

## Performance Practice of Early American Hymnody: Tempo and the “Moods of Time”

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## **Abstract**

Modern time signatures indicate metrical organization in notated music. However, in most American hymnals and psalters published between 1721 and 1809, time signatures also signify very specific tempi. This notational practice, further removed from modern usage than any other element of this music, derives from proportional notations abandoned in art music in the seventeenth century. As technically complex music was published using this notation in the 1760s, these time signatures began to be used more subtly. In combination, they provide metrical effects unlike those possible with modern time signatures: doubling or halving tempo, or maintaining the pulse while altering its division or larger metric organization. Viewed from the perspective of modern notation, these functions diverge from their appearance. This article clarifies the correlation between time signature and tempo indicated in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American tunebooks (hymnals), arguing for its inclusion in modern performances of this repertoire. Internal evidence and related pedagogical practices suggest these tempi were intended to be observed; most early American theorists, composers, and compilers advocated adherence. Any revival of repertoire first published in this notation, including the works of such composers as William Billings, Daniel Read, and Supply Belcher, would profit by observing these tempi. In a repertoire frequently devoid of interpretive markings, time signatures provide invaluable clues to performers.

## **Keywords**

Hymnody, Performance Practice, Tempo, Dispersed Harmony



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## Performance Practice of Early American Hymnody: Tempo and the “Moods of Time”

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Many American tune-books published between 1721 and 1809 include “moods of time.” The moods of time, unlike modern time signatures, determine tempo as well as metrical organization. As conventional time signatures are similar in appearance to the moods of time, modern musicians could easily overlook the implications of this notational practice when performing music from tune-books of this period.<sup>1</sup> The moods, however, are valuable clues for interpretation, as tune-book repertoire usually lacks other interpretive markings. With this analysis of the correlation between mood and tempo, I will emphasize the importance of these markings for modern performers of early American church music. An examination of performance practice will also demonstrate the importance of these markings, raising questions of how precisely the moods were notated and how closely singers may have followed them. Although the moods were widely replaced by European time signatures during the

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1. This research is based on my examination of more than three thousand pieces and the theoretical introductions of thirty-two tune-books, which are listed separately at the beginning of the bibliography.

nineteenth century, they still represent an important facet of American music that has received little scholarly attention to date.

## **Introduction: Historical Context**

The moods are an important feature of both the northern and southern American tune-book repertoire. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American musicians used hymnals usually referred to as “tune-books” in the home, for trained choirs, and as pedagogical aids in singing schools.<sup>2</sup> New England clergy formed a market for tune-books when they established singing schools to teach music reading to congregants, circa 1720.<sup>3</sup> Tune-books served as singing school textbooks throughout their history, thus the moods of time reflect singing school pedagogy.<sup>4</sup> School classes met several nights a week in autumn or winter, typically culminating in a public performance by the students. The teachers sold tune-books and taught solmization, time-beating, and part-singing. At first they taught from psalters that featured simple three-part settings of standard psalm tunes. In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the importation of more

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2. Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (1981): 16–17; Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1978), 20–21.

3. Allen Perdue Britton, “Theoretical Introductions in Early American Tune-Books to 1800” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1949), 89–92.

4. The moods were not created explicitly as pedagogical devices, but any sizeable theoretical introduction to a tune-book will include a discussion of them suggesting that they were taught in most singing schools.

technically challenging English church music collections by booksellers caused a demand for similar publications in America. Singing school teachers compiled tune-books to meet this demand. As a result, tune-book publication boomed in America in the 1770s, and production increased through the end of the century.<sup>5</sup> Prior to 1801, one hundred and eleven tune-books were published in America, and roughly three hundred and thirty between 1801 and 1860.<sup>6</sup>

The moods of time of early American tune-books are similar to modern time signatures as they determine the note that receives the beat and the number of beats in the bar.<sup>7</sup> They differ from time signatures, however, in that each mood indicates a specific tempo. Time signatures emerged from mensural notation, the symbols used by Medieval and Renaissance composers to indicate proportional relationships of beats among different sections of a piece. In the fractional signatures used in mensural notation, the upper figure indicates the number of notes in the new meter and the lower figure indicates the number of notes in the old. Both occupy the same amount of time. For example, in the “sesquialtera proportion” (three over two), three note values in the new meter would be performed in the time of two in the old, a change that a modern musician may notate by introducing triplets. The relationship between time signatures still existed after proportional notation became obsolete in art music in the early seventeenth century. For instance, Henry Purcell’s *A*

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5. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 116.

