8 (13%), 6/4 (6%), and 12/8 (4%). Even his use of 3/4 (6%) often employs two-measure phrasing, maintaining a mostly duple, 6/4 orientation.

Most of Brumley's compositions do not have any tempo indication. Of the twenty percent that do, the few examples from his early career use the common Italian markings of classical scores (e.g., *Adagio*, *Allegro*, *Moderato*). After the mid-1930s, Brumley used English terms—"slow," "lively," "not too fast," etc.—for any tempo instructions. Such terminology is another indication of Brumley catering to his primary audience, rural shape-note singers with little, if any, formal music training.

### **Melody and Harmony**

Although Brumley seemed to have a natural gift for writing simple, lasting melodies, he was also able to hone his craft over years of experience and hundreds of songs. Moreover, he realized very early the importance of understanding the trademarks of successful songwriting. "I got to studying songs at an early age," Brumley said in a 1973 interview. "We'd have these singing conventions and community sings and [we] had a singing class. And I'd notice that certain songs would have a real popular appeal and others, they wouldn't pay any attention to them. And I got to making a study of that—what made those songs click."<sup>41</sup> Brumley undoubtedly discovered within his own writing that certain melodic formulae were more appealing to singers than others. In general, his melodies are heavily pentatonic (*do, re, mi, sol, and la*), but they also contain large doses of chromatic nonharmonic tones, mainly neighboring tones and passing tones.

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<sup>41</sup> Albert E. Brumley, recorded interview with Maxine Sanford, 4 Aug. 1973, Albert E. Brumley and Sons Archive, Powell, MO (AEBS).

One of Brumley’s favorite stylistic conventions was to open a song at the dominant scale degree and then descend to the tonic over the course of the first phrase. This type of melodic contouring occurs in the openings to nearly half of his works, including some of his most widely circulated (see Figure 3.14). Such writing bears the mark of Brumley’s philosophy of simplicity. While his melodies certainly make use of chromatic ornamentations and nonharmonic tones, at their core they reflect a pentatonic approach that was already decades—perhaps even centuries—old. Such writing helped many of Brumley’s songs achieve a certain “timelessness” from the moment they were published.

Figure 3.14. The first melodic phrases from four of Brumley’s most popular works. The melodic contour similarities (bracketed) begin on the downbeat of each phrase. Note also the heavy pentatonicism, use of neighboring tones, and the key preference (E-flat major).

- a) “Jesus, Hold My Hand” (1933).

As I trav-el thru this pil-grim land There is a Friend who walks with me,

- b) “I’ll Meet You in the Morning” (1936).

I will meet you in the morn-ing, by the bright riv-er side,

- c) “Rank Strangers to Me” (1942).

I wan-dered a-gain \_\_\_\_\_ to my home in the moun-tains, \_\_\_\_\_

- d) “If We Never Meet Again” (1945).

Soon we’ll come to the end of life’s jour-ney, \_\_\_\_\_



Brumley also reused more distinctive melodic ideas. The following examples display similarities not only of melodic contour, but also melodic rhythm and textural setting. “I’ll Meet You by the River” (1942) and “It’s Really Surprising” (1948) display how the success of an earlier song likely influenced the composition of a later work (see Figure 3.15). Note the overall similarity of the opening phrases, the alternating verse textures, and the harmonic progression as well as the keys and meters.

“He Was Once a Darling Sweet Baby” (1946) and “God’s Gentle People” (1960) provide another example of reused material (see Figures 3.16 and 3.17). In this case, a revised melody from an unsuccessful earlier song became a popular hit for Brumley during his later years. The latter presents an opening phrase that is almost identical to the former in pitch organization, rhythm, key, and meter, changing only the underlying harmony. The melodic contours of each chorus are also quite similar, as is the overall textural organization of both songs.

In comparison with Beary’s Stamps-Baxter sample, Brumley generally favored wider ranges in his melodies (see Figure 3.18). His preferred range was an octave (32%) or ninth (33%), which, when combined, account for 65% of his melodies. About six percent of his works defy typical melodic range classification, possessing melodies that rotate among a song’s various parts (Figure 3.19). Brumley’s key preferences allowed his melodies to stay mostly within the range of a grand staff, with only rare extensions to the ledger lines above or below.

Figure 3.15. "I'll Meet You by the River" (1942) and "It's Really Surprising" (1948). Note the overall similarity of the opening phrases, the alternating verse textures, and the harmonic progression as well as the keys and time signatures.

40 **I'll Meet You By the River**  
 Dedicated to the memory of E. M. Bartlett, Sr.  
 Copyright, 1942, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Co.  
 in "Lasting Peace" Albert E. Brumley

A. E. B. *Slow*

1. O - ver on the bright e - ly - ian shore Where the howling tempest comes so more,  
 2. Af - ter all the sor - row and the strife, Af - ter all the trou - ble of this life,  
 3. Af - ter all the dis - ap - point - ments here, Af - ter all the shad - ows dis - ap - pear,

I'll meet you by the riv - er Meet you by the riv - er some hap - py day;  
 some sweet day;

Far be - yond the part - ings and the tomb, Where the charm - ing ros - es ev - er bloom,  
 When we gath - er far be - yond the sea, What a hap - py meet - ing that will be,  
 When the evening sun at last goes down, When we go to wear a robe and crown,

I'll meet you by the riv - er Meet you by the riv - er some sweet day.  
 some hap - py day.

**Chorus**

I'll meet you by the riv - er Meet you by the riv - er some hap - py day,  
 some sweet day,

By the bright and shin - ing riv - er so far a - way;  
 By the bright and shin - ing riv - er far a - way;

Ai - ter we have flow - n these prison bars to a ci - ty far be - yond the stars,

I'll meet you by the riv - er Meet you by the riv - er some sweet day.  
 some hap - py day.

42 **It's Really Surprising**  
 (What The Lord Can Do)  
 Copyright, 1948, by The Hartford Music & Printing Co., Inc.  
 in "Grace and Glory" Albert E. Brumley

A. E. B.

1. If you are bur - dened down with care, Take it to Je - sus Christ in prayer,  
 2. When you are lost and cannot see, Je - sus will hear your fee - ble plea,  
 3. If you are wand'ring from the fold He can re - deem your precious soul,

It's really sur - pris - ing Really sur - pris - ing What the Lord can do;  
 What the Lord can do;

He can give glad - ness day and night, He can change dark - ness in - to light,  
 Bless - ings He gives to one and all Who on His precious name will call,  
 Je - sus will be your dear - est friend, He will go with you till the end,

**FINE**

It's really sur - pris - ing Really sur - pris - ing what the Lord can do.  
 what the Lord can do.

**CHORUS**

It's really sur - pris - ing Really sur - pris - ing What the Lord can do,  
 What the Lord can do,

He can make a lost sinner Make a lost sinner Just as good as new;  
 Just as good as new;

**D.S.**

And if you will let Him If you will let Him He will par - don you,  
 He'll par - don you,

Figure 3.16. "He Was Once a Darling Sweet Baby" (1946). Note the melodic similarity with "God's Gentle People" (Figure 3.17), especially in the opening phrase. Also compare the melodic contours of each refrain and the overall textural organization of both songs.

**No. 115 He Was Once A Darling, Sweet Baby**  
 Copyright, 1946, by The Stamps Quartet Music Co.  
 A. E. B. in "Perfect Peace" Albert E. Brumley

**He Was Once A Darling, Sweet Baby**

1. Look - ing back thru the years to a man - ger, In the  
 2. Then the wise men all came to a - dore Him While the  
 3. When you think of the cross on the hill - side Where He

lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem; I can vi - sion a  
 faith - ful shep - herds watched their own; They were led by a  
 died to bring us hope and joy; Just re - mem - ber He

dar - ling, sweet Ba - by, With His moth - er watch - ing o - ver Him.  
 new star in heav - en, 'Twas the bright - est star the world has known.  
 once was a Ba - by, A pre - cious lit - tle ba - by Boy.

**Chorus**

He was a dar - ling, sweet Ba - by, "Might - y  
 He was once a dar - ling, sweet Ba - by, "Might - y like that

like that ba - by of mine," Je - sus  
 ba - by of mine," Je - sus was His Name,

Sweet - est Name e'er spo - ken to man - kind;  
 And the sweetest Name ev - er spo - ken to man - kind;

Sweet  
 Ti - ny lit - tle In - fant so ten - der,  
 Ti - ny lit - tle In - fant so ten - der,

Hands as smooth as un - wrin - kled floss, But those  
 Hands as smooth as un - wrin - kled floss,

Hands were the ver - y same hands, That were nailed to the  
 ti - ny lit - tle hands were the

*Coda rit.*  
 old rug - ged cross. Je - sus the Sav - ior is born.  
 old rug - ged cross.

Figure 3.17. "God's Gentle People" (1960).

**God's Gentle People** 58  
Copyright, 1960, by The Hatfield Music Co. in "Let Us Sing." International Copyright Secured ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

1. When my time comes to cross o'er the riv - er, Where our  
2. Will I sing with the plain, gen - tle peo - ple, That were  
3. O, they say there are cool, gen - tle wa - ters, And the

hearts will nev - er break an - y - more; Will these same gen - tle  
once so near and dear to my heart? Will the same lit - tle  
flow - ers are for - ev - er in bloom; And they say there will

peo - ple be wait - ing; On the banks of that ev - er - green shore?  
chil - ren be play - ing In that land where we nev - er will part?  
be no to - mor - row When God's gen - tle peo - ple get home,

**CHORUS**  
Will I Hear the same voic - es, same gen - tle voic - es,  
the same voic - es,

Drift to the sweet by and by? Will I  
When I drift to the sweet by and by?

**God's Gentle People** 59

See the same fa - ces, same smil - ing fa - ces Riv - er  
See the same fa - ces By the riv - er

that will nev - er run dry? Have the same neighbors,  
that will nev - er run dry? Will I have the

same friend - ly neigh - bors Knew down by the  
same neighbors That I knew down by the side of the

side of the road, God's gen - tle peo - ple, God's gen - tle peo - ple  
road, When God's gen - tle peo - ple

Steal a - way to that bless - ed a - bode?  
Steal a - way to that bless - ed a - bode?

Figure 3.18. Comparison of melodic range between Brumley's musical works and Beary's Stamps-Baxter sample.

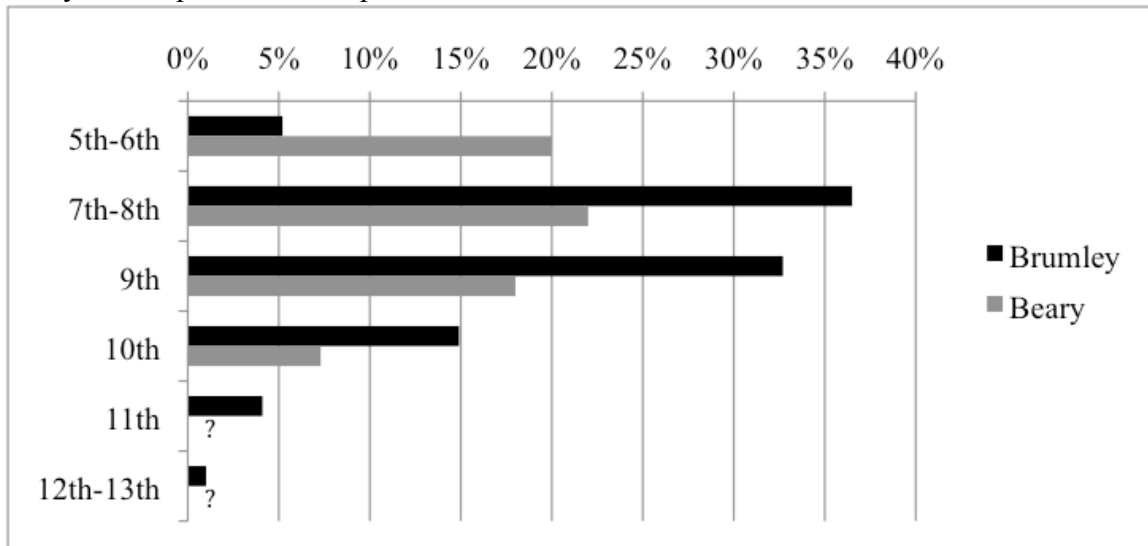


Figure 3.19. Two examples of rotating melodies. Both use a 4/4 meter.

- a) In this more typical case, the melody moves from the soprano to the alto and finally the bass voice.<sup>42</sup>

**Chorus**

The musical score for the chorus of "Heaven's Radio Station" is presented in five systems. Each system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody rotates between the soprano, alto, and bass voices across the systems. The lyrics are: "air, is on the air. Heaven's ra-di-o sta-tion, Sta-tion is on the air, broad-cast-ing from the land of end-less day, Heaven's ra-di-o sta-tion, so far a-way; What a won-der-ful Sta-tion up on high so far a-way; cho-rus, Cho-rus o-ver there, just lis-ten to the voices rich and rare, Heaven's ra-di-o sta-tion..... is on the air. sta-tion..... is on the air."

- b) This excerpt shows a more hocket-like use of melodic distribution.<sup>43</sup>

The musical score for the excerpt of "Twill Be Glory There for Me" is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is distributed in a hocket-like fashion between the soprano and alto voices. The lyrics are: "home-land of the free It will be glo-ry, Glo-ry, glo-ry, glo-ry, glo-ry for me."

<sup>42</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Heaven's Radio Station Is On the Air," number 114 in *Anchored Faith* (1943).

<sup>43</sup> Albert E. Brumley, "Twill Be Glory There for Me," number 115 in *Sunlit Way* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1947).

Although Brumley did not publish any works in minor keys, he did publish a few with melodies that modulate to minor key centers. All of these were later works published after he had established himself as a songwriter. Two songs from the 1960s, “There Is a Higher Power” (1961) and “That Old Country Chapel” (1965), modulate briefly to the relative minor in their refrains. The former (Figure 3.20) does so only to move quickly to C minor—also closely related to the tonic—on its way to a half-cadence midway through the refrain. The latter (Figure 3.21) contains an interesting cadence before the *dal segno*. It resolves to an E-flat harmony that substitutes a sixth (C) for the fifth (B-flat) of the chord and creates an inverted C-minor (iii) sonority, resulting in a slight reworking of the typical half-cadence one would expect here.

One of Brumley’s more interesting uses of the minor mode occurs in “It Seems There’s Nothing but Trouble” (1944). Unlike the other two examples, “It Seems” (Figure 3.22) uses the parallel minor to create a unique modal mixture in the refrain that vacillates between major and minor. While the song is in E-flat major, Brumley’s liberal use of G-flats in the refrain melody—probably for its evocation of blues-like lines and sonorities—creates a number of compelling harmonies, most notably an inverted G-flat major triad (spelled enharmonically) in the third, seventh, and fifteenth measures of the refrain. These chords function as chromatic mediants, coloring and interrupting a progression from tonic harmony to a B-flat dominant-seventh chord. Other harmonies in the refrain that reinforce a minor mode include A-flat minor (ninth measure) and an F dominant-seventh chord with a flatted ninth (eleventh measure).

Figure 3.20. Excerpt of “There Is a Higher Power” (1961). The meter is triple (3/4).<sup>44</sup>

Chorus

Who spun the gold of the sun-rise — that gleams in the morn-ing

sky? — And whose mighty hands framed the rain-bow? 'Twas nei-ther,

you nor I; All hail the mighty King, let all cre - a - tion —

— His Pow'r and His glor-y de - clare, — For high and be-

Figure 3.21. Excerpt of “That Old Country Chapel” (1965), also showing a brief modulation to the relative minor. The B-sharp in the penultimate measure is most likely a misprint that should have been a B-natural. The meter is 3/4.

Fine

way. pray'r. shore.

When it's pray'r meeting time I'll be wend-ing my way,

go.

Down the hol-low to that chap-el to wor-ship and pray For I

unusual half-cadence

<sup>44</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “There Is a Higher Power,” number 100 in *Sing and Rejoice* (Powell, MO: Hartford Music Co., 1961).

Figure 3.22. Excerpt of “It Seems There’s Nothing But Trouble” (1944). The inverted G-flat major harmonies are inside the rectangles. The meter is 4/4.<sup>45</sup>

**Chorus**

The musical score consists of six systems of vocal and piano parts. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "In this trou-ble-some world be-low. Trouble, trouble, and It seems there's nothing but and trouble, trouble, and In this Trouble, in this world be - low, trou-ble-some world be - low, Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble, Lord I It seems there's nothing but heartache from morn'ing till night And Lord I don't know which don't know how to go; way to go; I trust the name of Je - sus my King Trust the name of of And do my best Do my best to smile and sing, Trouble, to to But there is nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble, and and In this Trouble in this world be-low. trou-ble-some world be - low."

Annotations in the score include:

- Rectangles highlighting inverted G-flat major harmonies in the piano accompaniment.
- A box labeled "A-flat minor" pointing to a circled area in the piano part.
- A box labeled "F<sup>7</sup> with flatted ninth" pointing to a circled area in the piano part.

<sup>45</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “It Seems There’s Nothing But Trouble,” number 132 in *Zion’s Call* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1944). In a manuscript version of this song, Brumley uses D-flats instead of C-sharps, further supporting a reading of this harmony as an inverted G-flat major triad.



By and large, convention music displays a fairly static style of harmonic part writing inherited from the gospel hymnody of the latter nineteenth century. Supporting voices—especially the tenor and the bass—might repeat the same note for an entire measure or more (see, for example, the two songs in Figure 3.15). Although “It Seems That There’s Nothing But Trouble” presents one of Brumley’s more adventurous uses of harmony, he generally favored a rather simplified harmonic framework, even by convention gospel standards. According to a 1973 interview, he adopted this approach after studying songs that were popular with convention singers.

I studied William Ramsey’s songs and Bartlett’s songs and old B. C. Unseld that wrote “Twilight is Stealing.” You remember that one? Did you know there’s only two chord changes in that song? That’s a tonic and dominant, tonic and dominant. There’s not even any subdominant in it. Maybe a dominant seventh, but it’s...still dominant.<sup>46</sup>

Eighty-three percent of Brumley’s musical works employ four harmonies or fewer, and thirty-five percent utilize just three chords or fewer. Of the latter, these are usually tonic, subdominant, and dominant (i.e., I, IV, and V) chords as in the case of “I’ll Fly Away,” but occasionally Brumley uses a secondary dominant chord in place of the subdominant. Songs with four different harmonies—his most preferred format—are mostly progressions made from these four chords (I, IV, V/V, and V). The three modulating songs profiled above—“There Is a Higher Power,” “That Old Country Chapel,” and “It Seems There’s Nothing But Trouble”—are all good examples of Brumley’s most complex harmonic writing. His harmonic style did not, as one might presume, become more complex as he gained more experience. On the contrary, he was

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<sup>46</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Sanford, AEBS. The correct title of the song to which Brumley refers here is “Twilight is Falling” (1881), by Aldine S. Keiffer and Benjamin C. Unseld.

experimenting with more advanced harmonic ideas as early as 1934.<sup>47</sup> In sum, Brumley's output reflects a relatively simple harmonic approach sprinkled with the occasional work that pushed the envelope of typical convention gospel harmony.

Examining Brumley's refrains gives another indication of his harmonic simplicity. Over two-thirds of them begin on a tonic chord. Of the rest, most use a subdominant harmony to open the refrain, with only seventeen beginning with an underlying dominant harmony. Only two of his songs do not fall into any of these three categories, "There Is a Higher Power" and "That Old Country Chapel."

### **Form, Structure, and Texture**

The most restricted aspects of composing convention gospel music were undoubtedly structural, namely a work's length and form. The medium of publication largely limited composers to two pages of music or less. All but three of Brumley's songs fit within one or two pages of a convention songbook. The exceptions are two three-page songs—"I Really Ought to Know" (1965) and the relatively popular "I've Found a Hiding Place" (1939)—and one four-page work, "The Christian Caravan" (1956).<sup>48</sup>

Page length does not necessarily reflect a higher or lower measure count. For example, "The Christian Caravan" is thirty-two measures in length, similar to many of Brumley's other works. However, this song uses a 4/4 meter with a melody written in mostly eighth and sixteenth notes, necessitating long measures to accommodate all of the music and text. "There Is a Higher Power," which contains more measures (64) than any

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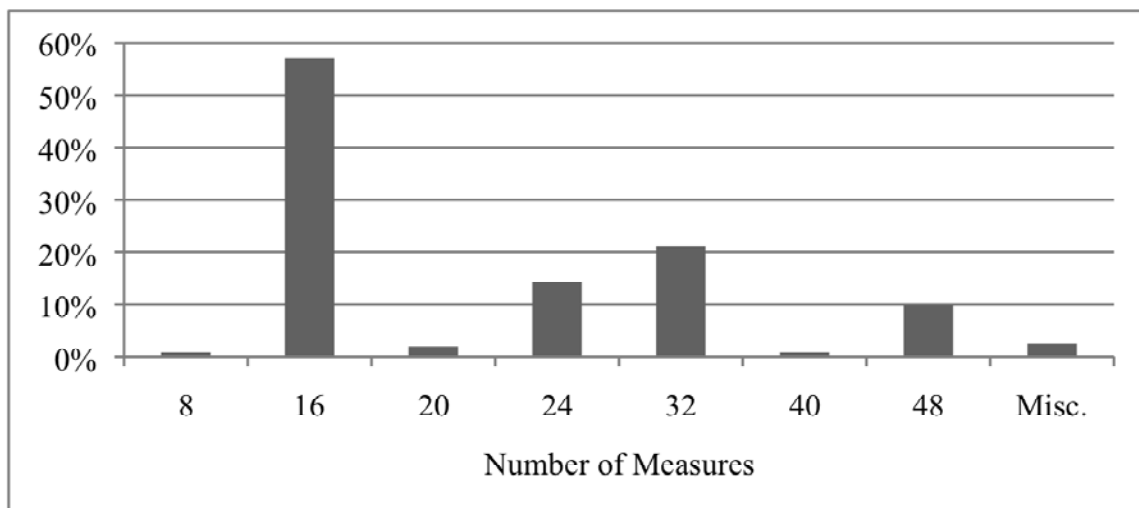
<sup>47</sup> In 1934, Brumley published "When the Sun Goes Down," a song with relatively complex harmonic properties including multiple secondary-dominant chords (diminished and major), relative minor passages, and his first use of the "American sixth" augmented chord.

<sup>48</sup> One of Brumley's lengthiest works was "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to You" (1950), but he published it only for use by professional artists (i.e., not the general public).

of his convention songs, is just two pages. Why Brumley chose to put this particular work in 3/4 instead of 6/4—another meter he frequently used and one which would have cut the measure count in half—is unclear.<sup>49</sup> His longest work is an 80-measure Christmas song that never appeared in a convention songbook and was published only for use by professional artists.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 3.23 graphs the distribution of various measure counts in Brumley’s musical output. As the graph implies, Brumley overwhelmingly composed with balanced, eight-measure phrasing. Only fourteen of his works comprise measure counts indivisible by eight; these include such various lengths as twelve (2), seventeen (2), eighteen (1), twenty (7), twenty-two (1), and twenty-five (1). Most of these unorthodox numbers result from a simple repetition of a refrain’s final phrase, presumably for added emphasis. In addition, Brumley occasionally wrote phrases of more unconventional lengths, as in the six-measure phrasing exemplified in Figure 3.24.

Figure 3.23. Distribution of measure counts among Brumley’s musical works.



<sup>49</sup> Brumley used 6/4 in a compound duple fashion, producing the same basic effect as two combined measures of 3/4 time.

<sup>50</sup> See previous footnote.

Figure 3.24. Excerpt of “That’s the Way I Want to Go” (1936), showing six-measure phrasing (bracketed) in the refrain. The meter is 4/4.<sup>51</sup>

REFRAIN

way I want to go. That's the way..... I want to go, Hal-le-  
That's the way,

lu-jah, Ev-er tell..... ing of the Lord and Master as I la-bor  
ev-er tell-ing

here be-low; Ev-'ry day,..... I'll shout and sing the sto-ry, That's the  
be-low Ev-'ry day,

way,..... I want to go to glo-ry, That's the way I want to go.  
that's the way,

Another heavily prescribed parameter of convention gospel music was a song’s formal structure. In the previously quoted comments by Bernard B. Edmiaston on songwriting, he discusses the verse/chorus format as if it is not just the best way, but also

<sup>51</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “That’s the Way I Want to Go,” number 66 in *Lights of Life* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Co., 1936).

the *only* way. This format limited convention gospel composers to a very homogenized structural approach. Of Brumley's complete works, including collaborations, only six—or less than two percent—have no refrain.

Similar to many conventional gospel composers, Brumley favored verse/chorus forms constructed from two antecedent/consequent periods. Figure 3.15 provides two good examples. To achieve a more specific reading of his organizational conventions, the Brumley thematic catalogue also gives each of his songs a form classification according to section and/or phrase structure. In the case of the examples in Figure 3.15, "I'll Meet You by the River" uses an AABA format, while "It's Really Surprising" mirrors more of an AABB form. Over half of Brumley's songs draw on these two basic forms, with thirty percent using AABB and twenty-five percent using AABA. Other forms that regularly appear in his work are AAAA (9%), AABC (9%), ABB (8%), and AABBCB (2.3%, the most common of his longer forms).<sup>52</sup> Brumley's use of *dal segno* (*D.S.*) end markings in over one-quarter of his songs also testifies to the propensity for repetition in his music.

Figure 3.25 provides a concrete example of just how directly the medium of publication influenced and affected Brumley's composing. "They Crucified My Savior" (1947), in the bottom-right corner of Figure 3.25, is his shortest original work and one of the few that contains no refrain. However, this unique distinction fades when one realizes that the song was almost certainly a "filler," or a short piece written with little more purpose than to fill empty layout space left by a preceding song, in this case "His Blood Will Cover a Multitude of Sins" (1947). With its similarity of key, meter, and almost

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<sup>52</sup> ABB and AABBCB dominate Brumley's 24-measure songs. ABB designates an 8-bar phrase structure (i.e., an *alla breve* or cut time pulse), while AABBCB denotes 4-bar phrasing.

identical concluding phrase, the latter song was undoubtedly meant as an optional companion piece or “coda” of sorts to complement the former.

Figure 3.25. “His Blood Will Cover a Multitude of Sins” (1947) and “They Crucified my Savior” (1947).

**No. 132 His Blood Will Cover a Multitude of Sins**  
 Copyright, 1947, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Ptg. Co. Albert E. Brumley  
 A. E. B. in "Highest Praise"

1. If you nev - er have heard the sto - ry of the Christ of Gal - i - lee,  
 2. God in mer - cy so dear - ly loved the world He gave His on - ly Son,  
 3. If you nev - er have been to Calv - ry where our Sav - ior knelt to pray,  
 If you nev - er have known the glo - ry Je - sus bought on Cal - va - ry,  
 Christ our Sav - ior, who brought sal - va - tion, vict - ry ov - er death He won,  
 If you nev - er have known the blessings Je - sus of - fers you to - day,  
 Just re - mem - ber He shed His pre - cious blood to make the sin - ner free  
 And while bleed - ing up - on the cross He meek - ly said "Thy will be done"  
 Go and plunge you beneath the crim - son fount 'twill wash your sins a - way,  
 And His blood will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins.  
 And His  
 For His your sins, will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins.

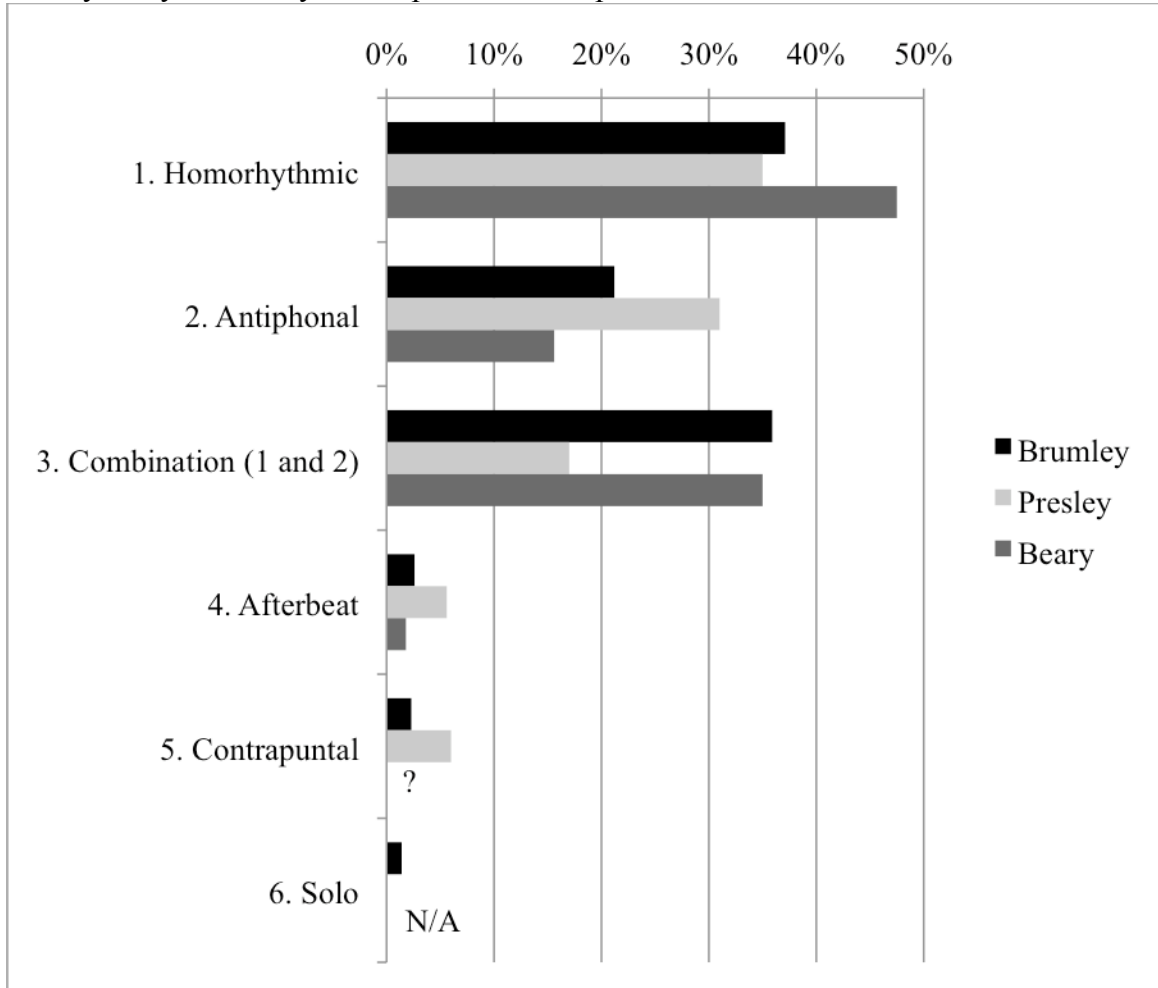
**Chorus**  
 Je - sus' blood will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins,  
 your sins, will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins,

**No. 133 They Crucified My Savior**  
 Copyright, 1947, by Stamps-Baxter Music & Ptg. Co. Albert E. Brumley  
 A. E. B. in "Highest Praise"

1. They cru - ci - fied my Sav - ior, They cru - ci - fied my Sav - ior, They cru - ci - fied  
 2. He died for our sal - va - tion, He died for our sal - va - tion, He died for our  
 3. There's peace and joy in know - ing, There's peace and joy in know - ing, There's peace and joy  
 ad lib.  
 my Sav - ior, And His blood will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins.  
 sal - va - tion, And His blood will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins.  
 in know - ing, That His blood will cov - er a mul - ti - tude of sins.