6. Phil D. Perrin, “Theoretical Introductions in American Tunebooks from 1800 to 1860” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968), 132–159.

7. Some tune-books use the variant term “modes of time” instead.

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*Choice Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord or Spinnet* (1696) lists three signatures, describing them as “a very slow movement, . . . a little faster, . . . brisk & airy time.”<sup>8</sup> Growing notational precision in the eighteenth century caused this relationship to decay, replacing a hierarchal ranking of time signatures and tempi with more specific metronome markings.<sup>9</sup> Thus the use of the moods of time in American tune-books is slightly anachronistic, like many features of the tune-book repertory.

The use of the moods of time in America did not reflect contemporary European art music developments. This encouraged their use in collections featuring similarly anachronistic dispersed-harmonic part writing. The moods remained in common use during the eighteenth century, although two late eighteenth-century tune-books explicitly disassociate time signature and tempo.<sup>10</sup> Most eighteenth-century American tune-books were written in dispersed harmony. In the nineteenth century, however, collections of European music in common-practice period harmonizations arose. The compilers of these tune-books typically eschew the moods in favour of time signatures supplemented by verbal markings such as *allegro* and *vivace*. Thus, knowledge of the moods is not necessary to perform of the music of these tune-books. *Templi Carmina* (1821), an anonymous transitional European-influenced tune-book, still uses the moods but cautions that “all the species in each kind of time are really the same, and may, and ought to be, performed slower or

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8. Curt Sachs, *Rhythm and Tempo: A Study in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1953), 271.

9. *Ibid.*, 310–320.

10. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 244.

faster, according to the sentiment to be expressed.”<sup>11</sup> This indicates that the editor of *Templi Carmina* did not consider the moods as important as his dispersed-harmonic predecessors, a view common among compilers of Europeanized tune-books. Southern tune-books in dispersed harmony, however, include the moods through the 1860s. Therefore, the knowledge of the moods remains vital for performance of the late southern repertoire, including such well-known tune-books as Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835) and White and King’s *Sacred Harp* (1844).

### Theoretical Characteristics

The moods have theoretical characteristics distinct from time signatures and notation alone does not provide sufficient information for performance. Therefore, singers had to learn about the moods in singing schools. Alternatively, they could read about them in the theoretical introductions included in most tune-books; these introductions reflect the pedagogical methods of singing schools and include detailed descriptions of the performance practice of the moods of time. Writers of these introductions divide the moods into three subcategories: common, triple, and compound. Common time includes four moods: Adagio, Largo, Allegro, and 2/4. Triple time has three: 3/2, 3/4, and 3/8. There are two compound moods: 6/4 and 6/8—producing a total of nine moods.<sup>12</sup> Tune-book compilers

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11. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 86; *Templi Carmina: Songs of the Temple, or Bridgewater Collection of Sacred Music* (Boston: Richardson, 1821), xi.

12. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 236–238.

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seldom use other symbols or explain them in detail. Adagio, Largo, and Allegro are distinct moods of time and do not imply ranges of possible tempo as in modern notational practice.

The first mood of common time, Adagio, is equivalent to 4/4. A “C” represents this mood. Largo, the second, is also equivalent to 4/4. A “C” with a slash through it signifies Largo. For a Largo melody that moves mostly in half-notes, some tune-book authors allow singers to count two beats per bar instead of four. For example, Billings marks passages in his compositions where this “minim beating” is appropriate.<sup>13</sup> An inverted “C” represents the third mood, called Allegro or “the Retorted Mood,” which is equivalent to 2/2. The symbol for Allegro may or may not include a slash. Jacob Kimball’s *The Village Harmony* (1796) describes the inverted “C” as slower than the slashed inverted “C,” but no other tune-books do likewise.<sup>14</sup> Allegro fell out of use sooner than the other moods; in 1832 Daniel Read remarked, “[Allegro] is seldom used in modern music.”<sup>15</sup> The terms Adagio, Allegro, and Largo as names of common time moods apparently appear only in American tune-books and, for

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13. William Billings, *The Continental Harmony*, ed. Hans Nathan (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), vii; Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 236; Henry Smith, *The Church Harmony* (Chambersburg: Ruby, 1837), 10; John Wyeth, *Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1974), 11.

14. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 238.

15. Daniel Read, *Musica Ecclesiae, or Denotational Harmony*, ed. Karl and Marie Kroeger (Middleton: A-R, 2004), 16.

unclear reasons, fell into disuse in the early nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

Many tune-book introductions term the triple and compound time moods “three from four” or “three to two.”<sup>17</sup> Dispersed-harmonic tune-books of the 1850s and 1860s do not use 3/8.<sup>18</sup> Some early tune-books, like John Lyon’s *Urania* (1761), neither use nor mention compound moods. William Tans’ur, an English composer and compiler popular in America, calls 9/4 and 9/8 “Triple Tripla-Time Moods” and 12/4 and 12/8 “Fourth Tripla-Time Moods.” He admits that they rarely appear in vocal music. The 1770 American edition of Tans’ur’s works omits this explanation.<sup>19</sup> Daniel Bayley, the editor, may have made this change to keep his book pertinent to American readers. Tans’ur’s description of these moods as “instrumental” suggests this, since many American churches still prohibited the use of instruments in worship. Even such a patently cosmopolitan tune-book as Lowell Mason’s *Handel and Haydn Society Collection* mentions 9/4, 9/8, and 9/16 only to note that they “seldom occur in modern music.”<sup>20</sup>

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16. William Tans’ur, *The American Harmony, or, Royal Melody Complete* (Newburyport: Bayley, 1771), 7; William Tans’ur, *The Works of Mr. William Tans’ur*, in *The Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Primary-Gale, 2000), 11–12; Perrin, “Theoretical Introductions,” 83–84.

17. One uses “from” if the upper number is larger and “to” if the lower is larger; see Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 238.

18. Examples include John G. McCurry, *The Social Harp*, eds. Daniel W. Patterson and John F. Garst (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1973) and B. F. White and E. J. King, *The Sacred Harp* (Nashville: Broadman, 1968).

19. Tans’ur, *American Harmony*, 8; Tans’ur, *Works of Mr. William Tans’ur*, 15–17.

20. Lowell Mason, *The Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music* (Boston: Richardson, 1822), xvi.

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American tune-book compilers who use the moods tend to specify tempi more explicitly than their English colleagues. For instance, Tans'ur relates 3/2 to the archaic *sesquialtera* proportion: "If a *Bar* should include the Quantity of three *Semibreves*, they are sung, or play'd but the length of three *Minims* [in the slowest mood of common time]; or if three *Minims* in a *Bar*, they are counted but in the *Time* of three *Crotchets* [quarter-notes]."<sup>21</sup> Tans'ur's American editor Bayley replaces this explanation with a footnote giving exact tempo indications for the moods, explaining that "[in Largo] the Crotchets, and so all other Notes in proportion, have been from a long Time past, and now for the most Part, are sung in the time of Seconds" (i.e., in Largo the quarter-note equals M.M. 60).<sup>22</sup> This may indicate that precise mood-tempo relationships had been a feature of American church song since the early eighteenth century, and that observing the moods is more important in American than British repertoire.

Figure 1 shows the most common tempo specifications for each mood. The relationship between Adagio, Allegro, and 3/2, all of which have a pulse of M.M. 60, is consistent in dispersed-harmonic tune-books.<sup>23</sup> This consistency is further evidence that the moods were widely used by singers. John Tufts describes the same correlation between Adagio and 3/2 in the first American tune-book,

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21. Tans'ur, *Works of Mr. William Tans'ur*, 13.

22. Tans'ur, *Works*, 10–14; Tans'ur, *American Harmony*, 7–8.

23. Some of the latest dispersed-harmonic tune-books, those published in the 1850s and 1860s, specify M.M. 40 for these moods instead. For examples see White and King, *Sacred Harp*, 6–7; McCurry, *The Social Harp*, 6.

*Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes* (1721).<sup>24</sup> In *Missouri Harmony* (1830), Allen D. Carden suggests beginners practice these moods against a clock.<sup>25</sup>

The moods 2/4, 3/4, and 6/8 are subject to greater variance than the other moods. Tempo specifications for 2/4 range between M.M. 75 and 160, although most tune-book compilers stipulate either M.M. 80 or 120. 3/8 is most problematic; some writers neglect to provide specific tempi for 3/8.<sup>26</sup> M.M. 120 is the most common, although specified tempi for 3/8 range between M.M. 100 and 180.<sup>27</sup> There is also some variation in the use of Largo in eighteenth-century tune-books. Some of the earliest authors suggest M.M. 120 for Largo, making the number of beats in the bar the only difference between Largo and Allegro.<sup>28</sup> Billings, like some

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24. Tufts, *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes, with a Collection of Tunes in Three Parts*, in *Early American Imprints 1639–1800* (American Antiquarian Society, n.d.), 5.

25. Allen D. Carden, *The Missouri Harmony* (Cincinnati: Morgan, 1830), 10. Carden's theoretical introduction, including his suggestion for practicing Adagio, Allegro, and 3/2, was widely copied by other compilers of dispersed-harmonic tune-books. The same suggestion had appeared more than a century before in John Playford's 1694 *Introduction to the Skill of Music*; John Playford, *An Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 75–78.

26. Examples include Read, *Musica Ecclesiae*, 16–17; Tans'ur, *American Harmony*, 8; Tans'ur, *Works of Mr. William Tans'ur*, 11–13.

27. Lyon, *Urania*, VI; Stephen St. John, *The American Harmonist* (Harrisburg: Greer, 1821), 11; Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music*, 11.

28. James Lyon, *Urania: A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems, and Hymns* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), V-VI; Tans'ur, *American Harmony*, 8; Tans'ur, *Works of Mr. William Tans'ur*, 11–12.

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English authors, states that Largo may be slower in psalm tunes.<sup>29</sup>

Anthems are tunes that exhibit the effects of mood changes well since they change mood more frequently than shorter pieces. Usually a mood change maintains the beat, altering only metric organization, as in measures 28–32 of Billings’ “Is Any Afflicted” (ex. 1). This excerpt begins and ends in Allegro, with one bar of 3/2 interspersed. As Billings’ theoretical introduction specifies that Allegro is at half-note = M.M. 60 and 3/2 at half-note = M.M. 60, the pulse remains steady throughout.<sup>30</sup> Occasionally mood changes maintain the pulse, but alter the division of the pulse. Billings’ hymn-tune “Richmond” (ex. 2) moves from 6/4 to 2/4 at the beginning of the chorus “Quickly, quickly, Jesus come.” The dotted half-note in 6/4 and the half-note in 2/4 have the same value (M.M. 60), creating an effect of moving from triplets to duplets. This and its reverse are not uncommon in Billings’ compositions.<sup>31</sup>

One oft-reprinted Billings anthem, “I Heard a Great Voice,” changes the pulse entirely (ex. 3). Rapid alternation of Allegro and 3/2 extends from measure 16 to measure 32, a device also seen in “Was Not the Day” (ex. 4).<sup>32</sup> The half-note remains at M.M. 60 until measure 33, when a change to Largo slows the half-note to M.M. 40, bringing the anthem to a

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29. Billings, *New England Psalm-Singer*, 24. This statement does not reappear in any of Billings’ later tune-books.

30. William Billings, *The Singing Master’s Assistant*, in *The Complete Works of William Billings*, vol. 2., ed. Hans Nathan (Boston: American Musicological Society & The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1977), 10–12.

31. *Ibid.*, 120–121, 221–223.