Figure 3.26 shows the distribution of Brumley’s textural use compared with that of Straughn’s Luther G. Presley study and Beary’s Stamps-Baxter sample. While Brumley matches well with both sets of data, he is closer to Beary’s than Straughn’s, giving a general yet intriguing indication of the different compositional approaches possessed by Brumley and Presley.

Figure 3.26. The distribution of Brumley’s textural use compared with that of Straughn’s Presley study and Beary’s Stamps-Baxter sample.



Brumley’s predilection for antiphonal textures becomes apparent in Figure 3.26. Proceeding from an understanding that any work not completely homorhythmic must contain some degree of antiphonal texture, one could plausibly state that Brumley used such textures in roughly two-thirds of his songs and more than most of his contemporaries (as measured by Beary and Straughn). When combining homorhythmic and antiphonal textures in the same song, Brumley always used the verse as the homorhythmic section. This affords the stanza texts—which do not repeat—more syllabic clarity. If Brumley did use antiphonal textures in the verse, then the entire song

was antiphonal to some degree. When writing in an antiphonal texture, Brumley overwhelmingly preferred placing the melody in the alto or soprano voice. He used bass leads just fourteen percent of the time, and he rarely gave the melody to the tenor voice.

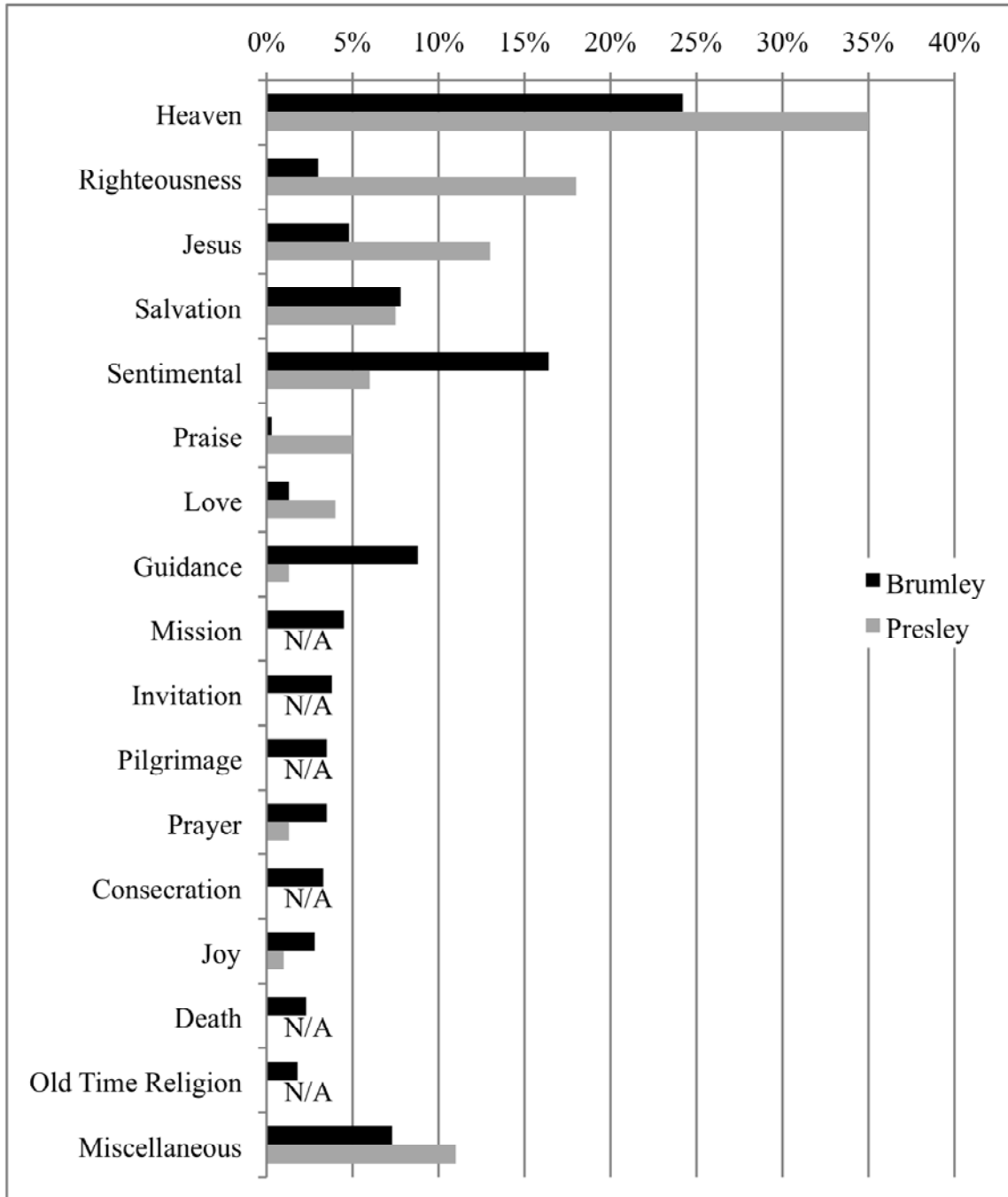
## **Themes**

Brumley wrote over 370 hymn texts on a number of different sacred and secular topics. Figure 3.27 shows the distribution of certain themes within Brumley's texts in comparison with Straughn's data on Luther G. Presley. Although heaven is far and away the most popular theme for both composers, there are some notable differences between them. With regard to sacred themes, Brumley wrote less about Jesus and righteousness (i.e., doing good works) than Presley. Conversely, he authored more texts about divine guidance and pilgrimage (i.e., enduring the Christian journey), an indication of Brumley's greater attention to earthly life in his songs.

One stark distinction is Brumley's fondness for "sentimental" songs, the term the composer used to describe his more secular, nostalgic works (Straughn classifies these as "nostalgia"). Brumley began writing such songs as early as 1930 and continued to write them well into the 1970s, composing 65 in all on a number of different topics. "Rank Strangers to Me" (1942), "Dreaming of a Little Cabin" (1940), "Did You Ever Go Sailin'?" (1938), and "There's a Little Pine Log Cabin" (1937) are some of his best-known sentimental songs. Table 3.1 lists the various themes found among these works and gives examples of each.



Figure 3.27. The distribution of certain themes within Brumley’s hymn texts in comparison with Straughn’s data on Luther G. Presley. In this graph, Straughn’s “nostalgia” category has been replaced with “sentimental,” the term Brumley preferred for such works.<sup>53</sup>



<sup>53</sup> The “miscellaneous” category contains themes appearing in only four songs or less. For Brumley, these include brotherhood, Christmas, faith, forgiveness, grace, judgment, peace, rapture, rebirth (being born again), redemption, society, surrender, thanksgiving, warning, and witness.

Table 3.1. The themes of Brumley’s sentimental songs.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
Church	“That Old Country Chapel” (1965)
The elderly	“We’re Getting Old and Feeble” (1941)
Mother and/or father	“She Was an Old-Fashioned Mother and He Was an Old-Fashioned Dad” (1949)
Home and childhood	“Dreaming of My Childhood Village” (1930)
Love	“My Closest Kin” (1960)
Singing	“They Have a Good Time on Sunday (at the All-Day Singing and Dinner on the Ground)” (1951)
The past	“Memories Come Stealing” (1935)
Patriotism	“Thank God for the U.S.A.” (1942)
South	“Dixie Land’s the Place for Me” (1942)
Work	“Son of the Soil” (1970)

One of the more interesting examples is “Dixie Land’s the Place for Me” (Figure 3.28), containing a refrain that was probably acceptable during the pre-Civil Rights era of the early 1940s but is clearly inappropriate today. The lyrics recall the songs of Stephen Foster, the earlier American songwriter whom Brumley once confessed was a model for his own work.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> In a 1970 newspaper article, Brumley remarked, “Not that I would want to think of comparing myself to someone as great as Stephen Foster, but...Foster wrote his songs in a time of great trouble and sorrow, and the songs inspired the people. Well, then, you see, I happened to come along and start writing my songs in the Depression years, and the songs lifted the people up.” See Billie Jines, “Graphically Speaking,” *Pea Ridge (Arkansas) Graphic*, 29 Oct. 1970, 6-7. This quote appears on page six.

Figure 3.28. “Dixie Land’s the Place for Me.”

28 Dixie Land's The Place For Me

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Renewed 1970. All Rights Reserved. Albert E. Brumley

A.E.B.

Slow

1. I have read a - bout the beau - ties of the South Seas, I have  
2. There's a dear old cou - ple wait - in' down in Dix - ie, 'Tis my  
3. O I hear a "wel-come home" that's ev - er ring - in, And the

read a - bout the cas - tles on the Rhine, But I'm think - in' 'bout the beau - ties  
smil - in' lit - tle moth - er and my dad, And the beau - ty of their fac - es  
whis - tle of the rob - in and the quail, And I hear the voic - es of a

of the pine trees Way down be - low the Ma - son - Dix - on Line; 'Tis a  
lin - ger with me, They are the dear - est friends I ev - er had; Ev - 'ry  
choir a sing - in' Down at the lit - tle chap - el in the vale; In an

gar - den land that na - ture has pro - vid - ed Where ev - 'ry bod - y's  
night they keep a lit - tle light a burn - in' And I'm long - in' for that  
all day sing - in' let me be a "jin - in" And say to ev - 'ry -

jol - ly as can be And I for one have just a - bout de - cid - ed That  
lit - tle light to see For all the while I sit a - round a yearn - in' For  
bod - y "how you be" O "Lawd - y" how this wea - ry one is pin - in' For

Chorus

Dix - ie Land's the place for me. O I'm go - in' back a - gain to dear old  
Dix - ie, Down a - mong the cot - ton and the corn, Where the beau - ty of a  
Southern moon enchants ye And the place where I was born; O lis - ten to those  
Dark - ies har - mo - niz - in', As they "lu - la - by" a Southern mel - o - dy, It  
puts my wea - ry mind to re - a - liz - in' That Dix - ie Land's the place for me.

### Text Meter

Measurements of text meter are crucial in discussions of convention music’s nineteenth-century shape-note predecessor, the four-shape sacred music of *The Sacred Harp* (1844) and similar tunebooks. However, the convention songbook industry’s consistent demand for new songs, coupled with its high regard for intellectual property and copyright law, led to a much more individualized, less uniform style of text meter. In short, tunes became restricted to their accompanying texts and vice-versa. The demand for interchangeability between texts and tunes ceased to exist with convention music,

and, as a result, such composers as Brumley who wrote both the music *and* the words—or hymn writers who wrote both the words *and* the music—were much more commonplace in the industry.

Of her findings regarding the text meter of Stamps-Baxter songs, Beary wrote, “Stamps-Baxter poets made use of the usual meters found in hymns and gospel songs—common meter, long meter, short meter—and a host of other patterns such as 8.7.8.7, 6.6.9.6.6.9, 10.6.10.6. Meter frequently posed a problem for the writers...”<sup>55</sup> Rather than posing a “problem,” perhaps text meter was not a concern for these writers. Furthermore, certain stylistic conventions of the music (contrasting refrains, antiphonal textures with differing texts between parts, etc.) did not accommodate the restrictions of strict text meter.

The five texts in Table 3.2 represent five of Brumley’s most successful songs. They are the same songs excerpted in Figure 3.14 with the addition of “I’ll Fly Away.” None conform to standard text meters. Each meter is unique and bound to its particular tune, as is the case in most of Brumley’s songs. Consequently, measurements of text meter do not play as important a role in examining and evaluating Brumley’s compositional style and thus do not occupy an important parameter in this catalogue.

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<sup>55</sup> Beary, “The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company”, 265.

Table 3.2. One verse and refrain from five popular Brumley songs, showing measurements of text meter in parentheses.

<p><b>“I’ll Fly Away” (1932)</b></p> <p>Some glad morning when this life is o’er, (9) I’ll fly away; (4) To a home on God’s celestial shore, (9) I’ll fly away. (4)</p> <p>I’ll fly away, O glory, (7) I’ll fly away; (4) When I die, Hallelujah, by and by (10) I’ll fly away. (4)</p>	<p><b>“Jesus, Hold My Hand” (1933)</b></p> <p>As I travel thru this pilgrim land (9) There is a Friend who walks with me, (8) Leads me safely thru the sinking sand, (9) It is the Christ of Calvary; (8) This would be my pray’r, dear Lord, each day (9) To help me do the best I can, (8) For I need Thy light to guide me day and night, (9) Blessed Jesus, hold my hand. (7)</p> <p>Jesus, hold my hand, I need Thee ev’ry hour, (11) Thru this pilgrim land, Protect me by Thy pow’r; (11) Hear my feeble plea, O Lord, look down on me, (11) When I kneel in pray’r I hope to meet you there, (11) Blessed Jesus, hold my hand (7)</p>
<p><b>“I’ll Meet You in the Morning” (1936)</b></p> <p>I will meet you in the morning, (8) By the bright river side, (6) When all sorrow has drifted away; (9) I’ll be standing at the portals, (8) When the gates open wide (6) At the close of life’s long, dreary day (9)</p> <p>I’ll meet you in the morning, (7) With a “How do you do” (6) And we’ll sit down by the river (8) And with rapture “auld” acquaintance renew; (10) You’ll know me in the morning, (7) By the smiles that I wear, (6) When I meet you in the morning (8) In the city that is built four square (9)</p>	<p><b>“Rank Strangers to Me” (1942)</b></p> <p>I wandered again to my home in the mountains, (12) Where in youth’s early dawn I was happy and free (12) I looked for my friends but I never could find them, (12) I found they were all rank strangers to me. (10)</p> <p>Ev’rybody I met seemed to be a rank stranger, (13) No mother or dad, not a friend could I see; (11) They knew not my name and I knew not their faces, (12) I found they were all rank strangers to me (10)</p>

Table 2. (cont.)

**“If We Never Meet Again” (1945)**

Soon we’ll come to the end of life’s journey (10)

And perhaps we’ll never meet anymore, (10)

Till we gather in heaven’s bright city (10)

Far away on that beautiful shore (9)

If we never meet again this side of heaven (12)

As we struggle thru this world and its strife, (10)

There’s another meeting place somewhere in heaven (12)

By the side of the river of life (9)

Where the charming roses bloom forever, (10)

And where separations come no more, (9)

If we never meet again this side of heaven (12)

I will meet you on that beautiful shore. (10)

**Conclusion**

With the Brumley thematic catalogue, one can accurately see both the conventions that the composer developed over the course of his career and changes in his general style. One interesting trend that emerges is a penchant for parametrical similarity among works written around the same time. For instance, while some keys (e.g., E-flat and B-flat major) appear en masse throughout Brumley’s output, the less common ones appear in clusters. For example, he used C major quite frequently in the early 1930s and then again several times in the mid-1950s, but it is mostly absent otherwise. D-flat appears in about ten percent of his works, but in 1960, he used it in one-third of the songs he published that year.

Other parameters that exhibit such trends are meter, texture, and especially form. 1941 provides a good example. Out of eighteen Brumley’s songs published that year, fourteen use 16-measure forms. Of these fourteen, twelve use antiphonal textures and

four (over one-quarter) are in the key of G major. All but one are in 4/4, and eight use an AABB form.

There were also gradations of changes in Brumley's style. C major largely disappeared from his work after the early 1930s, at which point G major becomes more common. D-flat major is rather infrequent in Brumley's earlier work, appearing only six percent of the time before 1956. However, from 1956 to 1965, D-flat major is the tonic key in over one-quarter of Brumley's songs. In general, melodic range increases with his later works. With regard to meter, Brumley largely discarded the use of 2/4 in favor of 4/4 after 1940. Following a 1936 collaboration with W. C. Woodward for which Brumley provided the text ("When Jesus Rows Me O'er the Tide"), he began writing songs utilizing a 3/4 triple meter. Subsequently, Brumley's first experiments with 6/4 and 12/8 meters shortly followed his adoption of 3/4.

In addition to a general increase in melodic range over the course of his career, Brumley's works also exhibit subtle harmonic developments. While his harmonic palette may not have become more experimental, he did experiment with harmonic aspects of his formal approach. Before 1941, only seven of his 105 published musical works employed a non-tonic harmony to open the refrain. Beginning in 1941, his use of subdominant and dominant harmonies at the openings of refrains increases dramatically, occurring in one-third of his remaining songs.

While afterbeat textures were quite popular in convention gospel music for a couple of decades, their novelty faded fast after the early 1940s. Likewise, Brumley's use of such techniques drops off entirely after this time. In fact, his overall use of texture was more antiphonal and complex during his early career. For example, most of his

contrapuntal works occurred during the 1930s, and a simpler textural approach—marked by a higher proportion of homorhythmic writing—actually surfaces during his later years.

These changes in Brumley’s style, though relevant, are still rather negligible in consideration of the composer’s larger creative contributions. Relatively speaking, Brumley’s music was of a highly idiomatic and prescribed nature. In addition to being a composer, songwriting was his livelihood. He was under hire—by both himself and others—to write not just gospel songs, but “good” gospel songs. Thus, Brumley had to balance creativity with the necessity of practicality and commercial success. In this regard, one can compile a pretty accurate, objective paradigm of the song “formula” that Brumley preferred and found to be lucrative.

Brumley’s “model” song is one of sole authorship. It has heaven as its thematic subject and has multiple verses with a refrain. It is set in four voice parts (SATB) with a key of E-flat major and a 4/4 meter. Its heavily pentatonic melody opens on the dominant scale degree and covers the range of an octave or ninth over the course of the song, displaying some nonharmonic tones—mainly neighboring and passing tones—along the way. There are no tempo or dynamic markings and the piece does not modulate; even the refrain begins on the tonic harmony. Only four main harmonies surface throughout: tonic, subdominant, dominant, and a secondary-dominant harmony (i.e., V/V). It is sixteen measures long and uses a basic form best described as AABB, setting the stanza to the A sections and the refrain to the B sections. While the multiple stanzas imply *da capo* style repetition, there are no marked repeats or other end markings. The overall texture is likely homorhythmic, although the refrain may use antiphony.



In such a model work as this, there is one common thread that arguably runs through each parameter: simplicity. This comes as no surprise, for Brumley viewed simplicity and accessibility as recipes for success within convention gospel music. Late in life, he himself was very open about this aspect of his compositional philosophy, remarking in a 1969 interview that “basic simplicity has been the earmark of nearly all great songs...the reasoning is simple; they are easier to understand and easier to remember.”<sup>56</sup> Four years later, Brumley touched on this again in another interview.

I just adapted myself to the basics. I never would fool my time away studying all the details. I just wanted the basics. Like chord harmony... I can write some complicated harmony if I wanted to, but I never could put any words to a complicated [song]. I had to stay on the simple side to express the thoughts and the things that my kind of people [felt]. You notice how simple “I’ll Fly Away” is? It’s only got about two or three chord changes in the whole thing.<sup>57</sup>

However, if one applies the simple “model” song described above to the Brumley catalogue, how many matches are there? Just one. Interestingly, it is one of Brumley’s earliest works, “Where the Soul Will Never Die,” written in 1929 (Figure 3.29). Perhaps this confirms that Brumley was already establishing major components of his compositional philosophy during the first years of his career. How successful was “Where the Soul Will Never Die”? Not very. It was published once more around 1935 and never heard from again. Thus, this song is more important for what it implies about his works that *were* successful. In short, understanding the unparalleled popularity and tremendous appeal of Brumley’s composing will require more than simply quantifying the parameters of his music.

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Goff, 96.

<sup>57</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with Sanford, AEBS.

Figure 3.29. “Where the Soul Will Never Die” (1929), the “model” Brumley song.<sup>58</sup>

**No. 108 Where the Soul Will Never Die**  
Albert E. Brumley, owner, 1929

A. E. B. Albert E. Brumley

1. There's a cit - y bright e - ter - nal, In that bless - ed land su -  
 2. O they say there'll be no sor - row, In that bright and sweet to -  
 3. Oft we wan - der here in sad - ness, Long - ing for the peace and  
 4. Loved ones there in snow - y white - ness, Where there's naught but heaven's

per - nal, Where the saints will all be gath - ered by and by; (by and by;  
 mor - row, And they tell me how the snow - white an - gels fly; (an - gels fly;  
 glad - ness, Of that home where we shall nev - er weep or sigh; (weep or sigh;  
 brightness Will be wait - ing just to wel - come us on high; (us on high;)

There the love of God is glow - ing, And the stream of life is flow - ing,  
 Won't that be a hap - py morn - ing, Crowns of love our brows a - dorn - ing,  
 There will be no nights of freez - ing, For there are no chang - ing seas - ons,  
 With what joy we then shall greet them, Hap - py - heart - ed we shall meet them,

FINE

In that cit - y where the soul will nev - er die. nev - er die.

CHORUS

I am bound . . . . . O yes, I'm bound for the land of Ca - naan,  
 for the land of Canaan, yes, I'm

<sup>58</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “Where the Soul Will Never Die,” number 108 in *Matchless Melodies* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Co., 1929). Even this song is not a “perfect” model. The melody spans an 11<sup>th</sup> (not an octave or 9<sup>th</sup>) and the harmonic rhythm contains only three main harmonies: tonic, dominant, and secondary dominant. The only subdominant harmony is a brief passing chord in m. 7. It also uses a *dal segno* marking.

Figure 3.29. "Where the Soul Will Never Die" (cont.).

Go-ing there ..... where none will ever weep, or sigh; And some-  
I am go - ing there

*D. S.*

day ..... I'll rest in peace by the crys-tal riv - er, In that  
some de-light-ful day

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score is in 2/4 time and B-flat major. The vocal line is written in a soprano clef, and the piano accompaniment is in a bass clef. The lyrics are: "Go-ing there ..... where none will ever weep, or sigh; And some- I am go - ing there". The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score continues with the lyrics: "day ..... I'll rest in peace by the crys-tal riv - er, In that some de-light-ful day". The piano part continues with the same accompaniment. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The marking "D. S." is placed above the piano part at the end of the first system.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Peculiar History of an American Gospel Standard, Part I

#### **Introduction: “One of the Most Important Copyrights in All of Music”**

On April 6, 1987, the performing rights organization SESAC held its 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Gospel Music Awards in Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> A highlight of the event was the induction of Albert E. Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” into the agency’s Hall of Fame (see Figure 4.1). SESAC had been representing Brumley’s music (including “I’ll Fly Away”) since 1944, and it had good reason to be thankful. In his introduction to the award, accepted that day by the composer’s widow and son, company vice president Jim Black reflected on the song’s significance, saying, “It is one of the most important copyrights to SESAC. But, more importantly, it is one of the most important copyrights in all of music.”<sup>2</sup> The ceremony concluded with a stirring rendition of “I’ll Fly Away” that included original members of the Chuck Wagon Gang, a group whose 1948 recording helped catapult the song into popularity.

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 1930, SESAC (Society of European Stage Authors and Composers) is the second oldest of America’s three main performing rights organizations, the others being ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) and BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.). While it originally catered specifically to European artists, SESAC soon expanded to include artists from across the globe and has long preferred the acronym as its official name. See “About Us,” SESAC, Inc., <http://www.sesac.com/aboutsesac/about.aspx> (accessed 16 Jan. 2008). While smaller than both ASCAP and BMI, SESAC quickly became the premier performing rights agency for gospel music publishers; by the early 1940s, it had already acquired more of that music than either of its competitors. See David Crawford, “Gospel Songs in Court: From Rural Music to Urban Industry in the 1950s,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 3 (1977): 551-67.

<sup>2</sup> Michael McCall, “Gospel Quintet Earns Lifetime Career Honor,” *Nashville Banner*, 7 Apr. 1987, B1.

Figure 4.1. "I'll Fly Away" as it first appeared in *The Wonderful Message* (1933).<sup>3</sup>

**No. 18                      I'll Fly Away**

A. E. B.                      COPYRIGHT 1932 IN WONDERFUL MESSAGE  
HARTFORD MUSIC CO., OWNER    ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

1. Some glad morn-ing when this life is o'er, I'll fly a -  
2. When the shad-ows of this life have grown, fly a - way  
3. Just a few more wea - ry days and then, fly a - way

way;                      To a home on God's ce - les - tial shore,  
fly a - way;              Like a bird from pris - on bars has flown,  
                                    To a land where joys shall nev - er end,

REFRAIN

I'll fly a - way fly a - way. I'll fly a - way fly a -  
fly a - way fly a - way. fly a - way. fly a - way

way, O glo - ry, I'll fly a - way, fly a - way;              When I die,  
                                    in the morning,

Hal - le - lu - jah, by and by, I'll fly a - way.              fly a - way.  
                                    fly a - way              fly a - way.

<sup>3</sup> *The Wonderful Message: Our 1933 Book for General Use in All Religious Gatherings* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Co., 1933). This version is musically identical to those currently published by Albert E. Brumley & Sons, Inc., except that the misprint in measure twelve—an extra dotted-quarter note-head in the soprano part—has been corrected.

Why was “I’ll Fly Away” such an important copyright? Quite simply, it is one of the most recorded songs in American history, and certainly the most recorded gospel song from the twentieth century. As early as 1975, SESAC began recognizing Brumley for the song’s astonishing number of recordings.<sup>4</sup> In the Winter 1998-99 issue of the company’s magazine, *Focus on SESAC*, a feature article titled “The World Flight of ‘I’ll Fly Away’” again tried to sum up the work’s unprecedented earning power:

If ever a gospel composition rivaled “Amazing Grace” for worldwide supremacy, it is surely “I’ll Fly Away.” By conservative estimate, the song has been recorded at least 800 times. Within the past year, foreign performance royalties for “I’ll Fly Away” have flowed in from Canada, France, Ireland, Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, and Sweden.<sup>5</sup>

The difficulty of tracking releases by local, regional, and small-scale performing groups—a difficulty that has existed at least since the 1950s—makes establishing a conclusive number of commercial recordings virtually impossible.<sup>6</sup> A working database of documented recorded versions of “I’ll Fly Away” from 1940 to 2010 contains over 730 entries, with over 250 from 2000 to 2010 alone.<sup>7</sup> Adding this last number to that

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<sup>4</sup> In 1975, Brumley received a SESAC award for “I’ll Fly Away” as its “Most Recorded Song.” See Paul Stubblefield, “Brumley Is Ozark’s Country/Gospel Songmaster,” *Music City News* 14, no. 10 (1977).

<sup>5</sup> Edward Morris, “The World Flight of ‘I’ll Fly Away,’” *Focus on SESAC* 4, no. 3 (Winter 1998-99): 3. Interestingly, this estimate comes before the resurgence in popularity that “I’ll Fly Away” enjoyed following its inclusion in the platinum-selling soundtrack to the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

<sup>6</sup> Estimates of “I’ll Fly Away” recordings numbering “more than 500” appear as early as 1975. See Gerard Attoun, “Albert E. Brumley: One of America’s Greatest Gospel Songwriters,” *Carthage (Missouri) Press Weekender*, 17 Apr. 1975, 2. However, one must acknowledge the potential for exaggeration in popular press articles such as this one. Nevertheless, by the late 1980s/early 1990s, scholars such as Bill Malone and Charles Wolfe were claiming that “over 500” recordings of “I’ll Fly Away” existed. See Bill C. Malone, “Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer,” *Bluegrass Unlimited* 21 (July 1986): 71; Charles K. Wolfe, “I’d Rather Be an Old-Time Christian’: The Music of Albert E. Brumley,” *Precious Memories* (May-June 1991): 15.

<sup>7</sup> The author began compiling this database—the only known attempt at accurately documenting these recordings—in 2008. It contains 100 entries before 1970, over 200 entries before 1980, over 300 entries before 1990, over 400 entries before 2000, and 250-plus entries alone between 2000 and 2010. The spike over the last decade is likely due to several factors including 1) the increasing ease of not only making do-it-yourself recordings but also distributing them through such online outlets as iTunes and CD Baby; 2) technological improvements in tracking commercial music through such companies as Nielsen SoundScan

published in *Focus on SESAC* would produce an approximation of more than 1,050 recorded versions to date. Even as a “conservative estimate,” this is an astounding number for a sacred song.<sup>8</sup>

Despite such impressive success, these numbers signal much more than just an important copyright. In his recent examination of music in the spiritual lives of Americans, David Stowe writes: “Sacred songs are densely layered artifacts, gathering additional meaning over time. [They] are at once intensely personal yet eminently social documents. . . , performed, experienced, and rewritten in the crucible of religious experience. Hymns can be remarkable linguistic and musical palimpsests.”<sup>9</sup> “I’ll Fly Away” is an extraordinary example of such a palimpsest. Its achievements in commercial music and other mainstream media such as television and film point to something deeper than simply royalty income. They indicate the enormous impact that the song has had on American culture as both an *artifact of* and *factor in* the culture’s relationship with religion during the last eighty years.

This impact is reflected in part by the variety of “I’ll Fly Away” recordings. To be sure, gospel—both white and black—and country artists account for most of them; however, other noteworthy treatments include those by various Delta blues singers, the Boston Pops (with Arthur Fiedler and Chet Atkins), and such individuals as Bob Marley

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and Broadcast Data Systems (BDS); and, more specifically, 3) the inclusion of “I’ll Fly Away” on the platinum-selling soundtrack for the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

<sup>8</sup> By comparison, Scott Reynolds Nelson’s award-winning 2006 book, *Steel Drivin’ Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend*, claims the ballad “John Henry” as “the most recorded folk song in American history” with “almost two hundred recorded versions.” See Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin’ Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2. See also the description on the book’s jacket cover. According to *Guinness World Records*, Paul McCartney’s “Yesterday” is the world’s most recorded song with over 3,000 cover versions in existence. See *Guinness World Records* (Stamford, CT: Guinness World Records, Ltd., 2009).

<sup>9</sup> David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

and Etta James. Even within the last fifteen years, “I’ll Fly Away” has appeared in the recorded output of artists as diverse as Alan Jackson, Kanye West, the Dixie Chicks, Puff Daddy, Jars of Clay, Aretha Franklin, Johnny Cash, and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, as well as in various television and film contexts.<sup>10</sup>

From its beginnings as a 1933 shape-note singing convention favorite to its establishment as an immensely popular “standard” within American sacred and popular music, this is the first of two chapters examining the peculiar history of “I’ll Fly Away” and its impact and manifestations within the bounds of American culture. In this chapter, a careful look at the song’s recording and publishing history rectifies persisting myths concerning its genesis and dissemination, with newly uncovered letters and correspondence from the 1930s giving a clearer picture of the song’s beginnings. By addressing previous historical inaccuracies and factoring in phenomena other than radio transmission and recordings alone, plausible explanations emerge for the song’s early spread and popularity among both whites and blacks. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to enhance understanding of the stylistically and culturally diverse contexts in which “I’ll Fly Away” has circulated as well as the magnitude of its general popularity.

### **Genesis and Publication: Mythology and History**

Public interest in the story behind the writing and publishing of “I’ll Fly Away” naturally increased as the song became universally popular. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this story as told today sounds more like modern legend, and some of the details have no

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<sup>10</sup> More recent television/film examples include NBC’s *I’ll Fly Away*, which aired for three seasons from 1991 to 1993, and the films *The Apostle* (Butcher’s Run Films, 1997), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Touchstone Pictures, 2000), Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 2006), and most recently, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Kennedy/Marshall, 2008).



doubt been stretched for sensational purposes. To what degree the fictionalized aspects can be attributed to Brumley himself will probably never be known, but given his penchant for nostalgia, there is little doubt that he was at least partly responsible.

The popular biography *I'll Fly Away: The Life Story of Albert E. Brumley*, written by Kay Hively with the help of Brumley's son, contains the most complete version of this oft-reproduced narrative. As the story goes, Brumley left his studies at the Hartford (Arkansas) Music Institute after the spring of 1927 and returned home to his family's farm near Rock Island, Oklahoma, presumably to help out in his father's cotton fields. It was during this sojourn that the song was written. The following account is from Hively's biography as told by the composer himself.

“I thought of the theme and started working on it while I was picking cotton in 1928. I was out in the field by myself—or at least there wasn't anyone close to me—and I got to humming this old song, ‘The Prisoner's Song.’

“Where it says ‘if I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly,’ ...well, it suddenly dawned on me that I could use the world for a prison and heaven for freedom when we pass on. And I started working on that theory.

“You'll notice in one stanza of ‘I'll Fly Away’ it says ‘when the shadows of this life have grown I'll fly away...like a bird from prison bars has flown’...I paraphrased that from the old ‘Prisoner's Song.’”

Even though Albert began writing the words to “I'll Fly Away” in 1928, he worked on it for the next three or four years, searching for the right phrasing and the right melody. In the meantime, he returned to school at Hartford... As he explained it later, “I would write a little on it and then lay it up and maybe write on another one some, until something came to me that would seem to fit.”<sup>11</sup>

While the earliest known appearance of this “cotton-picking” anecdote is a 1970 newspaper article, most believe it to be truthful.<sup>12</sup> “The Prisoner's Song,” a secular piece about an inmate longing for his “poor darlin’” and pining for her embrace, had achieved widespread national fame by 1928. Vernon Dalhart's recording of the song, released in

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<sup>11</sup> Kay Hively and Albert E. Brumley, Jr., *I'll Fly Away: The Life Story of Albert E. Brumley* (Branson, MO: Mountaineer Books, 1990), 25-26, 34.

<sup>12</sup> See Billie Jines, “Graphically Speaking,” *Pea Ridge (Arkansas) Graphic*, 29 Oct. 1970, 6.

1924 as the B-side to “The Wreck of the Old 97” (Victor 19427), was a smash hit. It became one of the earliest records to sell a million copies, and it was almost certainly the first country recording to do so. Its success also made Dalhart into country music’s first real star, and he eventually recorded additional versions of “The Prisoner’s Song” for at least a dozen other record companies.<sup>13</sup>

The delay between Brumley’s reported first idea for “I’ll Fly Away” (1928) and the song’s eventual copyright (1932) has led to various discrepancies in dating the work. 1928, 1929, 1931, and 1932 all appear with some regularity in both primary and secondary source material. However, the handful of scholarly writings concerning Brumley tends to date the work by its copyright year, which is the date this study uses as well.<sup>14</sup>

The story behind the publication of “I’ll Fly Away” and Brumley’s ultimate ownership of the song is equally legendary. Since the mid-1960s, various versions of the following account have appeared in Brumley articles and interviews:

“I just couldn’t imagine anyone wanting my songs,” [Brumley] remembers. “But [my wife] Goldie won out, reasoning that I had nothing to really lose by sending a composition or two to a publisher. With the depression hitting

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<sup>13</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 2d rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 64. According to Malone, Dalhart purportedly made “well over a million dollars” in royalty from “The Prisoner’s Song” before his death in 1948 (although he did not write it). See Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 61-64. While many writers have claimed “million-selling” status for various pop songs of the 1920s and 1930s, “The Prisoner’s Song” is one of the few for which this claim can be substantiated. See Allan Sutton, “The ‘Million Seller’ Fallacy: A Reappraisal of 1920s Record Sales”, Mainspring Press Online Resources, <http://www.mainspringpress.com/millions.html> (accessed 11 Dec. 2008).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, David Crawford, “Albert E. Brumley: Ozark Gospel Musician” (paper presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the Sonneck Society, Lawrence, KS: 1982), 3; James R. Goff, Jr., *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 95; Malone, “Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer,” 71, 77; Charles K. Wolfe, *Classic Country: Legends of Country Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 245. Another source of confusion is the song’s publication date. Although copyrighted in 1932, the song’s first publication came in Hartford Music Company’s 1933 convention songbook, *The Wonderful Message*, which would have been released in late 1932 or early 1933. Unless otherwise noted, any reference to a publication date in this study refers to the copyright date of the work in question.

hard at us, I reckoned, finally, she was right, and did send one of my songs to the Hartford Music Company for consideration.”

The letter that came to the Brumley house that hot July afternoon in 1931 from Hartford proved Goldie’s intuition was good, for the song “I’ll Fly Away” was accepted for publication in a new song book, *Wonderful Message*.<sup>15</sup>

Hively’s biography weaves in more—if not slightly different—details:

In 1932, Albert received disappointing news about the new Hartford songbook *Wonderful Message*. “The fella that selected the songs for the books cut me down to one song. But it happened to be ‘I’ll Fly Away.’ He put it on page 18. Over the next few months I’m sure I heard it used at least 20 times in one singing convention after the other. And four or five of the bigtime [*sic*] song leaders followed each other up singing it. That gave me great satisfaction and I was never cut back in the songbooks again,” Albert recalled.

“All I could do was laugh a little bit because I was thankful for it. Also, because I had been cut back to one song, and it turned out to be the most popular song I’d ever written.”<sup>16</sup>

Both of these excerpts begin to show some exaggeration. For one, some of Brumley’s comments imply that “I’ll Fly Away” was his first venture into professional songwriting. In actuality, his first published song, “I Can Hear Them Singing Over There,” appeared in Hartford’s 1927 convention songbook *Gates of Glory*, with at least eleven more compositions appearing in Hartford’s books before 1933’s *The Wonderful Message*.<sup>17</sup> He also co-wrote another eleven published songs during the same period, which means over twenty Brumley works appeared in print before “I’ll Fly Away.” In fact, various other sources claim that Brumley was earning \$12.50/month as a staff songwriter for Hartford at the time that he published “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>18</sup> In sum, Brumley already had a fair amount of success at songwriting before 1933, and while the anecdote about “I’ll Fly Away” being his only song chosen that year is memorable, it is also

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<sup>15</sup> Gene Gideon, “Brumley Music Spans the Generations,” N.p. [c. 1972]. See also “Albert Brumley,” *Music City News* 3, no. 1 (1965): 18.

<sup>16</sup> Hively and Brumley, 116.

<sup>17</sup> One of these, “I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way” from Hartford’s 1932 songbook *Celestial Joys*, went on to become quite popular.

<sup>18</sup> See Paul Stubblefield, “Old Tune Flying High: Gospel Songwriter Revives Ozarks Town,” *Kansas City Star*, 15 Sep. 1976, C1. This detail resurfaces in subsequent literature, including Hively and Brumley, 41.

simply not true. He had *two* songs accepted for *The Wonderful Message*, although the other was certainly more forgettable.<sup>19</sup>

A look at certain correspondence between Brumley and the Hartford Music Company introduces some interesting information with regard to the publication history of “I’ll Fly Away.” After marrying Goldie Schell on August 30, 1931, Brumley left Hartford, Arkansas, and settled in Powell, Missouri. He began working in his father-in-law’s grocery store for \$.50-\$1.00 per day, but he was also seeking advice from his mentor and former boss at the Hartford Music Company, E. M. (Eugene Monroe) Bartlett, on how to best further his songwriting career. In a letter dated November 6, 1931, Bartlett counseled Brumley to hold off on signing a contract with the Stamps-Baxter Music Company and wait for word from the Hartford Music Company.<sup>20</sup> “Better stand hitched for a while,” he wrote, “I believe you will make money in the long run by it.”<sup>21</sup> Bartlett continued, “Think I can handle [selling] some of your manuscripts. When you get a bunch ready send them to me with a price on them and I believe I can handle some for you.”

The following February, another letter from Bartlett confirms that he received manuscripts from Brumley and submitted them to Hartford: “I turned [your songs] over to David [Moore] and Mc [J. A. McClung] with the understanding that they will report on

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<sup>19</sup> The other Brumley song in *The Wonderful Message* is no. 106, “I Wonder What I’ll Do in Glory Land.” It was reprinted at least five more times from 1933 to the present, but this number is quite small in comparison with Brumley’s more popular songs.

<sup>20</sup> The Stamps-Baxter Music Company, headed by Virgil O. Stamps and Jesse R. Baxter and based in Dallas, was another large publisher of shape-note gospel music at that time. Bartlett retired as president of the Hartford Music Company in April 1931. J. A. (John Alexander) McClung succeeded Bartlett, but the latter could not stay away from the business. By January 1932, he was back working for Hartford. See Earl Haynes, “Arkansas Music Publishing Company Finds Depression Has No Depressing Effect Upon Demand for Religious Song Books” ([unknown newspaper], 16 Jan. 1932; reprint, in *Gospel Music Scrapbook: 1922-1939*, Vol. 2, comp. Emmaline Wakefield, 11. Troy, MI: Lee Marks, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> E. M. Bartlett, letter to Albert Brumley, 6 Nov. 1931, Albert E. Brumley and Sons Archive, Powell, MO (AEBS).

them at once... I think they are all dandy.”<sup>22</sup> McClung, the president of Hartford Music Company at the time, wrote Brumley later that month:

Your letter at hand and contents noted and will say in reply that I like your songs and Uncle Tom said they were good... We are having plates made for three and will use more of them if we can. But will do as I told you about buying several if you want to do that. Uncle Tom says we are getting in some of the finest songs we have ever had and that there is no doubt but what we will have a dandy book for 33.<sup>23</sup>

Hartford’s convention songbook for 1933 was *The Wonderful Message*, and McClung was obviously interested in several of Brumley’s songs (as were other top publishers such as Stamps-Baxter). While McClung does not mention the titles of the three songs for which Hartford was making plates, two of them were most likely “I’ll Fly Away” and “I Wonder What I’ll Do in Glory Land,” both of which appeared in *The Wonderful Message*. The other material discussed was perhaps held over for Hartford’s 1934 book, *Gems of Gladness*, which featured three more new Brumley works.<sup>24</sup>

Although Brumley composed “I’ll Fly Away,” Hartford Music initially owned the song’s copyright. In return for the work, Brumley might have received 50-100 copies of *The Wonderful Message*—in addition to any monthly pay—that he could then sell on his own. Brumley did eventually acquire copyright ownership of “I’ll Fly Away,” but the exact date of his acquisition is unclear. A 1936 songwriting contract between the Hartford Music Company (signed by Bartlett) and Brumley states that at the end of the contract—“a period not to exceed five years”—Hartford would agree “to relinquish all claims of ownership to said songs, including all songs of [Brumley] which have [been] previously

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<sup>22</sup> E. M. Bartlett, letter to Brumley, 2 Feb. 1932, AEBS. Moore was Business Manager and McClung was President of Hartford Music Company at that time.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. McClung, letter to Brumley, 20 Feb. 1932, AEBS. The identity of “Uncle Tom” is yet unknown.

<sup>24</sup> The three Brumley songs in *Gems of Gladness* are “When We Sing in the Morning by the River,” “I’ll Sail Away Home Some Sweet Day,” and the famous “Jesus, Hold My Hand.”

published and copyrighted by [Hartford] and to have them assigned to [Brumley].”<sup>25</sup>

However, Hively’s biography carries a different story as told by the composer himself:

“The new owners [of Hartford] had let it go down to nothing. I got word that David Moore (one of the owners) had sold ‘I’ll Fly Away,’ ‘I’ll Meet You in the Morning,’ and ‘Jesus Hold My Hand’ to R. E. Winsett for a hundred dollars. So I got on the phone and called Mr. Winsett, and I said he didn’t have authority to do that because prior to that I had got assignment on those songs from Otis [*sic*] Echols during the year or two that he owned the company. That was a pretty lucky break...I hate to think what would have happened if I hadn’t got those songs...they put a lot of food on the table.”<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of exactly how or when it happened, Brumley officially became a copyright owner of all his Hartford works by the end of 1947, when he purchased—with the help of natural gas tycoon N. J. “Pappy” Gaines—a majority of interest in the Hartford Music Company and became its president.

### **Early Popularity within Convention Singing**

Brumley’s earlier quote mentioned that he heard “I’ll Fly Away” sung “at least 20 times in one singing convention after the other” in the months following its publication.<sup>27</sup>

Unsurprisingly, many sources portray the song as the spark that launched the composer’s career, including Brumley himself in a 1976 interview:

But in 1932 I came out with “I’ll Fly Away,” and that put me on the road. It served as an inspiration to me as well as being a success for the Hartford Music Company, and I just settled down here in the hills of Missouri where it was quiet and then started writing in earnest, and the rest of it is a matter of record.<sup>28</sup>

While the 1930s *was* a period of unprecedented growth for shape-note convention music, there are various indications that “I’ll Fly Away” was not nearly as popular with

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<sup>25</sup> “Contract of Agreement,” Hartford Music Company, 1 Jan. 1936, AEBS.

<sup>26</sup> Hively and Brumley, 120. Winsett headed a gospel music publishing concern in Dayton, Tennessee. Odis Echols was President of Hartford Music Company in 1944.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 18.

<sup>28</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with James Gaskin, 12 Oct. 1976, AEBS.

convention singers as some of Brumley's other works during this time. In several short profiles of the composer published in the late 1930s, "I'll Fly Away" appears as one of his lesser works or not at all. Stamps-Baxter's 1937 *Radio Song Album*—a special songbook that also contained short biographical vignettes of major performers and composers—does not even list it among Brumley's "most popular songs," and neither does a promotional flyer for the 1937 Bartlett School of Music, a three-week summer normal school held in Waldron, Arkansas, at which Brumley lectured on songwriting.<sup>29</sup> Even in a 1944 sales brochure that the composer himself mailed out to advertise his own special songbooks, "I'll Fly Away" does not appear among the fifty or so songs listed to entice customers to purchase the books.<sup>30</sup>

A survey of convention gospel publications in the years following the publication of "I'll Fly Away" supports this evidence. While the song appeared in at least five different songbooks from various publishers through 1937 (five years after its copyright), other, newer Brumley works far outperformed "I'll Fly Away" in this regard.<sup>31</sup> "Jesus, Hold My Hand" (1933) was in at least *eighteen* songbooks by 1937; "I'd Rather Be an Old-Time Christian" (1934), eight books; and "I'll Meet You in the Morning," copyrighted in 1936, was already in ten different books by 1937. "I'll Fly Away" seemed

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<sup>29</sup> See Virgil O. Stamps, *Virgil O. Stamps Radio Song Album* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music Co., 1937), 240. See also "The Bartlett School of Music," (Harrison, AR: E. M. Bartlett, 1937). This flyer is in the files of the W. J. Hamilton Memorial Museum, Hartford, Arkansas. The three "most popular songs" listed in *Radio Song Album* are "Jesus, Hold My Hand," "I'd Like to Go Back," and "There's a Little Pine Log Cabin." See also Ottis J. Knippers, *Who's Who among Southern Singers and Composers* (Hot Springs National Park, AR: Knippers Brothers, 1937), 28. "I'll Fly Away" does appear in Knippers, but it is eighth out of ten songs listed and is in smaller print than the previous seven.

<sup>30</sup> See Brumley, Stamps-Baxter sales pamphlet (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley, [c. 1944]), AEBS.

<sup>31</sup> These numbers include both yearly convention songbooks such as *The Wonderful Message* as well as so-called "special" books, or songbooks printed not specifically for singing school/convention use such as *Sacred Quartets for Men* (Hartford Music Company, 1933), *Albert E. Brumley's Book of Radio Favorites* (Bartlett Music Company, 1937) and *Super Specials* (Stamp-Baxter Music Company, 1940). While convention songbooks mostly contained brand new songs, special books were often collections of new and old favorites from previously published convention books. The author is indebted to B. F. McLemore and his inventoried songbook collection for much of this publishing information.

to gain momentum in the decade that followed. By 1947, it was in thirty-two different songbooks. However, “Jesus, Hold My Hand” and “I’ll Meet You in the Morning” were still far ahead, with both appearing in at least forty-seven books by that same year. “I’ll Fly Away” was a convention hit for Brumley, but it certainly was not his biggest hit at the time.

### **The First Commercial Recording**

Another medium of dissemination that can accurately measure a song’s popularity is commercial recordings. The importance of the Chuck Wagon Gang’s famous 1948 recording of “I’ll Fly Away” in establishing the song as a mainstay within both country and gospel music circles contributed to a long-held myth that the group was the first to record it.<sup>32</sup> However, in the early 1990s the late Charles Wolfe located a much earlier version from 1940, recorded in Fort Worth, Texas, by the Humbard Family for OKeh Records.<sup>33</sup> The performance is a sprightly duet by Rex Humbard and his sister Ruth backed with mandolin, guitar, and bass.

The Humbard Family group, led by future televangelist Rex, rose to prominence during the 1930s in Hartford territory on station KTHS, Hot Springs, Arkansas.<sup>34</sup> The family was soon performing at regional events alongside company quartets from Hartford, Stamps-Baxter, and the Vaughan Music Company (Lawrenceburg,

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<sup>32</sup> This myth is still perpetuated today on the current Chuck Wagon Gang’s website. See “The Chuck Wagon Gang Story - Past to Present”, The Chuck Wagon Gang Official Website, <http://www.thechuckwagongang.net/> (accessed 1 July 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Wolfe, “I’d Rather Be an Old-Time Christian: The Music of Albert E. Brumley,” 17. See also Wolfe, *Classic Country*, 245. The Humbard Family recorded the song on April 17, 1940.

<sup>34</sup> Rex Humbard was one of the first American evangelists to have a weekly nationwide television show. “Cathedral of Tomorrow” first aired in the early 1950s. By 1960, Humbard had built a large church of the same name just outside of Akron, Ohio, from which to broadcast the program.



Tennessee).<sup>35</sup> In 1939, they relocated to Dallas at the request of Virgil O. Stamps and began doing daily and weekly radio broadcasts on stations WRR and KRLD as well as touring the area. Brumley's songs were frequently sung by all of Stamps-Baxter's radio groups—especially after the composer joined the company's staff in 1937—and KRLD was Stamps-Baxter's home station.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Humbard version seems a perfect fit for being, as Wolfe claimed, the first commercial recording of "I'll Fly Away." But, it is not the first.

On February 7, 1940, just ten weeks before the Humbard Family's session, the Reverend J. M. Gates recorded the song in Atlanta, Georgia, for Bluebird Records. A minister at Atlanta's Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Gates was the most well known of the black preachers who made commercial recordings from the 1920s into the 1940s. Now largely forgotten, he recorded some 200 titles for different labels and sold the most records of any such artist.<sup>37</sup> Gates's "sermonettes," as they were often called, centered on his preaching but often incorporated singing, which featured him and a few members from his congregation. His "I'll Fly Away" opens with him exhorting:

Ah, I want to talk to you this morning from a song that I've been a-hearin' so long: "I'll Fly Away." And I've been thinking about that song, and the grammatical phrases of that song. And I want you to sing it, Brother and Sister

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<sup>35</sup> See Ronnie Pugh, "Rex Humbard Family Singers," in *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music*, ed. W. K. McNeil (New York: Routledge, 2005), 316; Jane Scott, "Cathedral of Tomorrow," *Billboard: The World of Gospel Music* (14 Oct. 1967): 20-21.

<sup>36</sup> By 1940, the Stamps-Baxter Company was reportedly sponsoring "more than forty quartets across the country," almost all of which held daily radio programs. See Goff, 122.

<sup>37</sup> See Bil Carpenter, *Uncloudy Days: The Gospel Music Encyclopedia* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2005), 149. According to this article, Gates was also important for "introducing the gospel music of...Thomas Dorsey and others into the black church via his crusades," and his funeral reportedly "drew the largest crowd of any death in [Atlanta] until the passing of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968." Brad McCuen, an A&R producer for RCA Victor during the 1950s and 1960s, also remembered Gates as one of the "leading Negro gospel artists" from the 1920s. See Fred Kirby, "Religious Records Enjoy Longer Sales Life," *Billboard: The World of Gospel Music* (14 Oct. 1967): 16.

Smith. I want you to sing that song. And then I want everybody to help you sing it. Sing it now! Open your mouth and sing!<sup>38</sup>

At this moment the impressive lead singing of Sister Smith begins a spirited *a cappella* performance that also includes an alto, bass, and Gates himself occasionally singing along or shouting “Thank God!” and “Sing it!” and other such exclamations. In some ways, the singing is closer to shape-note convention style than the Humbarb Family’s.<sup>39</sup>

While the chronological discrepancy between the Humbarb and Gates versions of “I’ll Fly Away” is negligible, it begs a larger question. How exactly did Brumley’s song make it from a Hartford convention book onto a record by a black Atlanta preacher in just roughly seven years? While “I’ll Fly Away” is not the first commercial recording of a Brumley work, it is the first one known to be made by an African-American artist.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Gates’s recording does not present the kind of predictable pedigree that the Humbarb version does. One may be quick to acknowledge radio as the chief conduit, but there are other important factors to consider as well.

From 1933 to 1940, “I’ll Fly Away” was published in at least fifteen different songbooks by six different concerns (see Table 4.1). Furthermore, of these fifteen, over half were from either 1939 or 1940. Local shape-note gospel singers—fueled by these songbooks—played a crucial role in popularizing certain songs, particularly in the

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<sup>38</sup> J. M. Gates, “I’ll Fly Away” (Bluebird B8504), reissued on *Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*, Vol. 9: 2 Aug. 1934 to 2 Oct. 1941, J. M. Gates (Document Records, DOCD-5484, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> This is particularly true with regard to the singers’ melodic phrasing, which, for example, maintains the rhythms of a dotted-eighth followed by a sixteenth note, as found in measure two of Brumley’s published “I’ll Fly Away.”

<sup>40</sup> Several other Brumley songs were recorded earlier than 1940. Examples include “I’d Rather Be an Old-Time Christian” (Mount Vernon Quartet, Bluebird, 1934), “Jesus, Hold My Hand” (Prairie Ramblers, Vocalion/OKeh, 1935), and “I’ll Meet You in the Morning” (J. B. Whitmire’s Blue Sky Trio, Bluebird, 1937). There is a 1937 Library of Congress recording of Luther McGee at the State Penitentiary in Parchman, Mississippi, performing a song titled “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” but a transcription of the lyrics shows that this is not Brumley’s song. See Robert M. W. Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records: 1890-1943*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 577.

decades before World War II. Taken together, these publishers represented markets in Arkansas, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, not to mention those beyond their home-state borders.

Table 4.1. Shape-note songbooks, 1933-1940, known to contain “I’ll Fly Away.”

<b>Year</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Songbook Title</b>
1933	Hartford Music (Arkansas)	<i>The Wonderful Message</i>
1935	Parris Music (Alabama)	<i>Charming Bells</i>
1935	Hartford Music	<i>Roses of Spring</i>
1937	Bartlett Music (Arkansas)	<i>Albert E. Brumley’s Book of Radio Favorites</i> <sup>41</sup>
1937	Hartford Music	<i>The Song Wonder</i>
1938	Parris Music	<i>Saints Delight</i>
c. 1938	Hartford Music	<i>Guide to Glory</i> (rev. ed.)
1939	Stamps-Baxter Music (Texas)	<i>Favorite Songs and Hymns</i>
1939	R. E. Winsett Music (Tennessee)	<i>Favorite Radio Gems</i>
1939	J. M. Henson Music (Georgia)	<i>Songs of the Morning</i>
1940	A. J. Showalter Co. (Georgia)	<i>Bells of Heaven</i>
1940	R. E. Winsett Music	<i>Gems of Devotion</i>
1940	Stamps-Baxter Music	<i>Joyful Songs</i>
1940	Hartford Music	<i>The Little Evangel</i>
1940	Parris Music	<i>Sunbeams of Joy</i>

The acknowledged yet still grossly understudied African-American convention-singing communities deserve mention here as well. George Pullen Jackson remarked as early as 1933 (the same year “I’ll Fly Away” was first published) on the “numerous” blacks engaged in seven-shape gospel music and cited reports of conventions in Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, and Arkansas.<sup>42</sup> A recent audio collection documenting various black convention groups active in Alabama noted their preference for Stamps-Baxter books.<sup>43</sup> A 2004 master’s thesis examining the history of seven-shape

<sup>41</sup> From 1938 until the 1950s, Stamps-Baxter took over publishing this special book (see footnote 33).

<sup>42</sup> George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 408-9.

<sup>43</sup> Steve Grauberger, liner notes to *Traditional Music of Alabama, Vol. 2: African American Seven Shapenote Singing* by various artists (Alabama Center for Traditional Culture: No. 202, 2002).

gospel music in a black Missionary Baptist church in Georgia found congregational books published by Showalter, J. M. Henson, and especially Stamps-Baxter.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas A. Dorsey himself reportedly had a formative encounter with shape-note gospel music while growing up in rural Georgia during the early 1900s. His uncle, Corrie M. Hindsman, wrote and published his own songbook and also instituted shape-note singing at the Dorsey family's home congregation, Mt. Prospect Baptist Church in Villa Rica, Georgia.<sup>45</sup> Later in his career, Dorsey recorded such convention favorites as "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again" and formed business relationships with songbook publishers, including R. E. Winsett of Dayton, Tennessee.<sup>46</sup>

The songbook publisher J. M. (John Melvin) Henson is also of particular interest. Based out of Atlanta (where Gates also lived), Henson formed the Morris-Henson Company with Homer F. Morris in the mid-1920s and began publishing convention songbooks.<sup>47</sup> As songwriters and individuals, both Henson and Morris influenced Brumley in his development as a composer and publisher.<sup>48</sup> They were also early supporters of his music. In 1932, Morris-Henson became the first major concern other

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<sup>44</sup> Kuanita Murphy, "From the Brush Arbor to the Sanctuary: The History of the Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church" (master's thesis, Valdosta State University, 2004). See Chapter Five, "Music," accessible online at [www.valdosta.edu/coa/SGFP/findingaid/student/chapter5.html](http://www.valdosta.edu/coa/SGFP/findingaid/student/chapter5.html) (accessed 20 March 2008).

<sup>45</sup> See Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 21-22, 24. Dorsey is the famous black gospel music composer—often called the "Father of Gospel Music"—known for writing such songs as "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" and "Peace in the Valley." According to Harris, *Inspirational Songs* was the title of the songbook published by Corrie Hindsman. It also deserves mention that Dorsey lived in Atlanta from his late childhood through his late teens, or about 1908-1916. J. M. Gates became the minister at Atlanta's Calvary Church in 1914.