32. *Ibid.*, 231–243.

close. Another Billings anthem, “The States, O Lord,” doubles in tempo by moving between Allegro (half-note = M.M. 60) and 2/4 (quarter-note = M.M. 120).<sup>33</sup> In addition, the already expansive 3/2 “Amen” is marked “Slow.” The inverse effect appears in “Was not the Day.” The antepenultimate section moves between 2/2 and 3/2 (both, half-note = M.M. 60). This precedes a “Halleluiah” in 3/4 (quarter-note = M.M. 80) and a final 3/2 “Amen,” which returns the pulse to 60 M.M.<sup>34</sup> Billings provides no indication of these transformations of pulse and subdivision apart from changes in mood, thus modern performers must be familiar with the moods to perform these anthems and other pieces with mood changes accurately.

### **Pedagogical Tools to Teach and Enforce Observance of the Moods**

Singing school teachers employed methods such as time-beating and pendulums to help students follow the moods of time correctly. This suggests that most singers observed the moods, as should modern performers. Eighteenth-century tune-books describe two manners of beating time; in both, the hand falls on the first beat and rises on the last. Lyon describes the simpler form thus: “The first half of [the bar] must be Perform’d with the Hand or Foot down, & the other with it up.”<sup>35</sup> By dividing the bar unevenly, singers could adapt this method to triple meter. Billings

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33. Billings, *Singing Master’s Assistant*, 244–255; Billings, *Continental Harmony*, xx–xxi.

34. Billings, *Singing Master’s Assistant*, 243.

35. Lyon, *Urania*, V.

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explains the more complex method of beating Adagio and Largo: “First strike the ends of the fingers, secondly, the heel of the hand, then thirdly, raise your hand a little and shut it up, and fourthly, raise your hand still higher and throw it open at the same time.”<sup>36</sup> Singers could subtract motions to use this method in triple or duple meter. It is possible that the simpler method is an abbreviated description of the more complicated method. Some writers, however, indicate that the former may be performed with either the foot or the hand, while the latter requires a surface upon which to “strike the ends of the fingers.”<sup>37</sup> This discrepancy may indicate two distinct techniques. Tune-book compilers almost universally advocate time-beating; one author suggests beginners perfect their beating with a watch or pendulum before attempting to sing and beat simultaneously.<sup>38</sup> According to Britton, even experienced choirs used time-beating while singing.<sup>39</sup>

Dispersed-harmonic tune-books specify these methods well into the nineteenth century, but church music reformers began to advocate standard conducting patterns by the 1830s.<sup>40</sup> In *Evangelical Musick* (1839), J. H. Hickock and George Fleming explain: “[4/4] has four beats or motions, viz: 1st, down,...2d, horizontally to the left,...3d, horizontally

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36. Billings, *Continental Harmony*, 7.

37. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 247–248.

38. Carden, *The Missouri Harmony*, 10–11.

39. Britton, “Theoretical Introductions,” 246; Ananias Davison, *Kentucky Harmony* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), xi.

40. Perrin, “Theoretical Introductions,” 77–78; Carden, *The Missouri Harmony*, 10; McCurry, *The Social Harp*, 6; William Walker, *The Southern Harmony & Musical Companion* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1987), vii; White and King, *Sacred Harp*, 6–7.

to the right, . . . and 4th, up.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike earlier writers, the reformers advocated beating time only as a teaching method. The *Handel and Haydn Society Collection* (1822) quoted a European authority to this effect:

I am by no means an advocate for the smallest motion or gesticulation, either with the hand, foot, or head, when a performer once begins to play with any degree of exactness; but, at the commencement, it is absolutely necessary that the right hand should be taught to make the beats in every measure, till it becomes to the pupil what the pendulum is to the clock, which is to keep it regular and in exact motion.<sup>42</sup>

That the reformers adopted conventional conducting patterns reflects their respect for contemporary European church music, a feeling that was not shared by the Southern dispersed-harmonic tune-book compilers who continued to use the moods.

The pendulum is another time-keeping aid associated with the moods. Some compilers specify pendulum lengths for each mood of time.<sup>43</sup> One author, Jeremiah Ingalls, gives tempi only in such lengths, and Billings asserts, “The most

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41. J. H. Hickock and Geo. Fleming, *Evangelical Musick*. (Philadelphia: Wetham, 1839), X.