<sup>46</sup> Dorsey recorded this famous song—written in 1922 by James Rowe and J. W. (John Whitfield) Vaughan—in 1934. In a 1943 letter, Winsett gave Brumley permission to use the former's arrangement of Dorsey's "Take My Hand," but he recommended that Brumley contact Dorsey to make sure it was okay. "Tell him you are a friend to me," he wrote to Brumley, "and that I am willing for you to have it if he is." See R. E. Winsett, letter to Brumley, 4 Oct. 1943, AEBS.

<sup>47</sup> See Wayne W Daniel, "J. M. Henson, Gospel Music Entrepreneur," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* 57, no. 4 (1996): 147-53.

<sup>48</sup> Hively and Brumley, 41.

than Hartford to publish Brumley's music in its songbooks.<sup>49</sup> Seven years later, the J. M. Henson Music Company (Morris left in 1937) published "I'll Fly Away" in its 1939 book *Songs of the Morning*.

While this fact may seem of little significance, a look at an earlier song published by Henson and its success within African-American gospel music may indicate otherwise. In 1930, Morris-Henson published the song "Happy Am I" in its convention book for that year, *Crowning Hymns No. Ten*. Over the next decade, the song—co-written by Henson and J. E. Marsh—became a gospel hit among African Americans nationwide. In 1943, George Pullen Jackson cited it as exemplary of the current "gospel hymn epidemic" and recounted a bit of its history.<sup>50</sup>

Composed by a clever white gospel songwriter, J. M. Henson of Atlanta. ["Happy Am I"] wandered to Washington D. C., where it became the name and theme song of a radio-famous negro church. And now song, preacher, and singing manner have landed in New York's Harlem and have made a smash hit.<sup>51</sup>

The preacher to which Jackson refers was Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux (c.1885-1968), a black Church of God evangelist who moved to Washington in the late 1920s and subsequently—through the great success of his radio broadcasts over the CBS and Mutual Networks—became one of the best-known African-American preachers in the country. He began using "Happy Am I" as his theme song in the early 1930s, the popularity of which soon led him to dub himself "the 'Happy Am I' preacher" and publish the *Happy News*, a monthly newsletter whose circulation allegedly grew to over

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<sup>49</sup> "I Walk in the New Jerusalem Way" (1932) and "I Want Them to See Christ Jesus in Me" (1932) appeared in Morris-Henson's 1932 book *Songs of Praise No. 1*.

<sup>50</sup> George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kinship* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1943), 273.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

8,000 at one point.<sup>52</sup> As for Jackson's Harlem reference, the Selah Jubilee Singers, a famous black quartet from New York City, did record "Happy Am I" for Decca Records in 1939 (coincidentally, in 1941 this same group became the first professional quartet to record "I'll Fly Away").

Besides songbooks and recordings, popular convention gospel songs had other avenues of dissemination among African-American communities. In 1941 and 1942, John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Alan Lomax made collaborative trips into Coahoma County, Mississippi, to "explore objectively and exhaustively the musical habits of a single Negro community in the Delta."<sup>53</sup> Jointly sponsored by Fisk University (Work and Jones) and the Library of Congress (Lomax), this field study yielded valuable results, including the first recordings of a young blues guitarist/singer named McKinley Morganfield (aka Muddy Waters) as well as two versions of "I'll Fly Away" recorded at churches in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Work, a composer and early ethnomusicologist, wrote a book-length final report in which he mentioned a general disappearance of spirituals from the Delta churches in the face of "the present era of gospel song... which is developing such overwhelming popularity the country over."<sup>55</sup> According to Work, gospel music was spreading "chiefly

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<sup>52</sup> See Rachel Gallaher, "Michaux, Elder Solomon Lightfoot (c. 1885-1968)," BlackPast.org, Quintard Taylor, ed., <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/michaux-elder-solomon-lightfoot-c-1885-1968> (accessed 19 Dec. 2008); Alan Young, *Woke Me up This Morning: Black Gospel Singers and the Gospel Life* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 147-48.

<sup>53</sup> John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, Jr., *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*, ed. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 14. These are Lomax's words as quoted in *Lost Delta Found*.

<sup>54</sup> The project recorded Reverend Ribbins and his congregation singing "I'll Fly Away" in August 1941, in rural Coahoma County. It also recorded a "jubilee quartet" singing the song at Silent Grove Baptist Church, Clarksdale, Mississippi, on July 25, 1942. See Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, 752, 795.

<sup>55</sup> Work, Jones, and Adams, 56. Work mentions Dorsey as "the most prominent figure" with regard to gospel music's influence (p. 56). He expected this report to be published, but it never was. *Lost Delta Found* contains Work's untitled manuscript in its entirety.

by traveling evangelists and professional singers” in addition to “younger ministers” and formally educated “school-preachers” who want “songs in the service accompanied by a piano or organ, especially gospel songs.”<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Work designated “I’ll Fly Away” as a spiritual and speculated that it had originated in the Coahoma County region, even transcribing one of the recorded versions.<sup>57</sup> Lomax’s own account of the Coahoma County study, written around fifty years later, also contains the transcribed text to a version of “I’ll Fly Away” that he claims was sung near the closing of a week-long revival (he gives no location specifics).<sup>58</sup> Both transcriptions unmistakably confirm that these performances were interpretations of Brumley’s song.

Samuel C. Adams, Jr., a graduate student in sociology at the time, also worked on the Coahoma County study as an assistant to Jones, a sociology instructor at Fisk. In particular, Adams researched “changing negro life” on a cotton plantation that bordered the town of Clarksdale.<sup>59</sup> He documented “I’ll Fly Away” as a “favorite” song among both older and younger individuals in his study and also labeled it as a “spiritual.”<sup>60</sup>

While Lewis Jones’s writings from his Coahoma County work do not discuss any

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 56, 113.

<sup>57</sup> The transcription is unattributed. However, it appears alongside another transcription, “I’m Gonna Stay on the Battlefield,” which was also sung by Rev. Ribbins and his congregation (see footnote 54). Thus, Ribbins’s version of “I’ll Fly Away” is more likely the source of Work’s transcription. Interestingly, Work wrote the word “published” in parentheses beside the title on his transcription, and in the aftermath of initial collecting he cited further needs for “accurate bibliographical data on song books...in the area,” a “study of the use and absorption of this material by the folk group,” and information on “shape-note singing groups.” Apparently these needs were never met. See Work, Jones, and Adams, 58-61, 165, 295-96.

<sup>58</sup> Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 105. For all of the colorful descriptions of its performance, Lomax does not comment on the song itself. Even in 1993, Lomax might have still believed that “I’ll Fly Away” originated as a spiritual. He generally disliked modern gospel music and resented it for displacing the spiritual as African-Americans’ sacred music of choice. See Work, Jones, and Adams, 52.

<sup>59</sup> Adams used his research on the King and Anderson plantation as the basis for his 1947 master’s thesis for Fisk University, “Changing Negro Life in the Delta.” The thesis appears reprinted in its entirety in Work, Jones, and Adams, 226-90.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 266, 286. Other convention songs also made Adams’s list of the plantation’s favorites, including “If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again” (also labeled a “spiritual”) and “Just a Little Talk With Jesus” (pp. 266, 268).

specific religious songs, he continued working for the Library of Congress in 1943 and documented yet another version of “I’ll Fly Away” when he recorded a black vocal group—the Lincoln Park Singers—rendering a convention-style performance of the song at a folk festival in Fort Valley, Georgia.<sup>61</sup>

Work’s mention of African-American evangelists as a force for spreading gospel music also deserves more attention. In fact, two southern black ministers from this period became the first to publish “I’ll Fly Away” in a denominational collection (see Figure 4.2). Bishop Mary F. L. Keith published it in *Spiritual Songs and Hymns*, a 1944 hymnbook intended for a Holiness denomination based in Chattanooga called the House of God, Which is the Church of the Living God, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth, Inc. Elder H. C. Jackson of Mississippi also published the song in an early-1940s Church of God in Christ songbook called *The Jackson Bible Universal Selected Gospel Songs*. Interestingly, both printings are unattributed, text-only versions, providing evidence of the song’s oral transmission.<sup>62</sup>

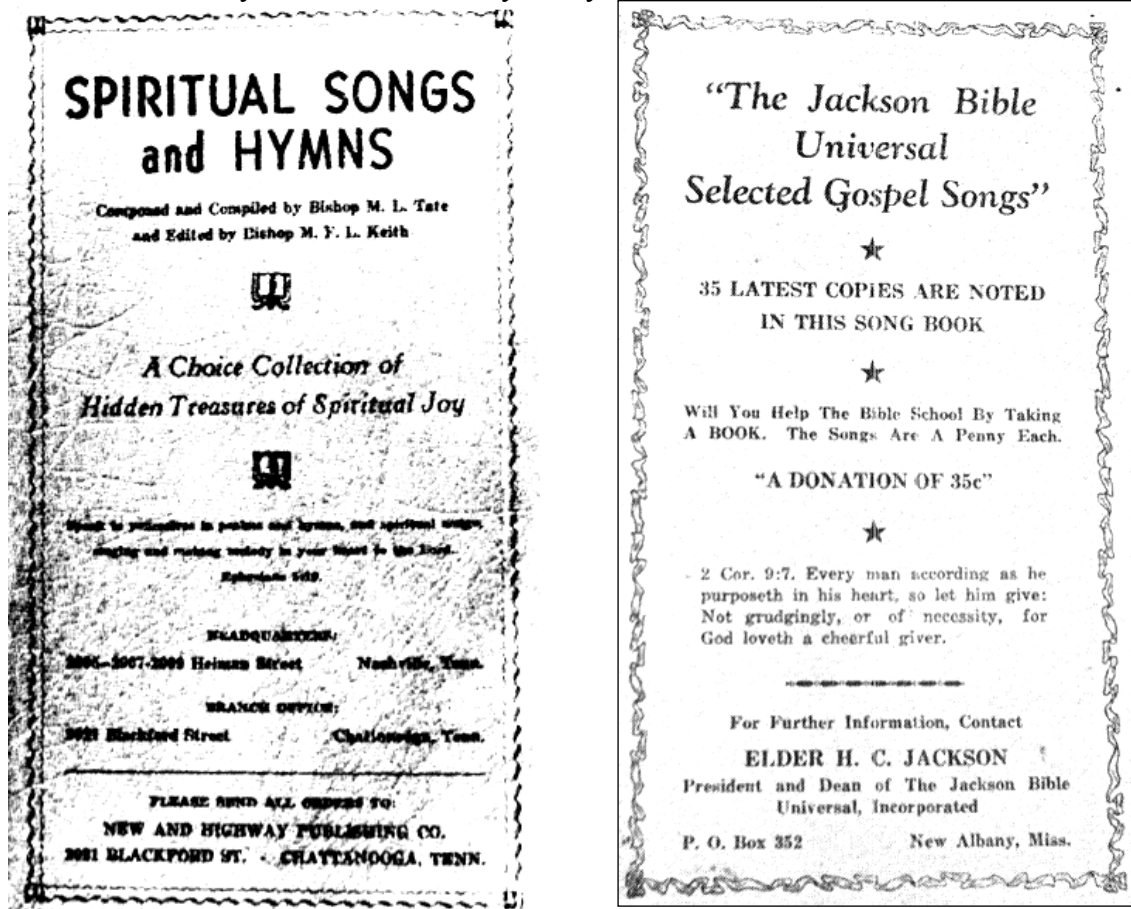
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<sup>61</sup> Jones’s manuscript from his Coahoma County study, “The Mississippi Delta,” also appears in Work, Jones, and Adams, 29-49. The Lincoln Park Singers performed as part of the Fort Valley Music Festival at Fort Valley State College during the summer of 1943. For more information, see Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, 546; “Now What a Time!: Blues, Gospel, and the Fort Valley Music Festivals, 1938-1943,” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ftvhtml/ftvhome.html> (accessed 1 July 2008).

<sup>62</sup> For more on these songbooks and their denominational contexts, see the following: Hugh J. Roberts, “*Spiritual Songs and Hymns*: A Review,” *The Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2, no. 2 (1988): 90-93; Gary Seabron, “*The Jackson Bible Universal Selected Gospel Songs*: A Review,” *The Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2, no. 2 (1988): 96-101; Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody: A Hymnological History of the African-American Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 119-62.



Figure 4.2. Two African-American denominational songbooks from the early 1940s that contained text-only versions of “I’ll Fly Away.”



As early as the mid-1940s, other examples emerge of black American “folk preachers” referencing “I’ll Fly Away” in sermons. According to Keith D. Miller, the oral tradition of folk preaching arose among slaves as a system by which illiterate black preachers passed along common sermons for one another to borrow and use.<sup>63</sup> The following excerpt comes from a 1946 sermon titled “The Eagle Stirring Her Nest” by folk preacher E. O. S. Cleveland who, like Gates, pastored a Baptist church in Georgia:

<sup>63</sup> See Keith D. Miller, “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Folk Pulpit,” *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 120-23.

THANK GOD. I Know How To Fly. Yes—I KNOW How To Fly.  
Yes Yes—Yes—I KNOW HOW TO FLY. DO YOU KNOW HOW TO FLY?...  
Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away.  
To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps more than any of the previous evidence, this sermon excerpt helps explain how Brumley's "I'll Fly Away" ended up in the repertoire of J. M. Gates. Indeed, by 1947 another black "straining preacher," New York City's Reverend B. C. Campbell and his congregation, released another early version of the song.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to evangelists and preachers, Work noted the influence of professional gospel singers as well. Before any of the Coahoma County recordings and just a year after Gates, a black quartet called the Selah Jubilee Singers recorded a more polished "I'll Fly Away" at a Decca Records session in 1941.<sup>66</sup> This release is a milestone for various reasons. In addition to being the first professional quartet recording, it is the first hard evidence that Brumley's song had reached a popularity of nationwide proportion. The Selah Jubilee Singers were based in Brooklyn, New York, and by 1941, they had been singing on local radio—including every Sunday night from their home church—for over a decade. During that same year of 1941, the group moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, and began a morning program on WPTF that was, according to one author, "one of the most popular and influential black broadcasts of that era."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*: 122. Miller cites a printed version of this sermon in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. According to Miller, versions of this sermon date back to "at least as early as the 1860s" (p. 121).

<sup>65</sup> Apollo Records released this 78 rpm recording—backed with "Promised Land"—as Apollo 185.

<sup>66</sup> Released with "Hide Me in Thy Bosom" as Decca 7831.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Sacré, "Selah Jubilee Singers," in *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music*, ed. W. K. McNeil (New York: Routledge, 2005), 333. Other scholars have noted the great influence of the Selah Jubilee Singers. Kip Lornell acknowledged the wide success of the group's WPTF broadcasts in his important book on African-American gospel quartets in Memphis, and Horace Clarence Boyer singled out the ensemble as the only New York City quartet to "become a major force in gospel during the Golden Age." See Horace Clarence Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel* (1995; reprint, *The Golden Age of Gospel*, Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000), 163; Kip Lornell, *"Happy in the Service of the Lord"*:

The Selah Jubilee Singers likely got the song from another quartet of the day. Various sources discuss the ensemble's penchant for appropriation and leader Thermon Ruth's shrewd practice of "taking songs and stylistic details from other groups and adapting them to his own sound."<sup>68</sup> In 1937, a church-sponsored "evangelical tour" took the quartet to Texas, where its members met and exchanged songs with the Soul Stirrers (another famous quartet) in Houston.<sup>69</sup> They also allowed touring groups such as the Dixie Hummingbirds and the Norfolk Jubilees to guest perform on their New York radio shows, providing yet another means of acquiring material. Thus, while multiple African-American quartets were likely performing "I'll Fly Away," the Selah Jubilee Singers represent the first quartet to record it, further spreading the song among subsequent black gospel audiences and performers.

In light of the above considerations, the distinction of Reverend Gates's "I'll Fly Away" as the song's first commercial recording should not be surprising. On the contrary, by 1940 the song was likely circulating widely in Atlanta and the surrounding region—if not nationwide—among African-American communities. In his introduction, Gates himself said that it was "a song that I've been a-hearin' so long."<sup>70</sup> By including songbooks, convention singers, and traveling evangelists and performers along with radio and recording information, this examination offers a fuller explanation for the work's diffusion. As a result, a more complex system emerges of the various methods by which

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*African-American Sacred Vocal Harmony Quartets in Memphis*, 2d ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 25-26.

<sup>68</sup> Ray Funk, *Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*, Vol. 2: 1941-1944/45, Selah Jubilee Singers (CD liner notes. Document Records: DOCD-5500, 1996). See also Sacré, 333.

<sup>69</sup> One of the very first releases by the Selah Jubilee Singers, "I Want Jesus to Walk Around My Bedside" (1939), was a cover of a song recorded just months earlier by the Soul Stirrers, "Walk Around." See Boyer, 164.

<sup>70</sup> See footnote 39.

such convention songs as “Happy Am I” and “I’ll Fly Away” spread among African Americans from the 1930s into the 1940s.

Already by the early 1950s, the foundation was forming for “I’ll Fly Away” to establish itself as a “classic” within America’s black gospel music tradition. The song benefited from the general boom in gospel music—among both blacks and whites—that followed World War II. One major factor in this boom was southern migration. The war “initiated the greatest spatial reorganization of Americans in the nation’s history, and the southerners were at the heart of the process.”<sup>71</sup> Almost 1.5 million blacks left the South for points north and west during the 1940s alone, and they brought with them religious practices cultivated in the heavily Baptist and Pentecostal southern states.<sup>72</sup> Among those practices was gospel music. Baptists—especially independent Baptists—and the Holiness and Pentecostal organizations have “by far the strongest denominational ties” to gospel music, both black and white.<sup>73</sup> J. M. Gates pastored a Baptist church in Atlanta, and the Selah Jubilee Singers’ home congregation was a Holiness church in Brooklyn. The South was also the primary birthplace of black gospel quartet singing, and by 1954 “I’ll Fly Away” had entered the catalogues of such celebrated groups as the Golden Gate Quartet, the Trumpeteers, and the Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama, in addition to those of several lesser-known quartets (see Table 4.2).

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<sup>71</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 32.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. For more on the migration of Baptists and Pentecostals from the South and how they transformed American religion, see Gregory, 197-235.

<sup>73</sup> Goff, 5. For black gospel’s particular ties to Pentecostals and Baptists, see Boyer, 12-29, 41-44; Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*, 5th ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1997), 173-86; Lornell, 147, 154, 190.

Table 4.2. Recordings of “I’ll Fly Away” by African-American performers, 1940-1954.

<b>Release Year</b> <sup>74</sup>	<b>Performer</b>	<b>Record Label</b>
1940	Rev. J. M. Gates	Bluebird
1941	Selah Jubilee Singers	Decca
1941	Rev. Ribbins and Congregation	(Library of Congress)
1942	Silent Grove Baptist Church jubilee quartet	(Library of Congress)
1943	Lincoln Park Singers	(Library of Congress)
1947	Rev. B. C. Campbell and Congregation	Apollo
1949	Golden Gate Quartet	n/a
1951	Southern Sons Quartette	Trumpet
1952	Trumpeteers	OKeh
1953	Colemanaires	Timely
1953	Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama	Specialty
1954	Four Kings of Harmony of Miami	Gotham
1954	Southern Wonders	Peacock

Recordings by both high- and low-profile black gospel groups increased in the following decades, further solidifying “I’ll Fly Away” in the canon of African-American gospel music. Such performers as the Staple Singers, Williams Brothers, Harmonizing Four, Marion Williams, Thomas Whitfield, Carrie Smith, and the Harlem Gospel Singers all released versions. The Blind Boys of Alabama have rerecorded the song twice more since the 1950s, on a 1967 live album and on the more recent *Down in New Orleans* (2008).<sup>75</sup> In 1991, the song appeared on *The Evolution of Gospel*, a landmark release by the group Sounds of Blackness that went gold and won a Grammy for “Best Gospel Album by Choir or Chorus.” “I’ll Fly Away” shows no sign of fading from the genre, either. Since 2000, more than twenty-five African-American gospel artists have released versions of the song.

<sup>74</sup> Except for the Library of Congress recordings, which were not intended for commercial release, this number corresponds to the release date as opposed to the date of recording (in many cases they are the same). Exact recording dates for some of these remain to be found.

<sup>75</sup> The 1967 live album is *Church Concert in New Orleans* (HOB LP 275).

## Beyond the Humbard Family

While gospel songs were able to transcend racial boundaries through channels of publications, performances (both live and over the airwaves), and recordings, the overall music industry of the 1940s largely continued its attempts to keep records and radio in segregated markets. Following the Humbard Family, the next white gospel group to record “I’ll Fly Away” was still not the Chuck Wagon Gang, but rather the Brown’s Ferry Four in September 1946, at a session for King Records. This famous coalition of 1940s country stars—including Merle Travis, Louis Marshall “Grandpa” Jones, and the Delmore Brothers (Alton and Rabon)—operated strictly as a radio and studio group and attained great popularity despite seldom, if ever, touring together. The four men achieved a polished, “country” gospel style that, coupled with their preference for both convention favorites and black quartet songs, made them one of the most popular white quartets of the day.

The Brown’s Ferry Four performed many convention songs, and the hit status of “I’ll Fly Away” within that repertoire surely influenced the group’s decision to record it. In particular, Alton Delmore was certainly familiar with Brumley’s music and no doubt partly responsible for choosing “I’ll Fly Away” and two more Brumley songs at that September session.<sup>76</sup> He had worked as a singing-school teacher and reportedly taught the rest of the Brown’s Ferry Four how to read shaped notes.<sup>77</sup> He was also a gospel songwriter who published in Stamps-Baxter, Winsett, and Hartford books during the 1940s and 1950s. Around 1950, Brumley himself helped Alton publish a Delmore

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<sup>76</sup> The Brown’s Ferry Four also recorded Brumley’s “If We Never Meet Again” and “Salvation has been Brought Down.”

<sup>77</sup> See Gary B. Reid, *Rockin’ on the Waves*, Brown’s Ferry Four (CD liner notes. King Records: 3056-2-2, 1997).

Brothers music folio, and the two even wrote a song together that appeared in Hartford's 1951 convention book, *Light Divine*.<sup>78</sup>

In spite of not being the first, the Chuck Wagon Gang's aforementioned 1948 recording of "I'll Fly Away" is still significant. It sold widely and, in the recent words of scholar Richard Spottswood, gave Brumley's song "a new and permanent country gospel trajectory."<sup>79</sup> Often hailed as the most successful southern gospel group, at one time the Gang was reportedly Columbia Records's second-biggest selling act.<sup>80</sup> The members also claimed Brumley as their favorite songwriter. His work "fit the Chuck Wagon Gang's singing talents like a glove," and the group put more Brumley songs on record than any other artist.<sup>81</sup> According to country music historian Bill Malone, the Chuck Wagon Gang was "probably the most important link between the shape-note gospel tradition and country music..., and [it was] instrumental in introducing the songs of Albert E. Brumley to the country audience."<sup>82</sup>

Malone's point is critical. While religious songs appear in the repertoires of various popular music genres, sacred music is unusually prominent in country music and its offshoots. Gospel expression has been a crucial component of the history and development of country music, inspiring such recent book-length studies as Curtis W. Ellison's *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (1995), Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth's *Honky-Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (2001), and David Fillingim's *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as*

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<sup>78</sup> This was Wayne Raney and the Delmore's *Folk Song Folio* (c. 1950). The co-written song is "I Want to Pull Dat Silver Chord," no. 112 in *Light Divine* (Powell, MO: Hartford-National, 1951).

<sup>79</sup> Dick Spottswood, "James and Martha Carson: 'I'll Fly Away'," in *Goodbye, Babylon* (CD liner notes. Dust to Digital: DTD 1 CDBX, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> McCall, B1. See also Goff, 109.

<sup>81</sup> Bob Terrell, *The Chuck Wagon Gang: A Legend Lives On* (Goodlettsville, TN: Roy Carter, 1990), 54.

<sup>82</sup> Bill C. Malone, "The Gospel Truth: Christianity and Country Music," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 219.

*Theology* (2003). As Malone argues, shape-note convention gospel songs—especially those of Brumley—formed an integral part of such expression in country music.

As a case study, “I’ll Fly Away” provides supporting evidence for this claim. For one, the members of the Brown’s Ferry Four were all country artists first and foremost. In the five years following the Chuck Wagon Gang, more versions from the country music field begin to appear (see Table 4.3). James and Martha Carson, the “Barn Dance Sweethearts,” performed throughout the 1940s on the *WSB Barndance* in Atlanta (J. M. Gates’s hometown) and specialized in performing gospel material. The Maddoxes were a pioneering group from California that achieved great success during the 1940s and early 1950s. The Virginia Trio was made up of future bluegrass luminaries the McReynolds brothers (Jim and Jesse) and Larry Roll. These country performers are the first in a very long and diverse line of secular pop music artists that recorded “I’ll Fly Away” over the next fifty years.

Table 4.3. Recordings of “I’ll Fly Away” by white performers, 1940-1952.

<b>Release Year</b>	<b>Performer</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Record Label</b>
1940	The Humbard Family	Gospel	OKeh
1949	Brown’s Ferry Four	Gospel	King
1949	Chuck Wagon Gang	Gospel	Columbia
c. 1950 <sup>83</sup>	The Humbard Family	Gospel	White Church
1951	James and Martha Carson	Country	Capitol
1951	Maddox Brothers and Sister Rose	Country	4-Star
1952	Virginia Trio	Country	Kentucky

Among early releases of “I’ll Fly Away” by both African-American and white artists, a lull appears during the mid-1940s. There are various explanations for this. The war disrupted industries across the country, and music was no exception. Restricted travel

<sup>83</sup> The exact release date for the Humbard Family’s second version of “I’ll Fly Away” is not known, but the release number shows that it is no earlier than 1949 and probably after 1950. White Church was active during the late 1940s and early 1950s. This second version also appears on a later LP record, *The Humbard Family* (Sacred Records: LP 7022, c. 1955).



(caused by gas and rubber rationing, automobile shortages, etc.) and military service created tough circumstances for many aspiring and established musical groups. In particular, a scarcity of shellac slowed record production during the war. Additionally, a recording ban during 1943 and 1944—resulting from a dispute between the American Federation of Musicians and record companies—nearly halted the business for two years.<sup>84</sup>

However, recordings—as previously shown—were only one factor in the spread of convention gospel songs. While convention singing was popular among some blacks, whites were by far the dominant consumers of shape-note gospel songbooks, and from 1941 through 1950, “I’ll Fly Away” appeared in over thirty-five of them. In addition, at least two prominent southern gospel quartets heard nationally on the radio—the John Daniel Quartet and the Blackwood Brothers—published it in their own promotional songbooks during these years. And barn dance programs—at their peak during the 1940s—also helped disseminate the song via radio. James and Martha Carson on Atlanta’s *WSB Barndance*, the Gloryland Quartet at Renfro Valley, and Red Foley on the Grand Ole Opry all featured the song.<sup>85</sup> Foley liked to sing it during his Saturday-night *Prince Albert Show*, introducing it as “one of the most-loved hymns of all.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, as more commercial recordings began to emerge, “I’ll Fly Away” was already a solid

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<sup>84</sup> This ban did not affect purely vocal, or *a cappella*, recordings that did not involve instrumentalists. However, piano accompaniment was (and still is) an indispensable part of shape-note convention gospel singing, and most commercial performances of “I’ll Fly Away” during this time would have likely included at least one accompanying instrument (e.g., piano or guitar).

<sup>85</sup> The Gloryland Quartet was a staff quartet that performed at Renfro Valley during 1948 and 1949. “I’ll Fly Away” was part of their repertoire. See Kevin D. Kehrberg, “Staff Gospel Quartets at Renfro Valley: 1940-1950,” 2007 Appalachian Music Fellowship Final Report, Hutchins Library, Berea College, <http://www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/specialcollections/amfp/StaffGospelQuartets-Renfro.pdf> (accessed 5 Jan. 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Script for *WSM’s Grand Ole Opry: Prince Albert Show*, 9 Dec. 1950, Frist Library and Archive of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Country Music Foundation, Nashville, TN (CMF). According to these scripts, Foley also sang “I’ll Fly Away” on the same show on January 14, 1950.

favorite both at the convention and on the radio. Radio, at least through the 1940s, dominated the commercial market for white gospel performers.<sup>87</sup>

As with blacks, migration among whites also helped carry “I’ll Fly Away” and other gospel music from the convention-rich areas of the South to other parts of the country. From 1930 to 1950, an astounding 3.6 million whites left the South for the North and West.<sup>88</sup> The family of the Maddox Brothers and Sister Rose, whose mother brought them from Appalachian Alabama to California in the aftermath of the Great Depression, is a prime example. Such migration also both allowed and encouraged the big shape-note publishers to expand outside their base in the South. By 1939, Stamps-Baxter was stationing representatives as far north as Detroit to keep up with the region’s increasing market, and in 1940 the company changed its newsletter’s title from *Southern Music News* to *Gospel Music News* as a way to reflect “subscribers in every state of the union and several foreign countries.”<sup>89</sup> By the mid-1940s, the *Gospel Music News* was featuring “California News” columns, and in a 1948 report from the Fresno area, one visiting representative wrote, “I don’t feel like I am in a strange place at all. For, every singing I attend most of the people I meet are from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Texas.”<sup>90</sup> In retrospect, Brumley could not have been in a better place at a better time to succeed as a convention gospel composer. His songs of the 1930s and 1940s, including “I’ll Fly Away,” were born in one of the hotbeds of convention singing and publishing

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<sup>87</sup> Conversely, scholars have noted how radio’s segregated climate at this time made recordings (i.e., “race” records) more important for the spread of early African-American gospel music. See, for example, Goff, 209; Lornell, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Goff, 90. This quote is from the first issue (March 1940) that featured the new title. According to Goff, the *Gospel Music News* had a circulation of around 50,000 at its height. A. T. Humphries was a Stamps-Baxter representative who spent “many years in Detroit in the Gospel [*sic*] song work” after being sent by Virgil O. Stamps in 1939. See A. T. Humphries, “On the Move with A. T. Humphries,” *Stamps Quartet News* 18, no. 5 (1963): 3.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas J. Farris, “Rambling Tom,” *Gospel Music News* 14, no. 12 (1948): 7.

(the Ozarks and the central southern states) at a time of unprecedented growth and expansion.

Among southern gospel entertainers, the popularity of “I’ll Fly Away” continued to rise during the 1950s and 1960s. By 1960 two of southern gospel’s biggest groups—the Statesmen and the Kingsmen—had included versions on recent albums. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, perhaps due to Brumley’s increased recognition as an important figure in gospel music, many of the biggest names in white gospel released recordings of the song. These included E. Smith “Smitty” Gatlin, Wendy Bagwell, Tony Fontane, Jake Hess, Jim Bohi (whose version received a “Best Sacred Performance” Grammy nomination in 1969), Bill Gaither, the Lewis Family, the Blackwood Brothers, Oral Roberts, and Jimmy Swaggert. Since this time, almost every major southern gospel artist has recorded “I’ll Fly Away” at one time or another, often including it on albums as an “old favorite” or within medleys of classic songs.

The 1970s also saw the song’s appeal expand to contemporary Christian music (or “CCM”), the burgeoning popular sacred music that was emerging as southern gospel’s chief competitor. From early pioneers (the First Nashville Jesus Band, Dino Kartsonakis, the band Truth, and B. J. Thomas) to current CCM chart-toppers (Acapella, Jars of Clay, and Avalon), such artists have welcomed the song into their repertoire. Moreover, the wide variety of genres covered by CCM groups have contributed some of the most varied and modern interpretations of Brumley’s song, comprising such styles as pop, rock, metal, techno/dance, and disco.

## A Sacred Standard in Popular Music

In measuring a popular song's status as a "classic," one often explicitly or implicitly considers both the number and variety of its interpretations. In the case of gospel songs, adoptions by secular artists seem to carry even more weight. If this is true, then the 1950s and 1960s were more important for what "I'll Fly Away" accomplished *outside* the realm of gospel music.

As previously shown, one of the most important genres in this regard was (and still is) country music. In 1959, "I'll Fly Away" began a flood of appearances on albums by top country artists that spilled into the next decade. From 1959 through 1969, Webb Pierce, Faron Young, Red Foley, Jim Reeves, the Stanley Brothers, Roy Acuff, Chet Atkins, George Jones, Porter Wagoner, Ferlin Husky, and Jean Shepard all released versions of the song. Southern gospel's rising popularity during this time—largely resulting from the success of such groups as the Blackwood Brothers and the Statesmen Quartet—surely helped spark this increase (the Statesmen Quartet released its own version of "I'll Fly Away" in 1959).<sup>91</sup>

Since this time, "I'll Fly Away" has remained a favorite sacred song within country music and has consistently appeared on recordings by its most popular performers. A list of only the most legendary superstars still gets rather long: Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Charley Pride, Johnny Cash (twice), Ray Price, the Statler Brothers, Willie Nelson (three times), Crystal Gayle, Loretta Lynn, the Oak Ridge Boys, Merle Haggard (twice), Randy Travis, Tammy Wynette, Charlie Daniels, and Ronnie Milsap.

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<sup>91</sup> The Statesmen's "I'll Fly Away" appeared on 1959's *I'll Meet You by the River* (RCA-Victor, LSP-2065).

Newer celebrities are no exception, either, as evidenced by recent releases from Keith Urban (2004) and Alan Jackson (2006).

However, country is far from the only secular genre that embraced “I’ll Fly Away” as a standard. The 1960s saw recordings by a variety of popular music performers. Folklorists documented the song on recordings by such traditional blues masters as Reverend Gary Davis, Mississippi John Hurt, and Blind Connie Williams. Under the direction of Arthur Fiedler, the Boston Pops performed an arrangement on their “*Pops Goes Country*” album of 1966. Folk icon Carolyn Hester included a version on her 1962 debut album for Columbia that featured a young Bob Dylan playing harmonica. The folk revival band The Highwaymen also recorded the song following the group’s 1961 hit version of “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore.” In 1960, jazz arranger Melvin “Sy” Oliver, of Jimmie Lunsford and Tommy Dorsey fame, incorporated a big band arrangement on his album *Oliver’s Twist*. That same year, jazz and R&B vocalist Lonnie Sattin’s release of “I’ll Fly Away” broke into the “Top 100” of the *Cash Box* best-selling singles charts. At the end of the decade, the Chambers Brothers put a version on the follow-up album to the group’s 1967 top-ten seller *The Time has Come*. Indeed, by 1970 and before it was even forty years old, Brumley’s “little ditty” (as he apparently liked to call it) had arguably already become “timeless.”<sup>92</sup>

As for Brumley himself, the success of “I’ll Fly Away” outside the world of southern gospel and convention singing was certainly not lost on him. While he claimed that he had “never consciously written a country song,” that did not stop him from

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<sup>92</sup> Hively and Brumley, 25.

working to get popular music artists to record his material.<sup>93</sup> In a draft of a letter to SESAC from the 1960s, Brumley wrote:

In regard to any publicity you may give “I’ll Fly Away” in SESAC Bulletins, which all sacred publishers receive, I suggest the following approach: play up the melody of the old “I’ll Fly Away” as having become standard or classic enough to fall into the pop and jazz field, much like “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Play up SESAC WB [Warner Brothers] L. Sattin, Sy Oliver and others, who “recognized” the merits of the melody and decided to arrange and record a “pop” version of the song.<sup>94</sup>

Whether Brumley ever actually mailed such a letter or not, the life of “I’ll Fly Away” within secular popular music only grew more diverse and interesting as the song journeyed through the last quarter of the twentieth century and into the next one. Since 1970, the song has prominently entered into such diverse styles and genres as rock, Cajun, hip hop, polka, New Age, and choral music, as well as continued on in country, pop, folk, jazz, blues, and R&B.<sup>95</sup> Its inclusion on the platinum-selling soundtrack to the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* thrust it into the public spotlight once again, helping spark a flurry of new recordings as “I’ll Fly Away” entered the new millennium.

## Conclusion

From its humble beginnings in the 1930s amidst the flimsy pages of paperback convention songbooks and eager voices of shape-note gospel singers, “I’ll Fly Away” became the most recorded twentieth-century gospel song in history. It spread through not only radio and recordings, but also by singers, preachers, entertainers, and people on the

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<sup>93</sup> Malone, “Albert E. Brumley: Folk Composer,” 76.

<sup>94</sup> A. E. Brumley, draft of letter to SESAC, n.d. [c. 1960s], AEBS.

<sup>95</sup> Examples include Ian Matthews, Ron Wood, Steve Goodman (rock); Bob Marley (reggae); Jo-El Sonnier (Cajun); Sean “Puffy” Combs, Kanye West (hip hop); Jimmy Sturr (polka); the Cincinnati Pops with the Azusa Pacific University Choir (choral); Ray Stevens (pop); Etta James, Preservation Hall Jazz Band (jazz); Mavis Staples, Aretha Franklin (R&B).

move. From its earliest days, it possessed a universal appeal and the power to transcend racial and cultural boundaries. Today it enjoys worldwide fame with printings and recordings in various languages. A more complete history of “I’ll Fly Away”—especially its early history—better explains the stylistic variety and broad cultural significance that the song exemplifies today.

“I’ll Fly Away” has also held the unique ability to move unrestrained within the sacred-secular dichotomy that has characterized American popular music of the twentieth century. Its success in this regard and the variety of genres in which it has succeeded is remarkable. In a largely secularized popular music culture that often frowns upon outward religious display, why has this particular religious song been deemed acceptable? What exactly is it about “I’ll Fly Away” that has made it so popular among so many different people and so many different musical tastes? Using a thorough examination of “I’ll Fly Away” within American public memory supplemented by insights from musical and textual analysis, the next chapter offers plausible explanations for the song’s success. Proceeding from the history outlined in this chapter, it will dissect popular uses and perceptions of the song from the 1930s to the present day, ultimately contributing a more informed understanding of sacred song’s place in American music and culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Peculiar History of an American Gospel Standard, Part II

#### **Introduction: Hip-Hop and Honky-Tonk**

On July 1, 1997, African-American rapper and record producer Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs released his first album as a performer, *No Way Out*.<sup>1</sup> It was an instant hit, debuting at No. 1 on *Billboard* magazine’s “Billboard 200” album chart and selling over 560,000 copies in its first week alone. The album produced multiple chart-topping singles including “Can’t Nobody Hold Me Down” and its crown jewel “I’ll Be Missing You,” which debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s “Hot 100” pop music chart and held the spot for a remarkable eleven weeks during the summer of 1997.<sup>2</sup> Success followed *No Way Out* to the 1998 Grammy Awards, at which it took “Best Rap Album” honors while “I’ll Be Missing You” won for “Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group.”

“I’ll Be Missing You” was, indeed, a masterfully constructed pop package that appealed to consumers through a potent mix of both music and celebrity drama. The song was Combs’s eulogy to Christopher Wallace, a fellow New York City rapper known to the public as “The Notorious B. I. G.” and the top star of Combs’s label, Bad Boy Records. On March 9, 1997, Wallace was the victim of a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles while on a promotional tour for his upcoming album. Many still blame his yet-unsolved murder on a mid-1990s feud between East Coast and West Coast hip-hop artists and fans.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, “I’ll Be Missing You”—complete with a guest vocal by the slain

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<sup>1</sup> *No Way Out*, by Puff Daddy and the Family (Bad Boy Records ARCD 3012, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Ronin Ro, *Bad Boy: The Influence of Sean "Puffy" Combs on the Music Industry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 106, 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-102.



rapper's widow, R&B singer Faith Evans—was an ingeniously timed release that tapped widespread public grievance over Wallace's untimely death.

The music of "I'll Be Missing You" represents a surprising cornucopia of styles and references. The song opens with an excerpt from the beginning of Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei* op. 11, a 1967 choral arrangement of the famous *Adagio* movement from the composer's String Quartet. With the choir in the background, Combs gives a reverb-laden monologue lamenting the loss of his friend, ending with, "I can't wait 'till that day, when I see your face again." As the choir fades, a sample of "Every Breath You Take"—the 1983 hit song by the English rock trio The Police—suddenly begins. Underlain with an updated drum track, this sample serves as the main "beat" over which Combs raps, reminiscing about Wallace and the night of his death. "Every Breath You Take" is the basis for other parts of "I'll Be Missing You" as well. Faith Evans sings a slightly rewritten version of Sting's famous verse as a chorus, replacing the latter's "I'll be watching you" with "I'll be missing you," and the song's outro directly models the closing vamp of the earlier work. Another telling musical allusion occurs near the end of "I'll Be Missing You." Evans sings the first line of Albert E. Brumley's "I'll Fly Away"—lightly modified to "One glad morning, when this life is over, I know I'll see your face"—as a brief, poignant interlude between the last chorus and the outro. As unusual as it may seem, this unique amalgam of musical ingredients helped create a pop hit rivaled by few predecessors in its crossover appeal. The song spent six weeks atop six different *Billboard* charts, and is currently Number 84 on *Billboard's* "Hot 100 All-Time Top Songs."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. The *Billboard* website describes its "Hot 100 All-Time Top Songs" as "the definitive list of the Hot 100's top 100 songs from the chart's first 50 years, August 1958 through July 2008." See "The

Just a little over two years later, on August 31, 1999, the all-female country music trio the Dixie Chicks released their fifth album, *Fly*, with similar success.<sup>5</sup> *Fly* debuted at No. 1 on the “Billboard 200” and stayed there for two weeks. While no singles from the album hit No. 1 on the “Hot 100,” multiple songs topped Billboard’s “Hot Country Songs” and charted respectably on the “Hot 100.”<sup>6</sup> *Fly* triumphed at the 2000 Grammys as well, taking two awards including “Best Country Album.”<sup>7</sup>

One song from *Fly*, “Sin Wagon,” charted on “Hot Country Songs” despite never receiving official release as a single.<sup>8</sup> Filled with up-tempo, bluegrass-infused, rockabilly energy, “Sin Wagon” is a defiant declaration of women’s liberation filtered through the Chicks’ brand of “honky-tonk feminism.”<sup>9</sup> After having “been good way too long” in a presumably unhealthy relationship, the singer wants to take *her* “turn” on the “sin wagon” and have *her* share of “twelve-ounce nutrition” and “a little mattress dancin’.”<sup>10</sup> Such celebration of the “sinful” life, which one author has labeled as “a rather extreme example of...a woman controlling and asserting her own sexuality,” was quite atypical of female country performers at the time.<sup>11</sup> A fitting bit of irony closes the raucous number. The Chicks quote the chorus to Brumley’s gospel classic, singing “I’ll fly away” in full three-part harmony before their lead singer unexpectedly chimes in with “...on a sin wagon.” While not an official single, “Sin Wagon” remained a favorite of fans as well as

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Billboard Hot 100 All-Time Top Songs", Nielsen Business Media, Inc., <http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/specials/hot100/charts/top100-titles-10.shtml> (accessed 2 Apr. 2009).

<sup>5</sup> *Fly*, by the Dixie Chicks (Monument Records NK 69678, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> “Cowboy Take Me Away” and “Without You” were both No. 1 singles on Billboard’s “Hot Country Songs” chart. The former hit No. 27 and the latter hit No. 31 on the “Hot 100.”

<sup>7</sup> *Fly*’s other Grammy went to the single “Ready to Run,” which won “Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal.”

<sup>8</sup> “Sin Wagon” spent 14 weeks on Billboard’s “Hot Country Songs” chart, peaking at No. 62.

<sup>9</sup> David Fillingim, *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 136.

<sup>10</sup> Natalie Maines, Emily Robison, and Stephanie Smith, “Sin Wagon,” from *Fly*, by the Dixie Chicks.

<sup>11</sup> Fillingim, 137.

the band members, who initially wanted it for the album title and often used it as a grand finale during their 2003 “Top of the World” concert tour.<sup>12</sup>

While finding connections between the music of Puff Daddy and the Dixie Chicks—not to mention the seemingly disparate genres of hip-hop and country music in general—is a challenge, these two hit songs from the same period both make symbolic reference to the same American gospel song, “I’ll Fly Away.” Interestingly, the two usages signify quite divergent meanings through distinct musical, textual, cultural, and political contexts, and the artists surely had differing objectives in troping the same musical work.<sup>13</sup> However, a song is still a song, and a Christian gospel song is still a Christian gospel song, rooted in a specific religious tradition that has profoundly shaped (and continues to shape) American culture and its various subsets.

In his book, *Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans*, David Stowe writes, “Sacred songs are extraordinary in their capacity to compress and epitomize the most fundamental ideas of a faith community.”<sup>14</sup> These fundamental ideas remain, in one way or another, in spite of a song’s performance setting. Furthermore, they can operate on a variety of levels, as American religious historian Stephen Marini articulates:

Sacred song performs complex and diverse functions in the larger domain of religious culture... [I]t takes on a multitude of roles and significations that reach far beyond matters of musical setting, sacred words, and ritual performance.

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<sup>12</sup> Natalie Maines, Emily Robison, and Martie Seidel, *Fly*, Dixie Chicks (CD liner notes. Monument Records: NK 69678, 1999), 18. Also see “Dixie Chicks”, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dixie\\_Chicks&oldid=282366026](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dixie_Chicks&oldid=282366026) (accessed 8 Apr. 2009). This webpage contains an image of a set list from the Dixie Chicks 2003 “Top of the World” concert tour which shows “Sin Wagon” as the final song.

<sup>13</sup> By “political,” I mean the cultural definition as outlined in David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), xiv, 5-16. This definition concerns politics “not...at the formal level of legislative act, judicial decision, or policy directive, but at the more basic level of individual values and assumptions, personal style and preference, community mores and local traditions” (p. xiv).

<sup>14</sup> David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

Within any single religious culture or tradition, sacred song may act in many ways. It can provide identity, move to action, cause dissent, promote growth, alter belief, deepen faith, galvanize or anesthetize worship.<sup>15</sup>

Marini fails to mention that sacred song—and more specifically, the *same* sacred song—can also act in various ways within American secular culture as well.

In this regard, “I’ll Fly Away” is an extraordinary sacred song. Its huge array of recordings—as discussed in the previous chapter—certainly testifies to this distinction. Furthermore, the various representations of “I’ll Fly Away” found in the public memory also serve as critical indication of the song’s multivalent cultural impact. For example, to those familiar with Brumley and shape-note convention gospel music, “I’ll Fly Away” remains as one of the tradition’s signature works, if not the most famous song to come out of it.<sup>16</sup> Other Americans have widely associated it, sometimes exclusively, with funerals and memorial services; along with “When the Saints Go Marching In,” the song remains a staple of New Orleans brass band music.<sup>17</sup> References to the song’s perceived roots as an African-American spiritual are also common. Connected to this is another belief that the song’s popularity arose out of its use as an anthem during the Civil Rights movement. Interestingly, other claims of origin involving music more associated with whites, such as early country music and its antecedents, appear just as frequently. As recently as 2003, National Public Radio’s talk show *On Point* referred to “I’ll Fly Away” as an “old-time Appalachian song” and grouped it with other “haunting ballads.”<sup>18</sup> Stowe

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Chapters One, Two, and Three contain more detailed information on this musical tradition, its history, and its performance practice.

<sup>17</sup> Discussions of these aspects, complete with supporting evidence, appear later in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen and Irene Kossoy, “The Timeless Kossoy Sisters” (Interview by Gail Harris, *On Point*, National Public Radio, 21 Feb. 2003).

offers perhaps the best summation of the cultural significance embodied by such a memorialized sacred song:

Sacred music doesn't explain American history. But it does allow access to the ways in which many Americans have understood and coped with their history. The interplay of...sacred songs has deeply marked the complex container of differences that we call American culture. Like any diverse society, the United States is a congeries of cultures in motion: ethnic cultures, regional cultures, religious cultures, occupational cultures, racial cultures, political cultures. And music—particularly sacred music—has been a crucial medium by which individuals and social groups have encountered, struggled against, learned from, and accommodated to other individuals and groups. By singing and making music, Americans wear their spiritual hearts on their sleeves.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter continues the examination of Albert E. Brumley's "I'll Fly Away" begun in the previous chapter, essentially representing "part II" of the study. As the first part investigated historical and social contexts behind the song's creation and subsequent rise to popularity, this one traces the cultural "work" it has carried out since. It begins with a musical and textual analysis that offers plausible explanations behind the song's initial appeal and broad adaptability. While the cultural significance of "I'll Fly Away" at the time of its composition is fairly simple to identify, its "meaning" evolves considerably as the song grows into a gospel classic and begins to permeate the realms of secular popular music and entertainment. This chapter follows this trajectory all the way into the twenty-first century, where "I'll Fly Away" continues to build on its ubiquity and signify in new contexts.

In its methodology, this study owes a debt to the musicological work of such scholars as Charles Hiroshi Garrett and Jeffrey Magee, whose recent detailed studies of specific Tin Pan Alley standards have yielded valuable, far-reaching implications

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<sup>19</sup> Stowe, 5.

concerning issues of race, ethnicity, and identity in America.<sup>20</sup> Calling this approach a “song profile,” Magee describes it as

a selective but in-depth exploration of a song’s composition and performance history that makes apparent how variable meanings are socially constructed through time. Such studies draw their power and relevance from following a familiar, apparently simple piece through a long path of sources until the piece itself reemerges as a complex document of American music and culture.<sup>21</sup>

As important as this growing “musicological subgenre” has been, recent scholars have largely confined this methodology to Tin Pan Alley and almost exclusively to secular music.<sup>22</sup> Applying it to one of the most popular gospel songs in American history produces entirely new issues and insights. It becomes a powerful tool to examine the relationship between music and Christianity in America. This religion has affected America’s cultural—including musical—development since at least the country’s political beginnings, and its societal role became increasingly complex after 1900. Such events as the rise of Pentecostalism, feuding fundamentalists and modernists, and an interdenominational diffusion of charismatic practices sparked social reactions in

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<sup>20</sup> See Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "Chinatown, Whose Chinatown? Defining America's Borders with Musical Orientalism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 1 (2004): 119-73; Jeffrey Magee, "Irving Berlin's 'Blue Skies': Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations," *Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2000): 537-80.

<sup>21</sup> Magee: 537.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* In addition to Garrett (on “Chinatown, My Chinatown”) and Magee (on “Blue Skies”), there is recent scholarship by Richard Crawford (on “I Got Rhythm”), Charles Hamm (on “Alexander’s Ragtime Band”), and David Brackett (on “I’ll Be Seeing You”). Magee specifically cites these latter authors along with other examples in his discussion of song profile methodology. See Magee: 537, 574. The lone sacred study among these is Wayne D. Shirley, "The Coming of 'Deep River'," *American Music* 15, no. 4 (1997): 493-534. Shirley’s enlightening article surveys the musical transformation of “Deep River” as traced through published versions dating from 1877 to 1930, but he devotes very little attention to this spiritual’s impact on American culture. Other recent studies that could be considered song profiles are Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Stephen Wade, "The Route of 'Bonaparte's Retreat': From 'Fiddler Bill' Stepp to Aaron Copland," *American Music* 18, no. 4 (2000): 343-69. Wade focuses on the historical processes behind Aaron Copland’s incorporation of William Stepp’s “Bonaparte’s Retreat” into the former’s *Rodeo*. Nelson’s book, while belonging to cultural history more than musicology, is nonetheless another important example of this methodology.

America characterized variously by fervency, ambivalence, optimism, mockery, and nostalgia.

“I’ll Fly Away” provides an ideal candidate for such a song profile. It is a product of the early twentieth century that has become a standard among both white and black gospel music audiences. Moreover, a 2008 online survey listed it as the “signature” hymn for denominations identifying themselves as Pentecostal.<sup>23</sup> However, “I’ll Fly Away” also regularly emerges outside the sacred realm, within America’s largely secularized popular entertainment environment where outward religious display is uncommon at best. Such lasting popularity relies upon presentations of the song that continue to change over time, emerging most recently in inter-textual and abstracted settings which trope its meaning to produce altogether new implications and associations (e.g., Puff Daddy and the Dixie Chicks).

By spotlighting select incarnations of “I’ll Fly Away” across a broad range of moments in time, cultural uses, and artistic interpretations, this chapter aims to show how certain music has helped mediate the complex relationship between American identity and Christianity, particularly the more evangelical Protestant Christianity spread through charismatic movements such as Pentecostalism. In doing so, it also challenges the racial essentialism that often clouds the study and historiography of American gospel music. While “I’ll Fly Away” may have begun simply as a catchy gospel number capable of wide stylistic adaptation, the song’s enduring ability to appeal across racial, cultural, and musical boundaries equally rests in its symbolic connection to charismatic American

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<sup>23</sup> Vern Sanders, "Practical Tools," *Monday Morning Email: A Weekly E-Zine for Church Musicians and Worship Leaders*, 22 Sept. 2008, Beckenhorst Press, Inc., <http://www.creatormagazine.com/dnn/MondayMorningEmail/September2008/September222008/tabid/458/Default.aspx> (accessed 9 Mar. 2009).

Protestantism. Viewed from this perspective, “I’ll Fly Away” becomes a case study for understanding sacred song’s dynamic place not just within American music, but within American culture as well.

### **Just Another Little Simple Ditty**

Asked about the success of “I’ll Fly Away” in a 1976 interview, Brumley remarked, “It seems to never quit, and to me I can’t understand why because it’s such a simple song. When I wrote it, I didn’t dream what I was doing. I had no idea. It was just another little simple ditty to me...”<sup>24</sup> As simple as it is, there is something about the music, words, and combination thereof that undeniably appealed to gospel music singers in the 1930s (Figure 4.1 in the previous chapter is a facsimile of “I’ll Fly Away” as it originally appeared in 1932).

Brumley widely credited the 1920s megahit “The Prisoner’s Song”—the first country single to sell over a million copies—as inspiring the topical basis of “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>25</sup> This connection is especially intriguing in light of the equally unprecedented success of “I’ll Fly Away.” However, there is little, if any, apparent musical connection between the two pieces. Figure 5.1 is a basic transcription of the vocal melody from Vernon Dalhart’s million-selling version, a sparse recording in which guitar and violin comprise the only accompaniment to Dalhart’s voice.

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<sup>24</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with James Gaskin, 12 Oct. 1976, Albert E. Brumley and Sons Archive, Powell, MO (AEBS).

<sup>25</sup> This topical inspiration is discussed in the previous chapter.



Figure 5.1. Basic melody of a verse from Vernon Dalhart’s “The Prisoner’s Song.”<sup>26</sup>

Now if I had wings like an angel, over  
 these prison walls I would fly. And I'd fly to the arms of my poor  
 darling, and there I'd be willing to die.

Despite the influence of “The Prisoner’s Song,” the musical style of “I’ll Fly Away”—as represented by Brumley’s published version—lies firmly within the idiom of shape-note convention gospel music. During his early years as a student and rookie songwriter at the Hartford Musical Institute, Brumley admired many of the older composers and teachers including Eugene M. Bartlett, John A. McClung, Virgil O. Stamps, Thomas Benton, Marvin P. Dalton, William Ramsay, and several others. However, there is no direct evidence that an earlier gospel song served as a model or inspiration for “I’ll Fly Away.” To survey just the pre-1932 output of these individuals in an effort to find such a connection would be virtually impossible, encompassing hundreds if not thousands of songs. An examination of their most popular works from that time does not reveal any clear possible influences, which is unsurprising considering the high regard for intellectual property and copyright law held by most within the convention songbook publishing industry.

The closest similarity yet found occurs in one of the twenty-plus published songs that Brumley wrote and co-wrote before “I’ll Fly Away” appeared. “They are Singing in

<sup>26</sup> “The Prisoner’s Song,” by Vernon Dalhart (Victor 19427, 1924). Transcribed by the author.

That ‘Home, Sweet Home’” is a 1931 song that contains words by Brumley and music by W. T. Utley, a then-colleague at the Hartford Music Company. The last eight bars of the chorus show some striking melodic similarities with the chorus of “I’ll Fly Away” (see Figure 5.2), although it remains essentially impossible to know whether or not Utley’s music influenced Brumley in any way. At the very least, such likenesses perhaps betray the coincidences inevitable within a large repertoire of such prescribed musical traits and aesthetics.

Proceeding from Shirley Beary’s stylistic taxonomy of convention gospel songs, “I’ll Fly Away” contains a mixture of both hymn-like (i.e., homorhythmic) and convention (i.e., antiphonal) style.<sup>27</sup> However, unlike many convention style songs, Brumley confines the antiphonal textures in “I’ll Fly Away” entirely to repetitions of the title phrase. For comparison, Figure 5.3 displays the type of antiphonal arrangement typical of many conventional style songs.

Brumley’s decision to limit the antiphony in “I’ll Fly Away” almost exclusively to the title phrase is part of the simplicity to which he referred. Indeed, the three-word phrase “I’ll fly away” makes up a significant part of each verse and even more of the chorus, resulting in a surprisingly small amount of text overall. However, this is just one aspect of the song’s relatively simple construction, particularly in comparison to the general repertoire of 1930s convention gospel music.

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<sup>27</sup> Shirley Beary, "Stylistic Traits of Southern Shape-Note Gospel Songs," *The Hymn* (Jan. 1979): 26-33, 35. Beary describes convention style as “the statement-repetition style in which one voice carries the melody while the others sing an harmonic repetition of each phrase, either literally or altered” (p. 32). Beary’s taxonomy will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three, which will comprise a general survey of Brumley’s complete musical output.

Figure 5.2. Excerpt of “They are Singing in That ‘Home, Sweet Home’” (1931).<sup>28</sup> The arrow indicates where the melodic similarities with “I’ll Fly Away” begin. Note also the similar setting of “hallelujah” at the antepenultimate measure of both songs.

**They Are Singing In That “Home, Sweet Home.” Con.**

The musical score is presented in a system of ten staves, alternating between treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are written below the notes. An arrow points from the bass staff of the second system to the treble staff of the third system, highlighting a melodic similarity. The lyrics are as follows:

sing-ing, Hal - le - lu-jah, Shouting prais - es  
 sing-ing, sweet-ly sing-ing, singing hal - le - lu - jah,  
 on the gold - en strand; They are call - ing,  
 there for - ev - er; call - ing, they are call - ing,  
 sweet - ly call - ing, And I know that I shall soon be  
 call - ing, sweet - ly call - ing,  
 go - ing on, They are sing-ing, Hal - le -  
 go - ing on, sing-ing, sweet - ly sing-ing,  
 lu - jah, They are sing-ing in that “Home, sweet Home.”  
 singing Hal - le - lu - jah, sweet Home.

<sup>28</sup> Albert E. Brumley and W. T. Utley, “They are Singing in That ‘Home, Sweet Home,’” number 104 in *The Garden of Song* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Co., 1931).

Figure 5.3. Excerpt of “I’ve Changed My Way of Living Here” (1932).<sup>29</sup>

**No. 136 I’ve Changed my Way of Living Here**

A. E. B.

ALBERT E. BRUMLEY

1. Many years I roamed, (many years I roamed,) Many years I trod, (many years I trod,)  
 2. Hand in hand I go, (hand in hand I go,) With the King on high (with the King on high.)  
 3. If I nev-er clasp (if I nev-er clasp) Your band a - gain, (your hand again,)

In paths of sor-row, doubt and fear; (sorrow doubt and fear;) But I pledge my  
 As dai - ly heav-en's gates I near; (heaven's gates I near;) It will all come  
 Be- fore death's reaper shall appear; (reap-er shall ap-pear;) Let the whole world

all, (but I pl-ge my all,) In all to God, (in all to God,) I've changed my way of  
 right (it will all come right,) In the by and by, (in the by and by,) Since I have changed my  
 know, (let the whole world know,) Ev'rywhere you go, (Ev'rywhere you go,) I've changed my way of

**REFRAIN**

liv-ing here..... I've changed my way..... of liv-ing here.....  
 living here, I've changed my way of living here,

My sin- ful past will dis - ap-pear,..... A life so true.....  
 soon will dis-ap-pear, A life so true

<sup>29</sup> *Celestial Joys* (Hartford, AR: Hartford Music Co., 1932). It is also common to find convention style examples in which the melody voice is alone and all three other voices sing the responsive phrases.