42. Mason, *Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection* (1822), xvi. The theorist quoted, “Dr. Arnold,” may be a British writer on music.

43. Supply Belcher, *The Harmony of Maine* (New York: Da Capo Press), 197213; Billings, *Continental Harmony*, vii–ix; Carden, *The Missouri Harmony*, 16; Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, xii; St. John, *American Harmonist*, 10; Walker, *Southern Harmony*, viii.

correct Way is to beat Time by Pendulums.”<sup>44</sup> Still, exactly how singers used pendulums is unknown. The English compiler Caleb Ashworth suggests in *Collection of Tunes* (ca. 1760): “If [the pendulum] were made to take a pretty large swing at first, . . . it would continue sufficiently uniform while a psalm tune was sung, and consequently being always put in motion at the beginning of the tune would be a constant guide.” Ashworth omitted this suggestion from the second edition of 1765, suggesting he found it unsuccessful.<sup>45</sup> Singing school teachers may have used pendulums as Ashworth suggests, but since the momentum of the pendulum is limited, this method would work only for extremely short tunes.<sup>46</sup> Billings seems to suggest use with a large group of students when he advises, “Rub them over, either with chalk, paint or white-wash, so that they may be seen plainly by candle-light.”<sup>47</sup> Regardless of the place of pendulums in singing school pedagogy, they were apparently only a teaching tool for beginners and intended to ingrain the proper tempo of each mood in students’ memories. The frequent mention of time-beating and pendulums in theoretical introductions of tune-books indicates that singing school teachers thought the moods were an essential part of music education. The moods

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44. Billings, *New England Psalm-Singer*, 25; Jeremiah Ingalls, *The Christian Harmony or Songster’s Companion* (New York: Da Capo, 1981), 5–7.

45. C. Ashworth, “A Collection of Tunes,” in *The Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Primary-Gale, 2000), 15; C. Ashworth, “A Collection of Tunes, Part I,” in *The Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Primary-Gale, 2000), 17.

46. Crawford and McKay, “Performance of William Billings’ Music,” 325–326.

47. Billings, *Continental Harmony*, vii; Crawford and McKay, “Performance of William Billings’ Music,” 326.

should be equally important in modern performances of tune-book repertoire.

### Evidence for the Regular Observance of the Moods

The introductions and repertoire of tune-books can only characterize printed culture, not actual practice. Thus, it is impossible to gauge how strictly singers followed the indicated tempi, even though these sources seem to show that the moods were usually observed.<sup>48</sup> Works published in composers' collections, including the above examples, are less ambiguous than those reprinted in later compilations. Authors presumably expected their own guidelines, as stated in their theoretical introductions, to apply: "Daniel Read remarks that, while he has laid down rules 'as conformable to the common custom' as possible, he holds it his 'indispensible duty' when singing music composed by authors who give different rules to sing it as their rules indicate."<sup>49</sup>

One early objector to the moods, tune-book compiler J. B. Aikin, claimed, "We sometimes find the same music written in different varieties of measure in different books (and those, sometimes, by the same author)."<sup>50</sup> Such instances are actually rare: while the exact tempo assigned to each mood varies, the use of moods within specific pieces remains remarkably consistent. The psalm tune "Crowle" bears the same mood in dissimilar collections published sixty years

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48. Britton, "Theoretical Introductions," 239.

49. Ibid. 242. Psalm tunes had multiple texts, so their tempi may have varied by psalm or verse, as one writer suggests; see Britton, "Theoretical Introductions," 310.

50. J. B. Aikin, *The Christian Minstrel: A New System of Musical Notation* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1860), 5.

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apart.<sup>51</sup> Two of Billings' anthems, "I Am the Rose of Sharon" (1770) and "The Lord is Ris'n Indeed" (1786), are consistently notated from their first appearances to 1867.<sup>52</sup> Some compilers converted obsolete markings into familiar terms. For instance, Billings' "I Heard a Great Voice" concludes with four bars of Largo (quarter-note = M.M. 80) following a section in Allegro (quarter-note = M.M. 60). After Allegro fell out of use, B. F. White altered this to an equivalent transition from 4/4 (quarter-note = M.M. 66) to 2/2 (quarter-note = M.M. 40).<sup>53</sup> These consistencies suggest that each mood had individual significance for those who compiled and sang from tune-books: one common-time mood could not simply be substituted for another without altering the character of the piece.