The song's harmony is quite basic. Both the verse and chorus are identical with regard to harmonic rhythm and variety, revolving mostly around the tonic with occasional measures of subdominant harmony. There is no use of a secondary dominant of the dominant harmony (i.e., V/V), a trait found in many convention gospel songs (see, for example, the third and eleventh full measures of the excerpt in Figure 5.3). The two melodic phrases of the verse begin the same, forming a balanced and distinct parallel period. The majority of the chorus melody is made up of material from the verse, with both of its phrases ending identically to their verse counterparts. Throughout it all, roughly ninety percent of the entire melody consists of pitches from the tonic triad.<sup>30</sup>

The melodic rhythm is balanced as well, equally divided between phrases of motion and long agogic accents. The restricted pairing of the text "I'll fly away" only with musical phrases of agogic accent provides further unity, in addition to adding an element of word painting. Brumley places the melodic climax at the opening of the chorus, directly at the center of the song. His rhythmic accompaniment is straightforward and march-like, and he avoids syncopation. The sixteen-bar form—divided into equal parts of eight-, four-, and two-bar phrases—is typical of many single-page convention gospel songs, although Brumley simplifies it further by the symmetrical nature of the harmonic and melodic content.

Even within the genre of convention gospel music, "I'll Fly Away" did, indeed, represent a "simple ditty." Such simplicity was of utmost importance: it enabled an adaptability and malleability that proved crucial to the song's success. While Brumley

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<sup>30</sup> The small-note triplet on the fourth beat of measure four in Brumley's "I'll Fly Away"—called "grace notes" by practitioners of convention gospel music—is a piano cue. A composer with specific desires for the piano accompanist writes them in small, often round notes such as these. See Chapter Three for more on piano performance practice in convention music.

did not conceive of it as such, the form can operate as a modified blues, in this case two consecutive eight-bar blues.<sup>31</sup> The tonic-subdominant-tonic-dominant-tonic harmonic movement of each eight-bar section easily allows such an interpretation. Brumley's simple melody hovers around the mediant and dominant scale degrees, rendering it ripe for blue-note ornamentation.<sup>32</sup> The heavy repetition of the title phrase is also significant. In the verse it enables a call-and-response pattern not unlike the verses of "Standing in the Need of Prayer" or "Go Down, Moses," and in the chorus it creates a cyclical refrain reminiscent of camp-meeting hymns.

While the success of his "simple ditty" may have surprised him, it also taught Brumley the power of musical accessibility. Commenting in his later years on his craft, the composer remarked that "basic simplicity has been the earmark of nearly all great songs...the reasoning is simple; they are easier to understand and easier to remember."<sup>33</sup> "I'll Fly Away" combined simple musical structures with Brumley's knack for thoughtful text underlay, melodic lyricism, and effective textural contrast, serving as a textbook example of the composer's philosophy.

### **The World for a Prison and Heaven for Freedom**

Thematically, "I'll Fly Away" falls into a classic category of gospel songs about heaven. Shape-note convention music inherited this emphasis from the early gospel hymnody of the Gilded Age, which often offered heavenly reward as an antidote to a life

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<sup>31</sup> On the eight-bar blues, see, for example, Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 374. In his glossary definition of the blues, Schuller writes, "The most common form is the twelve-bar blues set in the following chord progression: I-IV-I-V-I. Eight-bar and sixteen-bar blues are also relatively common" (p. 374).

<sup>32</sup> Brumley almost implies such ornamentation with the C# neighbor tone in the second, sixth, and fourteenth measures of the melody.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in James R. Goff, Jr., *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 96.

of suffering on earth. Additionally, these songs frequently wedded this rhetoric with notions or implied assurances of being “saved.” This subject matter ties in perfectly with the doctrine embraced by Pentecostalism and other charismatic movements, in which individual salvation is a central focus.<sup>34</sup>

In this respect, “I’ll Fly Away” offered a fresh take on an old thematic standby. Unsurprisingly, this message held particular resonance among the song’s first audience, Depression-stricken Americans. For them, life’s growing “shadows,” metaphorical (or actual) “prison bars,” and “weary days” were a harsh reality. Thoughts of taking flight to a heavenly “home” of unending joy fed an increasing social need for release, escape, distraction, and spiritual solace in the face of difficult times. While other Depression-era gospel songs certainly invoked similar themes, they did not possess Brumley’s musical and lyrical artistry that proved so attractive to singers. For David Deller, Brumley’s title phrase alone represents “a fortunate or providential stroke that may have sealed this song’s appeal.”<sup>35</sup> While effectively encapsulating “exuberance and confident hope and release,” Deller says, the title is also “more concise, vigorous, and suggestive than [other] songs with the same theme.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For discussions of heaven and individual salvation as popular themes in southern gospel music and its antecedents, see, for example, Beary: 27; Curtis W. Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 102-11; Fillingim, 29-33; Howard Wright Marshall, “‘Keep on the Sunny Side of Life:’ Pattern and Religious Expression in Bluegrass Gospel Music,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1974): 24-26; Scott Tucker, “Looking for a City: The Rhetorical Vision of Heaven in Southern Gospel Music,” in *More Than Precious Memories: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel Music*, ed. Michael P. Graves and David Fillingim (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 23-42; Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth, *Honky Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 83-88.

<sup>35</sup> David Charles Deller, “Sing Me Home to Gloryland: Arkansas Songbook Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1999), 186.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-87. It deserves mention that Brumley was neither the first nor the last convention gospel songwriter to use the title “I’ll Fly Away.” See, for example, H. W. Sloan and James D. Vaughan, “I’ll Fly Away,” number 44 in *Heavenly Praises* (Lawrenceburg, TN: James D. Vaughan, 1925); Theodore Sisk, “I’ll Fly Away,” number 76 in *Dew Drops* (Toccoa, GA: Sisk Music Co., 1933); and Charles W. Vaughan and G. Kieffer Vaughan, “I’ll Fly Away,” number 55 in *Gospel Glory* (Lawrenceburg, TN: James D.

The title and refrain of “I’ll Fly Away” may have communicated more than just heavenly escape. Biblically literate singers could link the phrase to the Old Testament and Psalm 55, which contains the verse, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”<sup>37</sup> On the other side of the chronological spectrum, modern aircraft advancement had propelled itself into the public spotlight of the early 1930s with the help of Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, lending a whole new dimension to notions of flying. Such metaphoric ties between modern technology and popular gospel music had certainly appeared before.<sup>38</sup>

The practice of lyrically “signifying” on the titles or texts of established sacred classics was widespread among convention gospel songwriters, and Brumley was no exception.<sup>39</sup> While not overt references, “glad mornings,” “celestial shores,” “weary days,” and “never-ending joys” were tropes from a familiar sacred rhetoric that Christian hymnody had been disseminating widely for decades and even centuries. For instance, Thomas Hastings’s “Hail to the Brightness of Zion’s Glad Morning!” (1831) is one of the famed writer’s best-known works. Charles Wesley spoke of a “celestial shore” in his

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Vaughan, 1948). As the only earlier song, the Sloan/Vaughan version is of interest with regard to possibly influencing Brumley, but his familiarity with it is highly unlikely. It was published only once and displays no similarities other than the title phrase.

<sup>37</sup> Ps. 55:6 KJV.

<sup>38</sup> Two popular earlier examples are “Life’s Railway to Heaven” (1890) by M. E. Abbey and Charles D. Tillman and “The Royal Telephone” (1919) by F. M. Lehman. Six years after “I’ll Fly Away,” Brumley himself directly invoked modern technology with his gospel hit “Turn Your Radio On” (1938). For more discussion on this phenomenon, see Bill C. Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’: Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 101-102.

<sup>39</sup> Examples within Brumley’s output are many. See, for example, “The Blood that Stained the Old Rugged Cross” (1942), “I Want to Meet You in the Sweet By and By” (1937), “I Just Steal Away and Pray” (1946), and “The Sweetest Song I Know” (1941), which signifies on “Amazing Grace.” The reference to musical “signifying” here comes from Henry Louis Gates via Samuel Floyd. Floyd writes, “Musical Signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of preexisting material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at a musical style, process, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms.” See Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8. Unlike Gates and Floyd, who respectively center their applications on black literature and music, this study’s application is more general.



funeral hymn “Again We Lift Our Voice” (1780) and so did Horace L. Hastings in “Shall We Meet Beyond the River?” (1858), a piece that spread widely through its publication in Ira Sankey and P. P. Bliss’s *Gospel Hymns No. 2* (1876).<sup>40</sup> Such phrases allowed “I’ll Fly Away” the potential to signify on preexisting material that was both sacred and secular (e.g., “The Prisoner’s Song”).

## A “New Spiritual”

Before “I’ll Fly Away” was barely ten years old, music researchers were already assuming the song’s provenance as a traditional spiritual.<sup>41</sup> Its frequent appearance on commercial recordings by black performers in the late 1940s and early 1950s also helped circulate this assumption. When listed in *Billboard* as new releases, these recordings usually fell under the heading “Spiritual.”<sup>42</sup> Such instances provide a vivid example of how essentialized understandings of American gospel music in both scholarship and the entertainment industry helped perpetuate misinformed conclusions about its history. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the African-American spiritual acquired a respected cultural status in America as one of the country’s premier art forms of an

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<sup>40</sup> “Again we lift our voice” is number 52 in John Wesley’s *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780). “Shall We Meet Beyond the River?” is number 75 in *Gospel Hymns No. 2* (New York: Biglow and Main, 1876).

<sup>41</sup> See the previous chapter’s discussion of the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County (Mississippi) Study of 1941 and 1942. In particular, John Work labels “I’ll Fly Away” as one of the “new spirituals” he discovered in Coahoma County. See John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, Jr., *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*, ed. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 58-61. This misunderstanding continues in current scholarship. One example occurs in Jacqueline Thursby’s recent book *Funeral Festivals in America*. In her discussion of slave mourning rituals in early America, she writes that “African American spirituals from that time such as ‘I’ll Fly Away’ reflect sadness and yearning for another life.” See Jacqueline S. Thursby, *Funeral Festivals in America: Rituals for the Living* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 82-83.

<sup>42</sup> “Advance Record Releases,” *The Billboard*, 12 July 1952, 39; “Other Records Released This Week,” *The Billboard*, 8 Aug. 1953, 37. These two announcements are for releases by the Trumpeteers and the Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama, respectively.

authentically oral tradition. In light of this, when scholars found “I’ll Fly Away” in common use among African Americans in Mississippi in the early 1940s, their inclination to distinguish the song as a spiritual of local origin rather than contemplate a published source is unsurprising.

Moreover, “I’ll Fly Away” simply *sounded* like a spiritual. As shown, this was due in large part to its musical composition: the modified blues form, the melody that invites blue-note ornamentation, the call-and-response nature of the verse, the highly-repetitive and camp-meeting style chorus. However, its text was perhaps more important in its categorization as a spiritual. In *The Power of Black Music*, Samuel Floyd identifies two basic types of spiritual texts: sorrow songs and jubilees. Sorrow songs “speak of the past and present trials and tribulations suffered by the slaves and their Savior,” while jubilees “express the joyful expectation of a better life in the future.”<sup>43</sup> Brumley’s text fits perfectly within the latter. Furthermore, African-American Holiness and Pentecostal churches—crucial in popularizing “I’ll Fly Away”—actively maintained spirituals as part of their worship music during the first half of the twentieth century at a time when most black churches had discarded them.<sup>44</sup> These charismatic denominations, according to Jon Michael Spencer, “led the way in reinterpreting these [spirituals] of longing for this-worldly liberation as having otherworldly meaning,” a meaning that concerned “a spiritual event (liberation from sin) rather than... a physical event (freedom from human forms of bondage).”<sup>45</sup> The text of “I’ll Fly Away” accommodated both perspectives quite

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<sup>43</sup> Floyd, 41-42.

<sup>44</sup> Two early-1940s African-American Holiness publications containing “I’ll Fly Away” are cited in the previous chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody: A Hymnological History of the African-American Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 123.

well, embodying a desire for liberation similar to that heard in such spirituals as “Steal Away to Jesus,” “Get Away Jordan,” “Deep River,” and many less popular examples.

More specifically, Brumley’s overarching theme of “flying away” links up with an idea not uncommon within spirituals and other black folklore. In her annotated collection of popular African-American church music, Gwendolin Sims Warren asserts that “I’ll Fly Away” engaged a fascination with flying that African Americans had cultivated since slavery, exemplified by such earlier spirituals as “All God’s Chillun Got Shoes” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.”<sup>46</sup> Within black folktale literature, “The People Could Fly” is one of several examples that make reference to flying Africans and slaves.<sup>47</sup> Flying clearly represented freedom, but Warren contends that it was also

a feeling [African Americans] experienced when they began to sing. As they “felt the spirit” during their praise and worship times, they also felt themselves being carried away and above their circumstances, “flying” above the earthly struggles that held them down.<sup>48</sup>

In his discussion of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” Samuel Floyd identifies a “chariot trope” which appears in numerous spirituals. In many of these, the chariot will variously “pick up and carry...the singers up ‘over Jordan,’” often traveling “across the sky” as it rides.<sup>49</sup>

Incidentally, “I’ll Fly Away” also shares salient musical traits with “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” arguably the best known of all spirituals. Each contains a repetitious internal refrain woven into both the verse and chorus. The basic formal structure of each

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<sup>46</sup> Gwendolin Sims Warren, *Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit: 101 Best-Loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the African-American Church* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 142. Another example not mentioned by Warren is “Now Let Me Fly.” Thursby also discusses the importance of flying within the mythology of early African Americans. See Thursby, 83.

<sup>47</sup> See Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 172. Hamilton even speculates here that “Come fly away!” was a code phrase used among slaves plotting escape.

<sup>48</sup> Warren, 142.

<sup>49</sup> Floyd, 213.

is the same, and the verses of both are very similar in their construction and texture: a couplet built from two equal call-and-response phrases. Arpeggios of major triads dominate the basic movement of both melodies, utilizing more leaping motion than stepwise motion. Finally, both contrast a more rhythmically active verse with choruses that highlight notes of longer durations.

While perhaps best viewed as a “jubilee” spiritual under Floyd’s criteria, “I’ll Fly Away” could also qualify as a certain type of “sorrow song.” It has long been one of the premier gospel songs for funeral services and memorial events, especially among African Americans. Such use is logical considering the text, especially the first verse (which is the most well known). It is unclear exactly when the song acquired this association. In his autobiography, Johnny Cash vividly recalls singing it along with “Peace in the Valley” and “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be” at his brother Jack’s funeral in 1944.<sup>50</sup> Within the last forty years, versions have rung out at memorials for Mahalia Jackson, Bob Marley, Lester Maddox, Rosa Parks, and Kirby Puckett, to name a few. Further indication of this legacy is the song’s status as a staple of New Orleans brass bands, second only, perhaps, to “When the Saints Go Marching In.” The heavy use of “I’ll Fly Away” in the so-called “jazz funeral” tradition of such groups has continued to the present day. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, one of New Orleans’s foremost contemporary brass bands, included it on their recent 2004 album, *Funeral for a Friend*.<sup>51</sup>

Another factor in the assumed spiritual roots of “I’ll Fly Away” was its active dispersion via oral transmission (singers, preachers, entertainers, radio, and recordings).

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<sup>50</sup> Johnny Cash and Patrick Carr, *Cash: The Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 29.

<sup>51</sup> *Funeral for a Friend*, by the Dirty Dozen Brass Band (Ropeadope Records, 2004). In fact, “I’ll Fly Away” has appeared on at least ten brass band releases since 2002, including albums by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, The New Birth Brass Band, and the Hot 8 Brass Band.

Such transmission produced and reinforced certain performing conventions different from Brumley's original arrangement. For example, in the earliest recordings, black performers display a tendency to repeat the song's chorus much more frequently than white performers, sometimes singing it twice after every verse. A further result has been negative tropism, the tracing of which vividly reveals these oral processes at work. The earliest recorded performances display only slight, if any, differences from Brumley's original text (e.g., conflated verses, "O Lordy" instead of "O glory," "to that home" instead of "to a home"), and these occur only in recordings by black performers. However, by the 1950s, performances of "I'll Fly Away" began exhibiting major changes. The Trumpeteers (1952) and the Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama (1953) both sing verses far different from Brumley's text. In the case of the latter, the group inserts a variant of a "floating verse" common within American vernacular music: "One of these mornings, it won't be very long. Gonna look for me, and I'll be gone." Interpretations by whites also altered the song's text, as shown by a 1951 radio performance by Hank Williams (see Table 5.1).<sup>52</sup>

Underscoring the ways in which "I'll Fly Away" functioned so well as a pseudo-spiritual raises important questions. How do we know that it is not an actual spiritual? How do we know that Brumley did not simply hear it, arrange it, and publish it as his own? These questions can never be completely discounted because—as with any artistic creation—we can never know the exact extent of an artist's inspiration. Brumley's honest reputation notwithstanding, the fact remains that his published version of "I'll Fly Away" predates any known unattributed version—recorded or published—by several years. Indeed, it was John Work's failure to find "I'll Fly Away" in several extant published

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<sup>52</sup> Williams's version appears on *The Unreleased Recordings*, by Hank Williams (Time Life, 2008).

collections of “Negro folksongs” that ultimately led him, in 1943, to classify the song as a previously undocumented spiritual of Mississippi origin.<sup>53</sup>

Table 5.1. Albert E. Brumley’s and Hank Williams’s “I’ll Fly Away” verse texts.

Brumley’s Verses	Williams’s Verses
Some glad morning when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away; To a home on God’s celestial shore, I’ll fly away.	Some bright morning when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away; To that land on God’s celestial shore, I’ll fly away.
When the shadows of this life have grown, I’ll fly away; Like a bird from prison bars has flown, I’ll fly away.	When the troubles of this life are o’er, I’ll fly away; To that land on God’s celestial shore, I’ll fly away.
Just a few more weary days and then, I’ll fly away; To a land where joys shall never end, I’ll fly away.	Like a bird from prison bars has flown, I’ll fly away; To a land where no sorrows are known, I’ll fly away.

### Sacred Songs and Nashville Sounds

As World War II came and went, “I’ll Fly Away” and its buoyant message of salvation and relief continued to resonate with diverse audiences. Through the “symbiotic relationship” enjoyed by southern gospel and country music during these years, the song found favor well beyond its shape-note convention singing origins.<sup>54</sup> Already by 1950, Red Foley was introducing “I’ll Fly Away” on the Grand Ole Opry as “one of the most-loved hymns of all” and a pillar of country music’s gospel roots:

Well, tomorrow’s Sunday...and that means church, followed by a quiet day at home with the folks... Then maybe, there’ll be people droppin’ in durin’ the evenin’—and like as not there’ll be a little singin’—and I’m willin’ to bet a pretty penny that one of the hymns most favored’ll be this’n here... “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See Work, Jones, and Adams, 58-61, 322.

<sup>54</sup> Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’*, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Script for *WSM’s Grand Ole Opry: Prince Albert Show*, 14 Jan. 1950 and 9 Dec. 1950, CMF. According to Bill Malone, Foley was “the most popular singer of religious songs in country music during the fifties.” See Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’*, 106.

As shown in the previous chapter, recordings by the Brown's Ferry Four and the Chuck Wagon Gang from the late 1940s were crucial in popularizing the song within the secular country music market. After a conspicuous lull in releases during the mid-1950s, a sharp increase begins in 1959, coinciding with the advent of country's "Nashville Sound" era. The Nashville Sound was a characteristic style of lush, pop-influenced, heavily produced, crossover country music that became dominant from the late 1950s through the 1960s. The style shift was part of the country music industry's calculated response to the threat of rock and roll's new market dominance.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning with Webb Pierce in 1959, at least fifteen major country artists released versions of "I'll Fly Away" over the next ten years.<sup>57</sup> Nearly every one of these appeared on albums entirely devoted to sacred material, a concept that similarly increased during this period. With such titles as *Hand Clapping Gospel Songs* (Roy Acuff), *Old Brush Arbors* (George Jones), *Good Old Camp Meeting Songs* (Stanley Brothers), and *More Grand Old Gospel* (Porter Wagoner) and covers depicting rural settings and austere country churches, the Nashville Sound remade "I'll Fly Away" as one of the most visible songs in an updated industry vision of country music's gospel heritage.<sup>58</sup> This vision brought the ideal of a southern, rural, working-class, morally conservative yet charismatically expressive Protestantism into intense relief and injected it with a renewed

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<sup>56</sup> The term "Nashville Sound" has been in circulation since at least 1970. See Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970). For more recent scholarship, see Joli Jensen, *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> "I'll Fly Away" appears on the Webb Pierce album *Bound for the Kingdom* (Decca, DL-78889, 1959). Other country artists who recorded the song from 1959 to 1969 include Faron Young, Red Foley, Jim Reeves, Roy Acuff, Leon McAuliff, Chet Atkins, George Jones, Bobby Bare, Porter Wagoner, Ferlin Husky, the Dillards, "Little" Jimmy Dempsey, Billy Walker, Charlie Walker, and Jean Shepard.

<sup>58</sup> While the Stanley Brothers more appropriately fall under the specific label of "bluegrass" rather than "country," the group's sacred recordings still promoted this connection between secular country music and gospel music.

nostalgic emphasis. In other words, “old time religion” was on the front lines of country music’s new “selling sound.”<sup>59</sup> To be sure, southern gospel’s rising popularity during this time—largely resulting from the success of such groups as the Blackwood Brothers and the Statesmen Quartet—helped spark this shift, but other factors were also at work.

Gospel music’s enhanced role during the Nashville Sound era had more to do with the continuing rural-to-urban migration of southern whites. Between 1940 and 1960, almost six million whites migrated north and west from the South, with another two-and-a-half million leaving during the 1960s. Primarily a blue-collar migration to urban areas, these individuals brought with them charismatic religious attitudes cultivated in the heavily Baptist and Pentecostal southern states.<sup>60</sup> Among those attitudes was an affinity for gospel music.

In his recent study of southern outmigration, historian James Gregory traces how the “maladjusted migrant” image, constructed by mid-century sociology, leaked into areas of American culture including literature, journalism, public policy, and entertainment.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, inflated ideas about the severe economic and social challenges besetting southern migrants proliferated, despite the reality that most migrants’ standard of living had actually improved in their new home areas. In the case of white southerners, “the popular figure...tended to be tightly drawn and one-

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<sup>59</sup> The phrase “selling sound” comes from Diane Pecknold, “The Selling Sound of Country Music: Class, Culture, and Early Radio Marketing Strategy of the Country Music Association,” in *Country Music Annual 2002*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 54-81.

<sup>60</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 15. For more on the migration of Baptists and Pentecostals from the South and how they transformed American religion, see Gregory, 197-235.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory, 72-74.



dimensional...[and] carried very strong images of uprooting and the psychological burdens of urban adjustment.”<sup>62</sup>

Gregory argues that sixties-era country songs reflecting urban disillusion, homesickness, and loneliness—such songs as Bobby Bare’s “Detroit City” and Bill Anderson’s “City Lights”—ran counter to the opportunity and accomplishment experienced by most southern migrants. As a result, this music perpetuated the myth of maladjustment, even among the migrants themselves. That “I’ll Fly Away” and similar “old time” gospel music infused with nostalgia resurged within country music during this time is no coincidence. They offered powerful musical mechanisms for coping with adjustment that fit well into this paradigm, combining spiritual alleviation with strong evocations of home, family, community, the South, and other romanticized aspects of place. Unfortunately, the religious experience of the rural South was a largely segregated one, potentially charging this nostalgic gospel music with the “whiteness” that typified many migrants’ memories of singing conventions and church services. Such association surely created special appeal among white migrant consumers dealing with the unfamiliar racial challenges and tensions exacerbated by urban living and the emerging Civil Rights movement.

A major goal of the country music industry during the Nashville Sound era was to dignify its audience, and gospel music was able to serve its interests here as well. The aggressive advertisement campaigns during the late 1950s of the newly formed Country Music Association (CMA) were more than simply efforts to reach new fans. They were also deliberate attempts to shed the off-putting hillbilly stereotypes of promiscuity,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 72.

“white trash,” and laziness that plagued country’s core audience of southern migrants.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the CMA promoted the music’s traditionalism and recast its listeners as “affluent blue-collar workers” who were mature and consumer-minded.<sup>64</sup> Again, “I’ll Fly Away” and the Christian worldview that it and other gospel music symbolized lined up well with such a representation.

Within country music, “I’ll Fly Away” began to signify “old time religion” with a new potency during the Nashville Sound era. This potency, along with its overtones of sentimentality, morality, and charismatic Christianity, largely remained as the song consistently appeared on recordings by country’s foremost performers during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the influential roles of both country music and evangelical Protestantism in the formation of America’s white working-class conservatism during these decades served only to strengthen the song’s socioreligious symbolism.

Various historians have examined the thickening ties between country music and Republican politics that took hold in the late 1960s. Sparked by George Wallace’s campaigns and a rash of reactionary songs in defense of the Vietnam War, country music began an association with morally and politically conservative agendas that lent it “a public notoriety, and an image, that have ever since remained with it.”<sup>66</sup> By the early 1970s, country music was providing “the soundtrack for the revolt of the Silent Majority.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> For a detailed look at the long history of the hillbilly stereotype, including its connections to music, see Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> An in-depth examination of this marketing strategy is Pecknold, 54-81. This quote appears on page 67.

<sup>65</sup> The previous chapter contains a lengthy list of top country stars that have recorded the song since 1970.

<sup>66</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 211.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory, 312.

Both Bill Malone and James Gregory cite Merle Haggard as the figure who perhaps best personifies the emerging political clout of country music during these years. His recordings of “Okie from Muskogee” and “The Fightin’ Side of Me” were rallying cries and crossover hits for white working-class conservatism. Haggard embodied a patriotic, populist, “plain-folk traditionalism” that eschewed the ugly segregationist platforms associated with Wallace, and he attracted an expanded following as a result.<sup>68</sup> “Old time religion” was a core value of this traditionalism, as reinforced by Haggard’s 1971 gospel double-album *The Land of Many Churches*, on which he teamed up with the Carter Family and “dug deeply into the paperback hymnal tradition to present songs by...Albert Brumley and other gospel stalwarts.”<sup>69</sup>

“I’ll Fly Away” also became popular with prominent evangelists during the 1970s, especially those who conflated aspects of their ministry with country music. Indeed, this tripartite interrelationship between country music, the idea of an “old time religion,” and white working-class conservatism that flowered in the 1970s was most important in the song’s growing embodiment of charismatic Protestantism. Phrases such as “old time” and “camp meeting” had been associated with evangelical Christianity since at least the revivalism of the nineteenth century. For the growing mass-media evangelism of the 1960s and 1970s, the parlance proved to be very effective in promoting an intimate worship experience in the face of nationwide syndication. Jerry Falwell

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>69</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 115. See also *The Land of Many Churches*, by Merle Haggard (Capitol SWB 0-803, 1971). Although “I’ll Fly Away” was not among the Brumley songs included on *The Land of Many Churches*, Haggard did record it twice on later projects: *Two Old Friends*, by Merle Haggard and Al Brumley, Jr. (Madacy 1107, 2001), and *Outlaws and Angels*, by Willie Nelson and Friends (Lost Highway Records, 2004).

gained fame in the 1960s through his *Old Time Gospel Hour* and Jimmy Swaggart followed with his *Camp Meeting Hour*.

Of all the superstar evangelists of this era, Oral Roberts was most explicit in reaching out to secular country music audiences and performers. In the 1970s, he produced *Oral Roberts on Country Roads*, one of many primetime television specials that he sponsored as publicity for his organization and his university. Special guests on these programs included Johnny and June Carter Cash, Roy Clark, and Skeeter Davis as well as gospel singers Clara Ward and Richard and Patti Roberts. Most surprising, the *Country Roads* program (and subsequent soundtrack release) consisted of equal parts sacred and secular material, featuring “I’ll Fly Away” and other gospel songs alongside arrangements of “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” “King of the Road,” and “Take Me Home, Country Roads.”<sup>70</sup> In another example, reverent photographs of Roberts and fellow evangelist Billy Graham graced the back cover of country star George Hamilton IV’s *Singin’ on the Mountain*, a 1973 record commemorating a famous, fifty-year-old gospel-singing event of the same name. Advertised as “the largest annual non-denominational religious gathering” in the United States, the “Singin’ on the Mountain” was a daylong affair held annually at Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina which featured both public gospel singing and professional speakers and performers (see Figure 5.4).<sup>71</sup> Along with touting Roberts’s and Graham’s involvement, the album’s liner notes stressed the “backwoods mountaineer amateur musicians,” “church auxiliary groups,” and “volunteer

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<sup>70</sup> *Oral Roberts on Country Roads: Music from Oral Roberts’ TV Special*, by various artists (Light LS-5603, 1972).

<sup>71</sup> George Hamilton IV, liner notes to *Singin’ on the Mountain*, by George Hamilton IV with Arthur Smith and the Crossroads Quartet (RCA Camden ACLI-0242, 1973). This singing continues today in its eighty-fifth year.

firemen” as core participants in the singing and singled out “I’ll Fly Away” as standard fare.<sup>72</sup>

Figure 5.4. *Singin’ on the Mountain* (back cover), by George Hamilton IV.<sup>73</sup> The middle-left photo shows Roberts on a mountaintop. “I’ll Fly Away” is the album’s final song.

**THE GREAT SINGIN' ON THE MOUNTAIN TUNES**

"Singin' on the Mountain" founder Joe L. Hartley

**SINGIN' ON THE MOUNTAIN**  
George Hamilton IV  
with Arthur Smith and The Crossroads Quartet  
Arranged by Arthur Smith / Produced by Bob Ferguson and Ethel Gabriel

Side A  
Singin' on the Mountain (BMI 1:57)  
Old Camp Meeting Days (BMI 2:38)  
The Old Country Church (P.O. 2:58)  
Family Bible (BMI 2:31)  
Amazing Grace (P.O. 2:24)

Side B  
Acres of Diamonds (BMI 2:04)  
He's Everywhere (BMI 2:25)  
Life's Railway to Heaven (BMI 2:28)  
Wings of a Dove (BMI 2:46)  
I'll Fly Away (SESAC 2:17)

Recorded at RCA's "Nashville Sound" Studios, Nashville, Tennessee  
Recording Engineer: Al Paschuck / Recording Technician: Ray Butts  
Photography: Hugh Morton

Don Ange, piano / Fred Carter, Jr., electric guitar / D.J. Fontana, drums  
Johnny Gimble, fiddle / Billy Linneman, bass / Arthur Smith, guitar & fiddle / Ralph Smith, accordion & organ  
Jerry Stembbridge, rhythm guitar / Lawrence Stumb, flattop guitar on "Old Country Church"

Vocalists:  
Tommy Faile / Maggie Griffin / Dick Schuyler  
Jacque Schuyler / Arthur Smith / Ralph Smith  
\*Courtesy of Nugget Records

**THE SOUTHLAND'S GREAT ANNUAL RELIGIOUS SINGING EVENT**

In the fifty years since its founding in 1924 by the late Joe L. Hartley, "Singin' on the Mountain" at Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina has become the best known of all the Southland's religious singing events. George Hamilton IV brings together in this album some of the hymns loved and sung by the multitudes that each year come to the famous mountain "sing."

Countless events in religious history have taken place on the slopes or summits of mountains, and the 6,000-foot Grandfather Mountain, highest peak of the Blue Ridge Mountain Range, has provided the inspirational backdrop "Singin' on the Mountain" needed to be close to Heaven in the midst of God's handiwork.

Names known only locally, names of international significance, all of these have been in the half century procession of singers and preachers to make their contributions to the continuing success of the Grandfather Mountain sing. Bearded preacher Shelby E. Gragg and mountain parson Alphonzo Buchanan have gone to join their Maker, as have Metropolitan Opera star Norman Cordon and others who have, in years gone by, had active parts in the proceedings. Internationally known ministers like Dr. Billy Graham and Dr. Oral Roberts have also meant much in causing "Singin' on the Mountain" to be a spiritually meaningful gathering.

About Hugh Morton:  
"Singin' on the Mountain" is the largest annual non-denominational religious gathering in the United States. Hugh Morton is the proprietor of Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina and is the inspiration and prime moving force behind the annual "Singin'" held there. He was a founder and first chairman of the annual "Azalea Festival" held in Wilmington, North Carolina and is a past president of the North Carolina Press Photographers' Association. He's a much beloved and respected North Carolina businessman, and I don't think a more patriotic "North Carolinian" ever lived than Hugh Morton!

About Arthur Smith and The Crossroads Quartet:  
Arthur Smith and The Crossroads Quartet are one of the best known sacred singing groups in America, and they are featured every year at the "Singin' on the Mountain." Arthur is the composer of many best selling hymns recorded by George Beverly Shea, Tennessee Ernie Ford and Johnny Cash.

HUGH MORTON

Geo. IV

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Though the Roberts and Hamilton cases illustrate direct intersection between high-profile evangelists and country music, they also show that by the 1970s both camps relished “I’ll Fly Away” as a signature gospel piece. Other prominent evangelists and

<sup>72</sup> Hugh Morton, liner notes to *Singin’ on the Mountain*.

<sup>73</sup> *Singin’ on the Mountain*, by George Hamilton IV (RCA Camden ACLI-0242, 1973).

conservative activists of that era who recorded the song include Jimmy Swaggart, Billy James Hargis, and Anita Bryant.<sup>74</sup> In country music, artists through the 1980s and 1990s continued to release “I’ll Fly Away” on albums with titles—*Revival of Old Time Singing* (Ray Price), *Old Time Religion* (Willie Nelson), *Revival* (Oak Ridge Boys)—and covers reminiscent of their Nashville Sound-era forbears.

### **Sacred Popular Song or Popular Sacred Song?**

Primed by its momentum within the gospel music practice of both whites and blacks, “I’ll Fly Away” seeped into other mainstream areas of American popular music and culture besides country music. The song possessed a unique power to signify concisely and memorialize—on broad scales—both black and white legacies of American sacred music and religion. While “I’ll Fly Away” could represent a spiritual and/or a southern gospel song (and everything associated with either distinction), this power lay more in its basic ability to embody a bygone religious time and place—an era of “old time religion” that had been disrupted by the unprecedented political, economic, technological, and geographical shifts that Americans had experienced during the first half of the twentieth century.

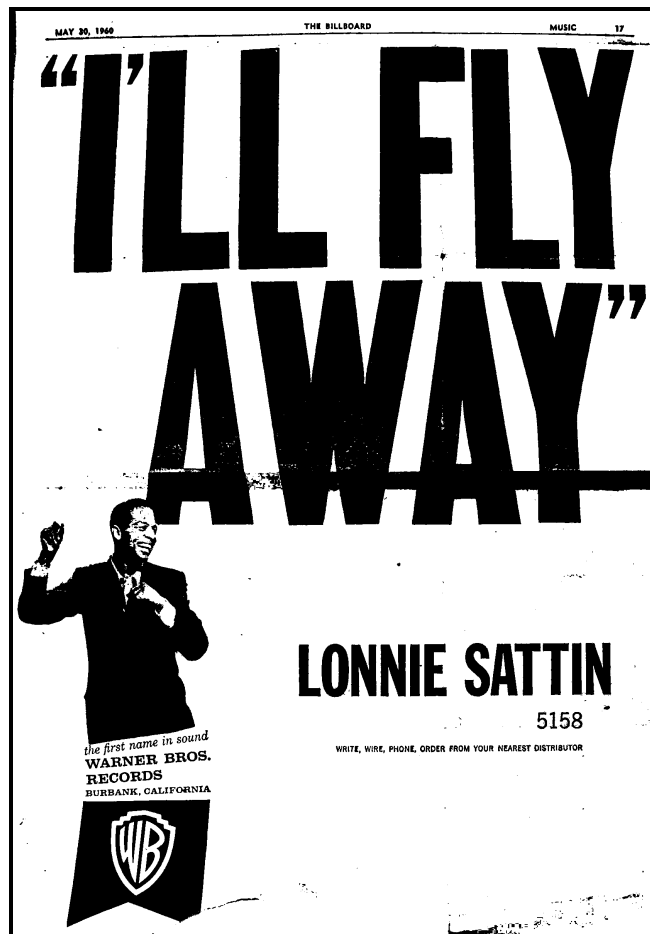
An early example is Lonnie Sattin’s 1960 single for Warner Brothers. Sattin was a Philadelphia music theater actor and African-American pop singer of mild renown who seemed destined for superstardom when Warner Brothers signed him in 1959. In 1960, he became host of *Circle*, a syndicated half-hour musical variety television show. That same

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<sup>74</sup> *Jesus is the Sweetest Name I Know*, by Jimmy Swaggart (Jim LP-116, 1973); *Billy and Me*, by Billy James Hargis and Billy James Hargis II and the “All-American Kids” (Christian Crusade Records 40010, c. 1973); “Gospel Medley” (45rpm single), by Anita Bryant (Anita Bryant Ministries ABM 1-41, 1980). Brumley had worked with Hargis before, publishing a songbook for him around 1960. See Brumley, business worksheet, c. 1960, AEBS.

year, the May 30 issue of *Billboard* contained a full-page ad promoting his new single, “I’ll Fly Away” (see Figure 5.5). Although *Billboard* called Sattin’s version an “unusual piece of material,” they gave it a four-star rating, signifying “very strong sales potential.”<sup>75</sup> Sattin’s release was not a chart-topper, but it did break into the “Top 100” of the *Cash Box* best-selling singles charts.

Figure 5.5. Lonnie Sattin ad in *Billboard*, May 30, 1960.<sup>76</sup>



Sattin’s “I’ll Fly Away” was an exercise in secularizing gospel music for popular markets, a strategy pioneered by Ray Charles during the 1950s. Set within a bombastic

<sup>75</sup> "Very Strong Sales Potential," *The Billboard*, 30 May 1960, 41.

<sup>76</sup> *The Billboard* (30 May 1960): 17. The record was “I’ll Fly Away” backed with “Any More than I,” by Lonnie Sattin (Warner Brothers 5158, 1960).

big band arrangement and a chorus of backup singers, Sattin sings completely rewritten lyrics. However, they do not shed their sacredness entirely:

When I'm troubled, like a little dove, I'll fly away;  
I'll be long gone to the one I love, I'll fly away.

If I hear where money grows on trees, I'll fly away;  
There'd I'd go and live a life of ease, I'll fly away.

Chorus:  
I'll fly away some morning, I'll fly away;  
Take my word, even though I'm not a bird, I'll fly away.

When the saints go marching in line, I'll fly away;  
Take my word, even though I'm not a bird, I'll fly away.

Though devoid of overt religious language, Sattin's lyrics retain a message of escape to someone and someplace where life is better. The chorus even paraphrases Brumley's first verse. The song's quasi-sacred nature is more apparent in the final verse as it references the ubiquitous spiritual "When the Saints Go Marching In." In light of these aspects, Sattin's version signifies readily on Brumley's song's sacredness and particularly its spurious legacy as a spiritual.

Folk revival performers of the 1950s and 1960s also found that "I'll Fly Away" fit well into their repertoire. Again, the song's dual white/black heritage no doubt aided its spread in this genre. However, just as important was the nature of its text. Despite its evangelical origins and comfortable familiarity among charismatic Christians, "I'll Fly Away" does not mention Jesus, and its single reference to God is indirect, at best. Thus, for a folk revival community driven by social justice concerns and pluralist impulses, "I'll Fly Away" represented an appropriately "civil" sacred song along the same lines as "Amazing Grace" and "We Shall Overcome."



In 1956, “I’ll Fly Away” appeared on the five-record anthology *Folk Songs and Instrumental Music of the Southern Mountains* alongside ballads, dance tunes, and jug band songs. Listed as “a typical example of the sacred songs in vogue in the southern mountains at the present time,” the performers were the Kossoy Sisters, two young folk revivalists actually from New York City who purportedly learned the song from James and Martha Carson.<sup>77</sup> Another singer on the anthology was future folk icon Carolyn Hester, whose influential 1962 debut album for Columbia also featured “I’ll Fly Away” (accompanied by a young Bob Dylan on harmonica).<sup>78</sup>

The Highwaymen, an all-male folk quintet patterned after the Kingston Trio, had a smash hit in 1961 with a rendition of the spiritual “Michael Row the Boat Ashore.” After hearing Hester’s “I’ll Fly Away,” the group tempered the song’s sacred lyrics and released its own take on a subsequent 1963 album.<sup>79</sup> The Highwaymen’s recording caught the attention of Brumley himself, mainly because the group had not requested permission to arrange and record his song. The Highwaymen’s publisher, J. Shink Music, initially insisted that “I’ll Fly Away” was a nineteenth-century spiritual and thus in the public domain, but it eventually reneged and agreed to assign the arrangement’s rights over to Brumley and Sons, Inc.<sup>80</sup> While the status of “I’ll Fly Away” as a more recent composition may have surprised folk revival performers, their recordings—as exemplified by the Kossoy Sisters, Carolyn Hester, and the Highwaymen—nevertheless

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<sup>77</sup> Liner notes to *Folk Songs and Instrumental Music of the Southern Mountains*, by various artists (Murray Hill Records, 927590, 1956). Capitol Records released James and Martha Carson’s single of “I’ll Fly Away” (Capitol 1415) in 1951.

<sup>78</sup> *Carolyn Hester*, by Carolyn Hester (Columbia CS-8596, 1962).

<sup>79</sup> *March On, Brothers*, by the Highwaymen (United Artists UAS-6245, 1963).

<sup>80</sup> Robert Brumley, phone interview with the author, 11 Dec. 2008. See also Shink-Brumley Copyright Agreement, 15 June 1964, AEBS.

added new support to the perceived “folk authenticity” of such material and helped raise its stock as traditional, “old time” gospel music.

With increasing rotation in gospel, country, pop, and folk revival circles during the 1960s, further inroads in rock and pop were almost inevitable. From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, versions emerged by the Chambers Brothers, the Goose Creek Symphony, Don Nix, Ray Stevens, and Ronnie Wood (of Rolling Stones fame). These interpretations range from blues rock (Chambers Brothers) to country rock (Nix) to more traditional, *a cappella* performance (Wood). The most intriguing treatment from these years is undoubtedly that of reggae legend Bob Marley.

According to Leonard Barrett, Marley often used “I’ll Fly Away”—a “Jamaican favorite”—as part of a ritual Rastafarian invocation that opened his concerts during the 1970s.<sup>81</sup> For most of his career, Marley was a devout follower of the Rastafari movement, a quasi-Christian religious faction that coalesced in Jamaica around 1930. In 1973, Marley’s band the Wailers released its second album, *Burnin’*, featuring multiple tracks that would become reggae classics including “I Shot the Sheriff,” “Get Up, Stand Up,” and “Rasta Man Chant.”<sup>82</sup>

“Rasta Man Chant” was actually an updated version of an old Rastafari chant in which Marley fused the traditional Nyabinghi percussion of Rastafarian sacred music with a few electric instruments to produce a sparsely textured, medium-tempo reggae song. Marley opens with the lyric, “I hear the words of the Rasta man say, ‘Babylon, you

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<sup>81</sup> Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 195. Another indication of the song’s popularity in Jamaica appears in Barrett’s account of Marley’s burial ceremonies on May 21, 1981. “The service ended with songs from [Marley’s backup vocalists] the I-Three, who sang the ‘Rasta Man Chant,’ concluding with the song, ‘Some Glad Morning When This Life Is Over, I’ll Fly Away Home.’” See Barrett, 219.

<sup>82</sup> *Burnin’*, by the Wailers (Island ILPS 9256, 1973).

throne gone down.” As he repeats the couplet, he inserts different figures for the Rasta man (e.g., “higher man”). The song’s second half features Marley singing a repetitive refrain centered on the phrase “fly away home.” Except for the repeated first line, this refrain displays clear similarities with “I’ll Fly Away,” both textually and melodically (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6. Basic vocal melody of the “Rasta Man Chant” refrain (transposed to B-flat major), showing textual and melodic similarities with the chorus of “I’ll Fly Away.”

For Marley and other Rastafarians, the appeal of “I’ll Fly Away” extended from its imagined roots as a slave freedom spiritual. Within the Rastafari movement, “Babylon” is a common general metaphor for “those Western values and institutions that historically have exercised control over the masses of the African diaspora.”<sup>83</sup> “Zion,” on the other hand, functions as a metaphor for heaven while also symbolizing Africa—and

<sup>83</sup> See Ennis B. Edmonds, “Dread ‘I’ in-a-Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 23-35. This quote appears on page 24.

specifically Ethiopia—as a promised land. Thus, “I’ll Fly Away” finally saw its first real work as an actual liberation spiritual through the music of Rastafarians in general and Marley in particular. Indeed, Marley’s iconic place in popular music history has helped transmit Brumley’s song—albeit cloaked within “Rasta Man Chant”—among audiences of untold magnitude.

### **Gospel as Drama: “I’ll Fly Away” on the Big (and Small) Screen**

“I’ll Fly Away” has been appearing on network television and in major films since at least the 1970s. As America’s evangelical, charismatic Christian movements gained ground during this period—what some scholars have termed “the southernization of American religion”—Brumley’s song developed capital as a musical signifier of such movements and the imagined culture that surrounded them.<sup>84</sup> In particular, the use of “I’ll Fly Away” in television and film of the last twenty years has not only reinforced this symbolism, but it has also added new dimensions of signification.

In the fall of 1991, NBC premiered a new television drama titled *I’ll Fly Away*. Set in a small Georgia town in 1959, it followed the lives of a local white district attorney, his black housekeeper, and their respective families. Following his wife’s hospitalization for mental treatment, Forrest Bedford (Sam Waterston) depends on the help of housekeeper Lilly Harper (Regina Taylor) to raise his three children. In addition to their personal lives, the plot centers on how the emerging civil rights movement affects the characters. Although Bedford’s moral compass compels him to begin prosecuting civil rights cases, he is uneasy about it and quietly laments the demise of the old,

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<sup>84</sup> Gregory, 198.

comfortable southern social order. At home, Bedford is largely oblivious as Harper becomes increasingly active in the movement within her community.

Commentary surrounding the show's premiere heavily promoted civil rights as a central theme, describing Bedford's character as a combination of Atticus Finch and Eugene "Bull" Conner.<sup>85</sup> *The New York Times* published a story on Harper detailing her own integration experiences growing up in Oklahoma as a "sharecropper's granddaughter."<sup>86</sup> Moreover, early publicity rarely failed to mention that the program's title came from a "traditional," "old black" spiritual.<sup>87</sup> Despite heavy critical acclaim and even an organized rescue effort by the watchdog group Viewers for Quality Television, a lack of ratings prompted NBC to cut *I'll Fly Away* after only two seasons.

Even though a single note of "I'll Fly Away" never sounded in the show, the decision by its creators to use Brumley's title had huge implications. It molded a distinct public image of the song for millions of television viewers that both reinforced existing assumptions and constructed new ones. With main themes concerning segregation and principal characters involving a patriarchal white male and an independent black female, *I'll Fly Away* accentuated racial and gender divisions that had long plagued essentialized notions of American gospel music and the "old time" religion of the South.

The program also invoked the song in its civil rights storyline. This was most apparent in the two-hour special—titled "Then and Now"—that served as a closing chapter to the series. It recounts a lynching incident that shook the small town and

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<sup>85</sup> Bill Carter, "NBC Creates a Series in a Standard Format but with a Deaf Star," *The New York Times*, 1 Aug. 1991, C19; Samuel G. Freedman, "Sam Waterston Goes South," *The New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1991, H37.

<sup>86</sup> Sara Rimer, "Star of New TV Series Taps Harsh Memories of School Integration," *The New York Times*, 22 Oct. 1991, C13, C17.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, John J. O'Conner, "Racial Issues of the 1950's, as People Lived Them," *New York Times*, 7 Oct. 1991, C13; Rimer, C13.

ultimately forced Lilly Harper and her family to abandon the community. The last scene fast-forwards to the present, when an aged Harper is now an accomplished author. She is at a book release for her latest work, a novel about a young black woman in a small southern town during the civil rights era. The book's title is *I'll Fly Away*.

Although viewers may have been led to believe otherwise, Brumley's "I'll Fly Away" had little, if any, historical role as a civil rights song. On the contrary, the prominent civil rights activist and minister C. T. Vivian once cited "I'll Fly Away" as a specific example of a gospel song that did not make a good "movement song." Vivian remarked that its escapist message "didn't work at all" and was "a direct contradiction to" the movement's emphasis on confronting injustice and pushing for change.<sup>88</sup> Regardless, thanks to NBC, "I'll Fly Away" has now found its way into the canon of civil rights movement songs.<sup>89</sup>

Recent Hollywood films have also both drawn upon and promulgated "I'll Fly Away" as a signifier of charismatic, Protestant, "old time" religion. In *The Apostle* (1997), Robert Duvall plays Euliss F. "Sonny" Dewey, a charismatic Holiness evangelist in Texas who, after a crime of rage, flees to a small Louisiana town where he repentantly starts a new church under a new alias, the Apostle E. F. "I'll Fly Away" appears prominently during a scene in which Sonny is excitedly preaching over the radio about going up to heaven someday in his "own little airplane." Following his short address, an integrated group of his new church members launches into an upbeat, hand-clapping

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<sup>88</sup> Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, eds., *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2008), xviii.

<sup>89</sup> For a recent album review containing this claim, see Derek Taylor, "The Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama - Oh Lord- Stand by Me/ Marching up to Zion (Specialty)", Bagatellen, [www.bagatellen.com/?p=1527](http://www.bagatellen.com/?p=1527) (accessed 18 Nov. 2008). Mark Greenberg includes "I'll Fly Away" in his "Music of the Civil Rights" educational program for middle and high school students. See Mark Greenberg, "The American Music Workshop with Mark Greenberg," Upstreet Productions, <http://www.upstreetproductions.com/americanmusic.html> (accessed 18 Nov. 2008).

rendition of “I’ll Fly Away.” In the poignant final scene, Sonny repeats this sermon in his quaint new Holiness church—complete with garish “One Way Road to Heaven” marquee—as state troopers wait outside. After the sermon, the church sings “I’ll Fly Away” once more as he calmly exits to his imminent arrest amidst tearful goodbyes.

In 2000, the Coen brothers’ *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* also featured “I’ll Fly Away.” Unlike *The Apostle*, its use was largely nondiegetic, but the film incorporated the entire song (as sung by the Kossoy Sisters in 1956) as incidental music during a particularly pastoral and optimistic sequence of scenes. Set in rural Mississippi during the Depression, the plot revolves around the comic adventures of three penitentiary escapees. Riverbank baptisms (two of the three characters get “saved”), chain gangs, early country music radio, and the Klu Klux Klan are all part of an elaborate tableau of 1930s southernness. With respect to sacred songs, “I’ll Fly Away” was a perfect fit for a soundtrack also geared to reflect this. More importantly, the soundtrack was a surprise commercial hit, eventually reaching platinum status and almost singlehandedly sparking a new surge of consumer interest in so-called “roots” or “Americana” music. With “I’ll Fly Away” as one of its most popular tracks, it thrust Brumley’s song into the public spotlight once again.

If *The Apostle* connects “I’ll Fly Away” with present-day Pentecostalism, then *O Brother* signifies more on the nostalgic currency it has developed. Perhaps as a result of the latter’s success, “I’ll Fly Away” has continued to appear in major motion pictures since 2000. Most recently, the Oscar-winning film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

(2008) drew upon yet another facet of “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>90</sup> In the movie, mourners sing it during an African-American funeral service in New Orleans, commemorating the death of the main character’s black adoptive mother. Taken together, these three recent films are good indicators of the current public image that surrounds “I’ll Fly Away.” It has become a romantic symbol of a charismatic, “old time,” and often-southern (both white and black) American Protestantism rooted in nostalgia.

### **Signifying the Sacred**

In light of this cultural history, the fact that artists as diverse as Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs and the Dixie Chicks both troped “I’ll Fly Away” in hit pop songs from the late 1990s is not so surprising. “I’ll Be Missing You” was a memorial to a deceased friend and fellow musician. By referencing “I’ll Fly Away,” Combs signified not only on its status as a “spiritual,” but also on its long history within the African-American funeral tradition. The song allowed Combs to inject the image, sanctity, and emotionalism of a stereotypical black funeral into a secular pop song, enabling listeners to grieve right along with him.

“Sin Wagon,” on the other hand, signifies on a different component of the song’s image in classic parody fashion. The Dixie Chicks’s trope draws its symbolic power by mocking the sacred essence now exemplified by “I’ll Fly Away” within country music culture. In “Sin Wagon,” true relief comes only by breaking from the prudish and patriarchal demands of “old time religion,” effectively reversing Brumley’s salvation

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<sup>90</sup> The film received nominations for thirteen Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Brad Pitt), and Best Supporting Actress (Taraji P. Henson). It won Oscars for Art Direction, Makeup, and Visual Effects.



message. To escape the domestic chains of conservative Protestantism, the singer will “fly away” to the liberating freedom of worldly excess.

In addition to such tropings, the multivalent cultural history of “I’ll Fly Away” continues to inspire complete performances of the song that adhere to different aspects of that history. In 1991, a black vocal group called the Sounds of Blackness recorded it on the group’s debut release, *The Evolution of Gospel*. The album became a landmark release that went gold and won a Grammy for “Best Gospel Album by Choir or Chorus.” The charismatic white televangelist John Hagee—notorious for his controversial endorsement of 2008 Republican presidential nominee John McCain—recorded “I’ll Fly Away” with his family for a 2004 album.<sup>91</sup> Around the same time, contemporary country celebrity Alan Jackson included it on his 2006 release *Precious Memories*, an all-sacred project promoted as a Christmas gift for his mother not originally intended for commercial release. It was released after all—complete with an “antiqued” cover photo featuring Jackson on the front steps of an old country church—and, perhaps unsurprisingly, went on to earn a 2007 Grammy nomination for “Best Southern, Country, or Bluegrass Gospel Album.”

The highest profile pop release of “I’ll Fly Away” in recent years is undoubtedly that of Kanye West, an African-American rapper who included it on his widely acclaimed debut album, *The College Dropout* (2004). Unlike the examples just mentioned, West’s album is certainly not an all-sacred project, and unlike the versions by Puff Daddy and the Dixie Chicks, West’s performance of “I’ll Fly Away,” albeit abbreviated (only one verse and chorus), is a complete one. Part of *The College Dropout*’s critical success was its message. It delivered a smart critique on the failure of America’s educational system

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<sup>91</sup> *We Believe*, by the John Hagee Family (Cathedral Records, 2004).

among African Americans as told with humor, sadness, pride, and defiance. Moreover, West's musical artistry was able to attract listeners from across the spectrum, including fans of "intellectual" hip-hop as well as those of the gangster rap that dominated the industry at the time. The album won "Best Rap Album" and "Best Rap Song" (for "Jesus Walks") at the 2005 Grammy Awards and earned triple-platinum status by August of that year. It continues to be West's best-selling release to date.<sup>92</sup>

On *The College Dropout*, West uses Brumley's song as a kind of prologue to "Spaceship," a modern-day black working-class anthem that yearns for deliverance from dead-end, mundane jobs. Right before "I'll Fly Away" begins, one hears a desperate-sounding male voice interject, "I'se can't keep working like this. This grave shift is like a slave ship." Sung in a contemporary black gospel quartet style with only piano accompaniment, "I'll Fly Away" moves directly into the chorus of "Spaceship," which sings, "I've been working this grave shift, and I ain't made shit. I wish I could buy me a spaceship and fly past the sky." West clearly intends "I'll Fly Away" to help articulate a link between slavery's suffering and the "bondage" of current African-American work environments.

West also used an excerpt from his "I'll Fly Away" in the video of "Jesus Walks," a song about his religious devotion and struggles with backsliding as well as a call to renew religious discourse in pop culture. "Jesus Walks" is not a Christian rap song (the first verse contains multiple four-letter words), but even as a sacred-themed song its success was surprising. West delivered an extended live performance at the 2005 Grammy Awards—with guest appearances by the Staple Singers and the Blind Boys of

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Grien. "Chart Watch Extra: The Top 20 New Acts of the 2000s," *Chart Watch Music Blog*, 22 July 2009, Yahoo! Inc., [http://new.music.yahoo.com/blogs/chart\\_watch/39906/chart-watch-extra-the-top-20-new-acts-of-the-2000s/](http://new.music.yahoo.com/blogs/chart_watch/39906/chart-watch-extra-the-top-20-new-acts-of-the-2000s/) (accessed 29 Jul. 2009).

Alabama—that heavily signified on the “old time” religion of “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>93</sup> Against a backdrop made to look like a black church sanctuary of the 1930s—complete with fan-waving Sisters in church hats and Brothers in bowties—West’s performance gets interrupted when he dies in a mock car accident. In the next scene, mourners pass by his coffin as the Blind Boys of Alabama sing “I’ll Fly Away.” The music for “Jesus Walks” then begins again, and West reappears in all white—as if resurrected from the dead—just in time to rap his second verse. With performances such as this one, Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” has become not only a nostalgic symbol of American Christianity, but it has proven its agency in appealing to a modern culture often wary of religion, especially in its more conservative forms.

## Conclusion

In the end, Puff Daddy and the Dixie Chicks shared something in common besides just the use of “I’ll Fly Away”: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, Inc. sued both of them for copyright infringement. Neither party requested permission to use the song, purportedly because they considered it to be in the public domain. In outcomes indicative of the fine lines within the U.S. Copyright Office’s doctrine of “fair use,” the lawsuit with Combs was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount while the Dixie Chicks apparently prevailed in their case.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> As of July 29, 2009, a video recording of this performance could still be viewed on the website YouTube under the title “Kanye West Grammy’s Jesus Walks” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx58OT8og0I&NR=1>).

<sup>94</sup> Charles Emerick. “K.C. Law Firm of Shook, Hardy, and Bacon Chosen to Protect Riaa,” *Daily Record and the Kansas City Daily News-Press*, 11 July 2005, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4181/is\\_20050711/ai\\_n14719697/?tag=content:coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4181/is_20050711/ai_n14719697/?tag=content:coll) (accessed 20 Oct. 2008); “Publisher Settles Copyright Lawsuit.” *Nashville Business Journal*, 26 Sept. 2000, <http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2000/09/25/daily12.html> (accessed 30 Mar. 2009).