The practicability of singing specified tempi may indicate how carefully singers followed the moods. Tempi assigned in dispersed-harmonic tune-books are generally faster than those of reform music, but not so quick as to preclude comfortable performance by amateurs. One of

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51. Mason, *The Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 128; Lyon, *Urania*, 7.

52. Ralph T. Daniel, *The Anthem in New England Before 1800* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 104-105; William Billings, *The Singing Master's Assistant*, in *The Complete Works of William Billings*, ed. Hans Nathan (Boston: American Musicological Society, 1977), 216-225; Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, 117; McCurry, *The Social Harp*, 241; M. L. Swan, *The New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville: Tennessee University Press, 1978), 199; Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 200; White and King, *Sacred Harp*, 254; Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music*, 73; Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, 101; McCurry, *The Social Harp*, 229; Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 195; Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 189; White and King, *Sacred Harp*, 235; Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music*, 88.

53. White and King, *Sacred Harp*, 253.

Billings' anthems contains a section in 2/4 (quarter-note = M.M. 120) with a long sixteenth-note run in the tenor, as shown in example 4. This would likely have taxed Billings' singing school students. Further, "The New Union," from Jeremiah Ingalls' *Christian Harmony* (1805), should be sung at dotted quarter = M.M. 80 (ex. 5). At this tempo, the irregular phrasing of the tune makes renewed breaths difficult. Equally, McCurry's *Social Harp* lists 6/8 as dotted quarter = M.M. 80. Keeping clear diction in the syllabic setting in example 6 would be demanding at that speed. Exceptions such as these, however, are rare. Most pieces in early American tune-books have tempi appropriate both to text and musical style, and therefore present few technical difficulties for performers.

The most convincing evidence for the regular observance of the moods of time is that tune-book authors admonish beginning singers to follow the moods.<sup>54</sup> Billings simply states: "observe strictly the rules beforementioned [*sic*]." <sup>55</sup> Supply Belcher provides an extended explanation:

The performing the several moods in their proper time, is a matter which should be well attended to: And [*sic*] yet singers often fail in this point. That some moods are quicker and some slower, all agree, yet some will sing every mood alike, or so nearly alike that the difference is scarcely perceptible. This, in many pieces, especially in such as change from one mood to

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54. Britton, "Theoretical Introductions," 239; Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, 8.

55. Crawford and McKay, "Performance of William Billings' Music," 325.

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another, entirely frustrates the design of the composer, and ruins the musick. Others again will sing all moods too slow: This [*sic*] is so common that many persons who profess to be good singers will scarcely allow it to be an error. It is generally most prevalent in those companies where the spirit of musick is upon the decline, and the singers grown dull and indifferent about singing; they will then drag on heavily through a piece of musick, and render it not only a burden to themselves, but disagreeable to all who hear them. On the other hand, some may err by beating time too fast; this error is sometimes found in persons who are possessed of too great a share of ostentation.<sup>56</sup>

Belcher advocates using pendulums to correct these errors. Writing about pendulums, Carden claims, “If teachers would fall upon this or some other method, for ascertaining and keeping the true time, there would not be so much difficulty among singers, taught at different schools, about timing music together.”<sup>57</sup> These remarks imply that deviation from the moods was common, especially amongst students, while at the same time indicating that Carden and Belcher wanted them to be strictly observed. Only a few dispersed-harmonic tune-books advise deviating from the moods outright. Timothy Swan writes in *New Harp of Columbia* (1801), “How

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56. Belcher, *Harmony of Maine*, 12–13. This paragraph was widely reprinted in nineteenth-century tune-books, for instance in Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music*, 12–13.