These two artists were certainly not the first to assume mistakenly that “I’ll Fly Away” was in the public domain. Ironically, the song would probably not be nearly as significant and influential were it not for this common misperception. David Stowe has argued that one reason “How Great Thou Art” never attained the ubiquity of “Amazing Grace” and “We Shall Overcome” (one could also add “I’ll Fly Away”) within secular American culture is precisely because of the tight legal restrictions that govern its circulation, restrictions that do not apply to works in the public domain.<sup>95</sup> The ability of “I’ll Fly Away” to masquerade musically as an old chestnut or spiritual from another century has surely led to more carefree attitudes regarding its use and performance. Unfortunately for Puff Daddy and the Dixie Chicks, they had to find this out the hard way. In short, numerous Americans—past and present—have decided the merits of “I’ll Fly Away” as a good gospel song, and not any one luminary cultural figure or artist. Brumley himself had little to do with the song becoming a classic other than writing it, which was, perhaps, for the best. On multiple occasions, the composer readily admitted his opinion that it was neither his favorite nor his finest work.<sup>96</sup>

Riding a wave of public appeal largely disconnected from its creator, “I’ll Fly Away” became a bona fide American gospel standard, born in the early twentieth century and raised during some of the most culturally, politically, and economically tumultuous decades of the country’s modern era. Its complex life and diverse popularity reveals the important role it has played in helping Americans articulate a religious and cultural heritage that has been both collective and separate, united and divided.

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<sup>95</sup> Stowe, 250.

<sup>96</sup> Brumley, recorded interview with James Gaskin, 12 Oct. 1976, AEBS. See also Velma Nieberding, “Fly Away’ Song Booms Ozark Town,” *Tulsa Tribune*, 13 Aug. 1971, 6C.

However, as evidenced by the Dixie Chicks, Puff Daddy, John Hagee, Alan Jackson, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Kanye West, and others, the life cycle of “I’ll Fly Away” is far from over. In the words of Brumley himself, “it just doesn’t quit.” As the culture wars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries continue to rage, perceptions of religion—whether positive or negative—remain a key component of the cultural identity of many Americans. Each new interpretation of “I’ll Fly Away” comments on this identity. For the pop culture figures that largely fall to the left side of these wars, the gospel music that “I’ll Fly Away” exemplifies allows them to acknowledge their artistic debt to America’s religious heritage without the stigma of being “religious.” It enables a remarkable spiritual paradox of authenticity and tolerance, adherence and plurality.

However, the most important aspect of studying the growing significance of “I’ll Fly Away” may ultimately lie not within American popular culture, but within American religious culture and specifically the conservative, transdenominational, charismatically oriented Protestantism that, according to multiple scholars, is “the fastest growing religious phenomenon of recent decades.”<sup>97</sup> Such faith practices, rooted in the Pentecostalism of the American South, have quickly spread throughout denominations not only nationwide but also internationally, and “I’ll Fly Away” is one of their signature songs. While it may have started as a simple ditty, Albert Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” has become a musical emblem of American Christianity.

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<sup>97</sup> Gregory, 213. See also Stowe, 296.

## CHAPTER 6

### Epilogue, Conclusions, and a Final Word

#### **Epilogue**

In March 2006, the Society for American Music and the Center for Black Music Research joined together for an annual conference in Chicago, Illinois. On the first day, the conference honored esteemed African-American music scholar Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. with a special session titled “A Retrospective on Black Music Research and a Look to the Future.” The session included such panelists as composers T. J. Anderson and Olly Wilson and scholars Richard Crawford and Sterling Stuckey. A concluding musical performance featured Dorothy Moore’s setting of Langston Hughes’s “Weary Blues,” Frederick Hall’s cycle of African-American religious work songs, and two gospel performances by the late Horace C. Boyer: W. Herbert Brewster’s “How I Got Over” and, finally, Albert E. Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>1</sup>

In this program, the inclusion of Brumley’s song was noteworthy. It was the only selection not written by an African-American; instead, it had its origins in shape-note convention gospel music of the early twentieth century. This anecdote underscores the problematic understanding of Brumley’s music. His songs—particularly “I’ll Fly Away”—are incredibly popular, but awareness of their provenance and the context surrounding their creation is almost nonexistent. While the magnitude of Brumley’s legacy in the popular sphere is overwhelming, his absence of mention within the academic sphere is inversely sparse.

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<sup>1</sup> *SAM/CMBR Conference Program, 15–19 March 2006* (Chicago, IL: SAM/CMBR, 2006), 17-18.

This neglect stems from a broader general disregard of the convention songbook industry and tradition in American music's scholarly discourse. The disregard is not for a lack of historical significance. On the contrary, the music's importance should be obvious to any scholar of twentieth-century sacred or popular music in America. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, major newspapers in the South were labeling convention singing as "the most significant folk music of these days."<sup>2</sup> They reported sales of new songbooks at over half a million each year, proclaiming them as "second only to the Bible" in the area.<sup>3</sup> The fervent zeal and passion of the music's consumers led Brumley's mentor, E. M. Bartlett, to declare boldly in 1938 that "men and women will do without something to eat and wear in order to purchase...song books."<sup>4</sup> By 1949, *Time* magazine had published a feature on convention singing and the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company. According to the article, about three hundred "local song get-togethers" occurred each week in eastern Texas alone.<sup>5</sup> At the time, Stamps-Baxter was doing \$300,000 worth of business each year, circulating its newsletter to 20,000 homes, and boasting certain songbooks that had sold as many as four million copies.<sup>6</sup>

The academic community's negligence of convention music is due in part to innocent ignorance. However, there are two main factors at work that have accommodated and even fostered this ignorance. The first has arisen from the strong connection, both real and imagined, between convention music—of which Brumley's songs are the most recognized—and forms of American Christianity labeled variously as

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<sup>2</sup> "Swinging in Refrain," *The Daily (Oklahoma City) Oklahoman*, 27 Nov. 1938, D7.

<sup>3</sup> Claude E. Johnson, "Singing Schools of Today: Modern Ozark Gatherings Adapt the Old Custom of 'All-Day Singings' to Conditions and Tastes of the Present Time," (*Little Rock Arkansas Gazette Sunday Magazine* (15 Jun. 1941): 9.

<sup>4</sup> E. M. Bartlett, "Here, There and Everywhere," *The Southern Music News* 4, no. 11 (May 1938): 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> "Gospel Harmony," *Time* (7 Nov. 1949). Online at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,801080,00.html> (accessed 17 Nov. 2008).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

“conservative,” “evangelical,” or “fundamentalist.” Within the ivory tower of the academy, a deep-seated stigma, rooted in the culture wars of the late twentieth century, has attached itself to this brand of American religion. Perceptions of its constituents and figureheads proceed from a not completely unfounded but grossly inflated idea of “narrow-mindedness” that has, ironically, resulted in a pervasive, narrow-minded disregard of its viability as a field of scholarship. In short, research connected with this topic—unless perhaps critical in nature—is at best controversial, at worst discouraged, and at a disadvantage in any case.

The second factor is the racialization that has dominated much of American gospel music historiography. This is largely a result of African-American gospel music’s older scholarly heritage. The first thorough historical survey on black gospel appeared in 1971 (Anthony Heilbut’s *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*), the first such book on black quartets in 1988 (Kip Lornell’s “*Happy in the Service of the Lord*”), and the first scholarly study of Thomas A. Dorsey—who has been labeled as Brumley’s counterpart in black gospel—in 1992 (Michael Harris’s *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church*).<sup>7</sup> The dearth of contemporary, parallel queries into white gospel, both directly and indirectly, has worked to reinforce and perpetuate ignorance of its contributions. Furthermore, following the Civil Rights movement, Jim Crow-era topics perceived as having mostly white cultural pedigrees have suffered from a taboo within academia that has only recently begun to relax. With respect to American gospel music, the outcome has been a lopsided, segregated historiography that does not tell the whole story.

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<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the first scholarly survey devoted to white southern gospel music appeared in 2002 (James R. Goff Jr.’s *Close Harmony*). See Chapter One of this dissertation for a more thorough review of gospel music literature.



This thesis attempts to rectify these problems. It is the first thorough, scholarly assessment of convention music's most celebrated composer, Albert E. Brumley. It probes his biography in much more detail than previous literature and offers an analysis of his complete musical output as a framework for interpreting his compositional style and understanding his music's enduring legacy. Finally, it researches the cultural history of one particular Brumley work—"I'll Fly Away"—as a lens through which to view the composer's impact on American music and society. Taken together, these components ultimately argue that Brumley's compositions have influenced the development of religious and popular music in America much more significantly than what is indicated by current scholarship, and that his music has become an important medium for American cultural expression that stretches well beyond the confines of convention gospel and southern gospel singing traditions.

### **Conclusions and Avenues for Further Study**

While Brumley certainly possessed prodigious musical talent, the environment in which he grew up and matured had a profound impact on his artistic development. The Oklahoma-Arkansas borderlands were one of the most active regions of convention singing in the nation. He was able to study not only under E. M. Bartlett, J. A. McClung, and other important contemporary convention gospel figures, but also with prominent individuals from northern revivalist circles (J. B. Herbert, Homer Rodeheaver) as well as those bearing lineage to America's nineteenth-century shape-note legacy (James H. and Will H. Ruebush). In Brumley, this variety of backgrounds worked together to produce musical contributions that were unparalleled in their influence, success, and popularity.

With one foot firmly planted in America's rich sacred music traditions, Brumley was adept enough to recognize the future of American gospel music: professional entertainment. In addition to his sacred material, he wrote secular songs appealing to traditional notions of home and family that resonated deeply with America's growing population of radio and record consumers. Urban migrants and rural homebodies alike found solace, distraction, escape, and empathy in such sentimental songs as "There's a Little Pine Log Cabin," "Rank Strangers," and "Did You Ever Go Sailing (Down the River of Memories)?"

Realizing the heightened importance of copyright ownership in this new era of professional, royalty-driven gospel music entertainment, Brumley moved quickly to own as much of his material (as well as that of others) as he could. He was a pioneer in convention gospel's transition away from publishers and its reformation within America's expanding commercial music industry. As a result, he emerged as a success story amidst a generation of convention songbook publishers struggling to remain viable. Brumley's shrewd business sense allowed him the luxury—and cultural capital—to headquarter and run a national company from the rural hamlet of Powell, Missouri.

While developing and managing his own publishing companies, Brumley cultivated an image that wisely tapped the sacred/secular essence of—and the cultural links between—the "country church" and the "log cabin," combining both in a promotional campaign that fantasized his hometown of Powell as a nostalgic, bucolic American paradise recast with the name "Memory Valley." Brumley reflected this image in the themes of songs that held particular appeal among another growing segment of America's popular music industry, country music and its subgenres.

At least since the 1927 Bristol recording sessions, often referred to as the “Big Bang” event that birthed country music, sentimental secular songs and traditional sacred material have been united in a Saturday-night/Sunday-morning marriage of complex cultural values that has deeply resonated with the music’s consumers.<sup>8</sup> Those first sessions in Bristol were an astonishing confluence of early county pioneers, including both secular performers (Jimmie Rodgers, Ernest Stoneman) and sacred singers (Rev. Ernest Phipps, Rev. Alfred Karnes) as well as artists who successfully combined both types of repertoire, namely the Carter Family. Besides marking the Bristol sessions, the year 1927 was important to country music history for another reason as well. It was the copyright year of Albert Brumley’s first two published songs. Fittingly, one was a sacred number, “I Can Hear Them Singing over There,” and the other was a sentimental secular song, “Dear Mother—She’s Gone.”

As country music blossomed into a major commercial industry, Brumley’s country-church/log-cabin songs perfectly mediated its seemingly disparate sacred-secular sensibilities. His music was crucial in both reflecting and paving the way for many Americans’ dual embrace of these sensibilities and spelling success for such endeavors as John Lair’s *Renfro Valley Gatherin’*, a Sunday morning radio program that the country music impresario launched in 1943 as a sacred counterpart to his successful Saturday night *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*. This embrace only gained momentum as country music’s history and traditionalism became memorialized and ingrained. By 1970, country and its related subgenres (e.g., bluegrass, old time, folk music) had championed the music of Albert E. Brumley enough to help establish him as the most influential gospel song

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olsen, eds., *The Bristol Sessions: Writings About the Big Bang of Country Music* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2005).

composer of the twentieth century. That year, a serendipitous recognition testified to Brumley's major influence on the industry since its birth in 1927. The Nashville Songwriters Association inducted Brumley into its first Hall of Fame class, a class that also happened to include the two most decorated legends from the 1927 Bristol sessions, A. P. Carter of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers.<sup>9</sup> The NSA award was indicative of the problematic divide that had developed between Brumley's significant impact on American music and his equally significant lack of mention in its literature. While scholars and enthusiasts in the field may not have even known Brumley's name, almost everyone knew his music. What had begun as popular convention songs had become popular American songs.

Brumley's ability to write such an unprecedented number of enduring, wildly popular songs is difficult to explain, but it was certainly due in part to his simplistic philosophy of composition. His nearly four hundred works are quite uniform in many respects. He published nearly all of them in the shape-note convention gospel songbooks that proliferated from the 1920s through the 1960s. For this thesis, a thematic catalogue of Brumley's entire body of published music enables a much clearer understanding of his compositional philosophy in addition to a more accurate idea of his work's scope and chronology.

In sum, Brumley's "model" song was a simple one of sole authorship. It had heaven as its thematic subject and its formal architecture consisted of multiple stanzas with a refrain. It was set in four voice parts (SATB) with a key of E-flat major and a 4/4 meter. Its heavily pentatonic melody opened on the dominant scale degree and covered the range of an octave or ninth over the course of the song, displaying some nonharmonic

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<sup>9</sup> "NASA [*sic*] Hall of Fame," *BMI: The Many Worlds of Music* (Dec. 1970): 6.

tones—mainly neighboring and passing tones—along the way. There were no tempo or dynamic markings and the piece did not modulate; even the refrain began on the tonic harmony. Only four main harmonies surfaced throughout: tonic, subdominant, dominant, and a secondary-dominant harmony (i.e., V/V). It was sixteen measures long and used a basic form best described as AABB, setting the stanza to the A sections and the refrain to the B sections. While the multiple stanzas implied *da capo* style repetition, there were no marked repeats or other end markings. The overall texture was likely homorhythmic, although the refrain may have used antiphony.

Brumley adopted this formulaic approach for two principal reasons. First, songwriting was his livelihood, and he was under hire—by both himself and others—to write not just gospel songs, but “good” gospel songs. Thus, he had to balance creative freedom with the necessity of practicality and commercial success. In this regard, Brumley’s simple song “formula” represents the conventions that he found to be the most successful. Second, Brumley saw simplicity as the key to not only a song’s widespread popularity, but also its endurance and longevity. “I write basically simple songs because that has been the earmark of nearly all great songs,” Brumley once remarked in an interview from his later years. “True harmonic embellishment and styling can often enhance the effect of a song if done with skill and moderation; but the songs with basically simple melodies and simple messages stand the best chance to endure.”<sup>10</sup>

No other song is a better example of Brumley’s artistic genius and appeal than “I’ll Fly Away” (1932). With conservative estimates exceeding 1,050 commercial recordings to date, “I’ll Fly Away” has become the most recorded gospel song in

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Kathy E. Ledbetter, “Albert E. Brumley: Gospel and Folksong Writer,” *Pickin’* (Oct. 1979): 14-15.

American history. Such significance signals not only the popularity of a sacred song, but a song that has had an enormous impact on American culture as both an *artifact of* and *factor in* the culture's relationship with religion during the last eighty years. Early on, the song's transmission relied not only on radio and recordings, but also on songbooks, singers, preachers, entertainers, and America's internal migrations. These beginnings—from its popularity at singing conventions to its usage among blacks in Coahoma County, Mississippi, to the first recordings by Reverend J. M. Gates and the Humbard Family—help explain the stylistic variety, multiple meanings, and broad cultural significance that the song exemplifies today.

Perhaps more important, however, is the cultural “work” that the song has performed since 1932. Through its symbolic connection to the more charismatic, nostalgic strains of American Protestantism, the song has come to signify everything from rural white Pentecostal anthem to urban black funeral song. Within American popular culture, “I’ll Fly Away” has become a signature song among attempts to articulate the country’s rich and complex Christian heritage. With a universal text of hope—drawing upon common themes of home, flying away, and escape from suffering—skillfully set to a simple, appealing tune, “I’ll Fly Away” typifies Brumley’s ability to write timeless songs that transcend cultural boundaries of style, genre, race, denomination, and doctrine.

The “song profile” presented in this thesis can also be used as a gauge to measure Brumley’s overall artistic contributions to gospel music in particular and American music in general. Furthermore, it can function as a case study for considering sacred song’s dynamic place not just within American music, but within American culture as well. An

even more nuanced understanding of this larger issue would follow more song profiles of ubiquitous American gospel songs. With respect to Brumley, “If We Never Meet Again,” “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” “Rank Strangers to Me,” and “Turn Your Radio On” would all yield important contributions. However, there are other non-Brumley songs that are equally ideal in this regard. Some examples include “The Old Rugged Cross,” “I Saw the Light,” “Just a Little Talk with Jesus,” and “When the Saints Go Marching In.”

Considering additional avenues for further research, the general field of convention gospel music and southern gospel music remains relatively wide open. There are other composers, two prominent examples of which are Luther G. Presley (1887-1974), Stamps-Baxter’s next most important composer after Brumley, and Bill Gaither (b. 1936), by far the most significant living southern gospel songwriter. Such related genres as bluegrass gospel and country gospel also need further study. In addition, the cultural practice of convention gospel singing deserves more detailed and focused examinations of its popularity, performance practice, and present-day survival. Specifically, its social links to its predecessor, the shape-note sacred music of the nineteenth century, have been overlooked and underestimated in recent scholarship. Conversely, the influence of northern revivalist hymnody on the convention music industry also needs more attention.

Examinations of the relationships between gospel music and politics are also lacking. In this regard, the void of inquiry into convention music and southern gospel’s connections with conservative movements and politics is particularly conspicuous and troubling. One of the most important new directions for scholarship emerged in the case

study of “I’ll Fly Away,” which challenges the aforementioned racial essentialism and politics that plague the study and historiography of American gospel music. The need for a revised history of gospel music in America that works to undo the entrenched segregation in previous literature is critically apparent.

### **A Final Word**

At the end of Chapter One, there is a comparison of Brumley with two musical figures that have become essential to current American music historiography, William Billings and Stephen Foster. One could easily expand this comparison to include additional luminaries of American music. Like Brumley, Joseph Funk (1777-1862), William Walker (1809-1875), and Benjamin Franklin White (1800-1879) were shape-note music proponents involved in teaching, arranging, composing, compiling, and publishing. Though not in the realm of shape notes, Lowell Mason (1792-1872) was another key figure whose career encompassed all of these occupations and significantly contributed to both sacred and secular music in America. Extending this list into the late nineteenth century would recall such American gospel music pioneers as Philip P. Bliss (1838-1876), Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908), and Funk’s heirs, Aldine S. Kieffer (1840-1904) and Ephraim Ruebush (1833-1924).

However, once the historiography reaches the twentieth century, this popular sacred music lineage curiously ends. It resumes to an extent with African-American gospel music and such individuals as Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993), but a gaping hole remains. The impact of convention gospel music on American music and culture cannot be overstated, and Albert E. Brumley stands as its most influential son. He forged new



ground for modern American popular songwriting, not the songwriting of New York's Tin Pan Alley, but rather the songwriting of Nashville's Music Row. The remarkable breadth of his catalogue covers works that Elvis Presley sang at his mother's funeral ("If We Never Meet Again"), that Ray Stevens made into a 1972 country and pop hit ("Turn Your Radio On"), that James Blackwood used to conclude every concert in his later years ("I'll Meet You in the Morning"), that Aretha Franklin recorded in memory of Princess Diana ("I'll Fly Away"), and that bluegrass pioneer Bobby Osborne declared as his all-time favorite ("Rank Strangers to Me").

In light of the research and conclusions presented by this thesis, the problematic ideals which have negated Brumley's serious consideration within American music scholarship should finally melt away. If such figures as Billings, Funk, Mason, and Foster are American music icons, then Brumley is a twentieth-century equivalent. Millions sing his songs. They should know his name as well.

## APPENDIX A

### Albert E. Brumley Thematic Catalogue

This thematic catalogue includes every musical work that Albert E. Brumley wrote and published and serves as the basis for the musical analyses conducted in Chapter Three, “The Compositions of Albert Brumley.” It documents 396 works in all, comprising both those of sole authorship as well as collaborations for which Brumley composed either words or music. For delimitation purposes, this catalogue does not include: 1) Brumley’s arrangements to which he did not contribute as an author or composer, and 2) manuscripts, sketches, fragments, or otherwise unpublished work. Further details concerning the research and assembly of the catalogue appears in Chapter Three.

As part of an electronic dissertation, the Brumley Catalogue is available in a Microsoft Excel file format, enabling interactive user interface that permits custom filtering and reordering of the data. For example, each field heading contains a drop-down menu that contains “Sort Ascending” and “Sort Descending” as well as a “Custom Filter” option. Using these filters, users may organize the catalogue chronologically (by filtering the “Copyright Year” field), alphabetically (by filtering the “Title” field), or by theme, publisher, incipit, etc., by using each respective field’s filter function. A table listing the catalogue’s data fields, complete with more detailed descriptions of each where applicable, appears below.

To access the catalogue, please click on the following link:

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Table A.1. Brumley Catalogue data fields. The catalogue uses “AEB” (Brumley’s initials) instead of his full name. Unless otherwise noted, blank entries within the catalogue indicate information that is not applicable.

<b>A) Title</b>	The printed title for each work.
<b>B) Author(s)</b>	The printed author(s) of the text.
<b>C) Composer(s)</b>	The printed composer(s) of the music.
<b>D) Arranger(s)</b>	The printed arranger(s) of the work (if any).
<b>E) Copyright Year</b>	The printed year of copyright.
<b>F) First Publication</b>	The publication (i.e., songbook) containing the work’s first publication.
<b>G) First Publisher</b>	The publisher of the publication listed in the previous field. Abbreviations are as follows: AEBS = Albert E. Brumley and Sons H = Hartford Music Company H-N = Hartford Music Company and National Music Company (joint publication) M. L. Smith = M. Lynwood Smith Publications SB = Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company Sisk = Sisk Music Company SQ = Stamps Quartet Music Company
<b>H) Song Number</b>	The number assigned to the work’s first publication. An “X” indicates an unknown number.
<b>I) Theme</b>	The theme of the text. A theme preceded by an “S” (e.g., “S-Home”) indicates classification as a “sentimental,” or secular, song.
<b>J) Verse Melody Incipit</b>	Melodic incipits use a numerical system (1= <i>do</i> , 2= <i>re</i> , 3= <i>mi</i> , etc.) that documents the melody for the first eight syllables of text. A “+” or “-” indicates an accidental. For a syllable with multiple, slurred notes, the subsequent pitches appear in parentheses following the first pitch. The letter “u” (up) or “d” (down) indicates movement into the octave above or below. The rare appearance of a capital “U” or “D” indicates a leap that exceeds an adjacent octave (i.e., spans two octaves above or below). Under this system, the melodic incipit for “Amazing Grace,” for example, would appear as: 5u13(1)321d65.
<b>K) Refrain Melody Incipit</b>	See explanation for “Verse Melody Incipit.”
<b>L) Melodic Range</b>	A number indicates the general interval of range (6, 7, 8, 9, etc.). For ease of comparison, the number includes both major and minor interval distinctions. For example, a classification of 10 includes ranges of both a major 10 <sup>th</sup> and minor 10 <sup>th</sup> . Melodies with a “0” indicate wide melodic distribution among the vocal parts that defies this type of range classification (i.e., melodies that rotate among soprano, alto, bass, etc., over the course of a song). This field excludes melodies not written by Brumley.

<b>M) Verse First Line</b>	The first line of verse text.
<b>N) Refrain First Line</b>	The first line of refrain text.
<b>O) Meter</b>	The musical meter of the work, expressed as follows: 24 = 2/4; 34 = 3/4; 44 = 4/4; 64 = 6/4; 68 = 6/8; 128 = 12/8; etc.
<b>P) Tempo Markings</b>	This documents any tempo markings, including general markings ( <i>Adagio</i> , Lively, Slowly, etc.) as well as tempo changes ( <i>ritardandi</i> , etc.).
<b>Q) Dynamic Markings</b>	This documents any dynamic markings, including accents.
<b>R) Key</b>	The key of the work. All indicated keys are major. For example, C = C major; Af = A-flat major; etc.
<b>S) Harmony at Refrain</b>	The harmony at the beginning of the refrain, indicated with Roman numerals in reference to the tonic key.
<b>T) Verse Texture</b>	The texture of the verse (see Chapter Three for a detailed discussion of convention gospel texture classification). Abbreviations are as follows: A = Antiphonal, followed by one or more of the following to indicate melody placement: s = soprano, a = alto, t = tenor, b = bass, r = rotating or alternating (antiphonal/homorhythmic) melody. For example, "As" indicates an antiphonal texture that involves a single soprano melody. "Asar" indicates an antiphonal texture that begins with a soprano-alto duet and rotates the melody to other voices and/or textures. C = Contrapuntal (CA = Contrapuntal/Antiphonal combination). Dsa = Soprano-Alto Duet. H = Homorhythmic. M = Mixture, or combination, of homorhythmic and antiphonal. CM = contrapuntal and homorhythmic combination. S = Solo, always soprano unless followed by "b" (bass solo).
<b>U) Refrain Texture</b>	See explanation for "Verse Texture."
<b>V) Afterbeat</b>	An "x" indicates the use of an afterbeat texture (see Chapter Three for an explanation).
<b>W) Length in Measures</b>	The number of printed measures (excluding repeats, additional verses, etc.).
<b>X) Form</b>	An alphabet letter ("A") corresponds to a particular section or phrase with an apostrophe indicating "prime" status, designating close but not exact similarity to a previous section/phrase. Two typical forms used by Brumley are AA'BA' and AA'BB'. Other general forms that regularly appear are AAAA, AABC, ABB, and AABBCB (the most common of his longer forms).

<b>Y) End Markings</b>	An “x” indicates a <i>dal segno</i> marking. Any other markings (Coda, 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> ending, etc.) are indicated in writing.
<b>Z) Harmonic Variety</b>	As with most convention gospel music, the harmonic properties of Brumley’s works are fairly static and formulaic. Using numbers, this field roughly documents the harmonic variety present in a song. For example, a “3” appears in this field for a work that contains only three major harmonic changes (e.g., I, IV, and V).
<b>AA) Dedications/ Instructions</b>	This field documents any additional written material that appears with the song, including dedications, words about the song’s composition, specific performance instructions, etc.
<b>AB) Special Comments</b>	This is a more general field for critical comments and observations, including errors, melodic or textual similarities, and unusual features. Abbreviations are as follows: * = indicates the song’s inclusion in the anthology <i>The Best of Albert E. Brumley</i> (Powell, MO: Albert E. Brumley and Sons, 1966). blue 3 = the presence of flatted-thirds in the melody. grace = the presence of “grace” notes (often piano cues).

## APPENDIX B

### “I’ll Fly Away” Commercial Recording Discography

This discography is a large database that documents commercially recorded versions of Albert E. Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” from 1940 through 2010. The author began compiling this database—the only known attempt at accurately documenting these recordings—in 2008, and it currently numbers over 730 entries. It contains 100 entries before 1970, over 200 entries before 1980, over 300 entries before 1990, over 400 entries before 2000, and 275-plus entries alone between 2000 and 2010. The difficulty of tracking releases by local, regional, and small-scale performing groups—a difficulty that has existed at least since the 1950s—makes establishing a conclusive number of commercial recordings virtually impossible. This discography serves as the basis for various findings presented in Chapters Four and Five, “The Peculiar History of an American Gospel Standard,” Parts 1 and 2.

As part of an electronic dissertation, the “I’ll Fly Away” Discography is available in a Microsoft Excel file format, enabling interactive user interface that permits custom filtering and reordering of the data. For example, each field heading contains a drop-down menu that contains “Sort Ascending” and “Sort Descending” as well as a “Custom Filter” option. Using these filters, users may organize the catalogue chronologically (by filtering the “Year of Release” field), alphabetically (by filtering the “Artist” field), or by record label, genre, album title, etc., by using each respective field’s filter function. A table listing the discography’s data fields, complete with more detailed descriptions of each where applicable, appears below.

To access the discography, please click on the following link:

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Table B.1. “I’ll Fly Away” Discography data fields. Unless otherwise noted, blank entries within the discography indicate information that is not available or not applicable.

<b>A) Artist</b>	Name of the primary artist or group.
<b>B) Artist Detail</b>	Further details on the artist or group. For example, the artist detail for “Bagwell, Wendy” is “Wendy Bagwell and the Sunlighters.”
<b>C) Release</b>	If the version was a single, then the titles of both sides appear (e.g., I’ll fly away / Travelin’ on). If the version is part of a larger album, the album title appears.
<b>D) Record Label</b>	The release’s record label.
<b>E) Release No.</b>	Release number information.
<b>F) Year of Release</b>	The most accurate listing of the year during which the version first became available.
<b>G) Format</b>	Where relevant, the format of the initial release appears. Abbreviations are as follows: 78 = 78 rpm phonograph record 45 = 45 rpm phonograph record LP = Long-playing phonograph record CAS = Cassette tape CD = Compact disc
<b>H) Genre</b>	This is the author’s opinion of each version’s genre classification. The subjectivity of such a field is apparent and a necessary caveat. This information appears only to provide the reader with an indication of the author’s judgment in this regard. The genres/categories used are: barbershop, bluegrass, bluegrass gospel, blues, boogie woogie, brass band, Cajun, CCM (contemporary Christian music), children’s, chill, Chinese, choral, country (occasionally modified with “alternative,” “pop,” “rock,” and “western”), country gospel, folk, folk rock, gospel (often modified with “black,” “southern,” and occasionally “Native American”), hip-hop, instrumental, jam band, jazz, Latino, new age, old time, parlor/chamber, polka, pop, R&B, ragtime, reggae, rock, rockabilly, smooth jazz, steel drum band, symphonic pops, and western swing.

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- 2009 “Researching Southern Gospel Music in Kentucky and Tennessee.” *The Bulletin of the Society for American Music* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 17-18.
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