57. Carden, *The Missouri Harmony*, 16, also quoted in Walker, *Southern Harmony*, viii.

quick or slow we should move in the different Moods of Time... must be left to the judicious Teacher or performer who will be dictated by the subject, and move in the different Moods of time according to the best of his judgment.”<sup>58</sup> After describing pendulums, Ingalls cautions, “This is for a general rule; the time may be varied according to the discretion of the performer.”<sup>59</sup> Overall, comments by compilers suggest that most performers observed the moods of time, and certainly that composers of dispersed-harmonic music expected and desired the moods to be used in performance.

## Conclusion

The moods of time, a central feature of nearly every eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American tune-book, are more removed from modern notational practice than other elements of these books. Nor do they merely indicate tempo like modern time signatures: when multiple moods are used in the same piece, they can provide metrical effects unlike those possible with modern time signatures. Hence, the moods can function in ways different from their appearance. Even if these distinctions were not always observed in practice, the majority of early theorists advocated adherence. Most pieces published in early American tune-books benefit from their use, and any performers who revive this repertoire—such as the works of William Billings, Daniel Read, and Supply Belcher—would benefit by following the moods.

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58. Timothy Swan, *New England Harmony* (Northampton: Wright, 1801), viii.

59. Ingalls, *The Christian Harmony*, 7.

## Appendix

Figure 1: Tempi of the moods of time.

Common time	Adagio	Quarter = M.M. 60
	Largo	Quarter = M.M. 80 or 90
	Allegro	Half = M.M. 60
	2/4	Quarter = M.M. 80 or 120
Triple time	3/2	Half = M.M. 60
	3/4	Quarter = M.M. 80 or 90
	3/8	Half = M.M. 120
Compound time	6/4	Dotted half = M.M. 60
	6/8	Dotted quarter = M.M. 80

Example 1: William Billings, “Sing Ye Merrily,” mm. 28–33.<sup>60</sup>

Teach-ing and ad - mon ish-ing,

One an - oth - er in Psalms and Hymns

Teach-ing and ad - mon ish-ing one an - oth - er in Psalms and Hymns

Teach-ing and ad - mon ish-ing one an - oth - er in Psalms and Hymns

60. Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant*, 130.

Example 2: William Billings, “Richmond,” mm. 7–9.<sup>61</sup>

Feels a dy - ing Lov - er's An - guish: Quick - ly, quick - ly,

Feels a dy - ing Lov - er's An - guish: Quick - ly, quick - ly,

Feels a dy - ing Lov - er's An - guish: Quick - ly, quick - ly,

Feels a dy - ing Lov - er's An - guish: Quick - ly, quick - ly,

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61. Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant*, 170.

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Example 3: William Billings, “I Heard a Great Voice,” mm.  
23–36.<sup>62</sup>

23  
for they rest, for they rest from their La-bours, from their La-bours,  
for they rest, for they rest from their La-bours, from their La-bours,  
for they rest, for they rest from their La-bours, from their La-bours,  
for they rest, for they rest from their La-bours, from their La-bours,

29  
from their La-bours and their works, which do fol-low, fol-low, fol-low, which do fol-low, fol-low  
from their La-bours and their works, which do fol-low, fol-low, fol-low, which do fol-low, fol-low  
from their La-bours and their works, which do fol-low, fol-low, fol-low, which do fol-low, fol-low  
from their La-bours and their works, which do fol-low, fol-low, fol-low, which do fol-low, fol-low

33  
them, which do fol-low them.  
them, which do fol-low them.  
them, which do fol-low them.  
35  
them, which do fol-low them.

62. Billings, *Singing Master's Assistant*, 176–177.



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Example 6: W. T. Power, “The Royal Band,” mm. 1–14  
(entire piece, texted as in source).<sup>65</sup>

$\text{♩} = 80$

Ho - san-na to Je - sus, my soul's fill'd with prais - es, Come, O my dear breth - ren, and help me to sing.  
No music so cham - ning, no look is so warm - ing, It gives life and com - fort, and glad - ness with - in.

5 Ho - san-na is ring - ing; O how I love sing - ing. There's no - thing so sweet as the sound of his name.

10 The an - gels in glo - ry, re - peat the glad sto - ry, Of love which in Je - sus is made known to man.

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65. McCurry, *The Social Harp*, 186.

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