

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FH 5378

MUSIC OF THE SHAKERS

COMPILED BY VINCENT R. TORTORA

The glee clubs of Smith & Amherst Colleges

PERFORMED IN TRADITIONAL STYLE



Shakers dance the "wheel" dance. It consists of four concentric circles of Brothers, alternating with Sisters, to symbolize the four spiritual cycles of Shaker theology.

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SIDE 1

FANFARE
THE PEOPLE CALLED THE SHAKERS
THE SERMON
FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB
MOTHER ANN'S SONG
OH I LOVE MOTHER
SHEPHERDESS SONG
MOTHER ANN'S SONG

SIDE 2

SHEEP AS I GO
THE VOICE OF GOD
WHO WILL BOW AND BEND LIKE A WILLOW
COME LIFE, SHAKER LIFE
SIMPLE GIFTS
I'VE SET MY FACE FOR ZION'S KINGDOM

The performance recorded herein was produced at Smith College in Northampton, Mass. under the direction of Professors Edith Burnett and choral director, Iva Dee Hiatt.

The singing was provided by the combined glee clubs of Smith College and Amherst College. A 16mm film and a 35mm sound filmstrip on the Shakers are available through VEDO FILMS, 85 Longview Road, Port Washington, N.Y. 11050.

Producer: Vincent R. Portora
Photographs: Chris Portora

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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MIDDLE 19th CENTURY PRINT OF SHAKER SQUARE—ORDER DANCE

Order, harmony of symmetry of dance patterns reflected Shaker theology. The same qualities infused everything they did.

THE SHAKERS IN AMERICA

(Vincent R. Tortora)

One of the earliest commune movements in America, and by far the most successful, was that of the Shakers. In the over 200 years that the Shakers existed, they exerted considerable influence on the development of American art, architecture & design; agriculture & technology. They were, as a group, extremely resourceful and industrious. Their crafted items such as chairs, tables, chests, cupboards and cabinets are staples of many museum collections in North America and Europe. Those of their communities which are still standing have been converted into museums so that posterity might admire their architectural purity and integrity.

Since they were founded near Albany, N.Y. in 1774, close to twenty thousand Shakers have lived, worked and created in the 18 communes they set up from Maine and New Hampshire in the east to Indiana and Kentucky in the west.

The founder of Shakerism in America was Ann Lee, who was born in Manchester, England. She was an intense, extremely sensitive woman who reacted profoundly to the suffering and adversity in her life and in the lives of the

poorer classes of Manchester. All of her 4 children died in infancy. Her husband was of little solace and, if anything, a millstone around her neck.

For years she wrestled with her soul and, in her early 30's, began to preach what she claimed had been revealed to her by God...that Christ had a dual nature: male and female...that the male incarnation had been Jesus and the female, herself, Ann Lee. She thus became the embodiment of the Millennial prophecy that Christ would reign triumphantly over the earth for a thousand years. When she came to America with a small band of followers she was extremely successful in attracting converts to her new religion.

She was convinced that the early death of her children signified that the act of procreation was sinful. Her experiences turned her against marriage. She preached and taught that anyone could experience the second appearing of Christ within himself if he prayed long and hard, purged himself of sins and desires of the flesh, rejected sex and marriage, and devoted his hands to work and his heart to God. These principles undergirded every Shaker commune to be established during its over-200-year history in America. All Shakers were celibates. New membership only came through conversions or by taking in orphans and foundlings.



MIDDLE 19th CENTURY PRINT

Final procession at Shaker Worship Service. Hands of worshippers are uplifted to receive God's Blessing. The Shakers sang special hymns during this segment of their service.

Mother Ann Lee also taught that it was by shaking and agitating the body that Believers were freed from such worldly ills as war, disease, slavery, racism, famine, poverty, the inequality of the sexes and human depravity. Agitation of the body became such an integral part of Shaker worship that outsiders gave them their name: The Shakers. They usually called themselves "The Believers."

In the earliest days of Shakerism, during the middle 1770's, Mother Ann Lee was not given to singing. In fact, she placed a taboo on most of the religious and secular songs of the day. But, the ecstasies arising from physical agitation literally cried out for some manner of voice. At first, as they began to dance, they murmured or softly chanted biblical text or prayers to establish rhythm. But, as their movements became more frenzied, they took to shouting and chanting nonsense syllables in a heavy cadence.

As more and more converts came to the Shakers from all areas of 18th-century life, they brought with them many of the customs and traditions of the day. It wasn't long before the folk, secular and religious music traditions of non-Shakers made their influence felt.

In fact, the Shakers were never, in any area of endeavor, reluctant to accept, modify and refine impulses from the outside world. This was as true with music as it was with other areas in which they excelled. In essence, they took from the world what they felt fitted into their religious philosophy and reworked it until it little resembled, and often surpassed, the original.

This practice is rather dramatically illustrated in an early Shaker song entitled: "The Saints Triumph on the Downfall of the Anti-Christ." It goes, in part:

We'll take the choicest of their songs
Which to the Church of God belongs

And recompense them for their wrongs
In singing their destruction.

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, the Shakers wrote literally thousands of songs, or adapted those from the outside. They fell roughly into the following categories:

1. Hymns and Anthems
2. Dance and Marching Songs
3. Ritualistic or Gestural Songs
4. Songs accompanied by Spiritual Presents
5. "Indian" Songs
6. "Negro" Songs
7. Songs in Unknown Tongues
8. Vision Songs
9. "Low" Songs

(List compiled by Edward Deming Andrews)

In every sense, Shaker songs are in the folk tradition. It is seldom known who composed a given song. They were thought to be dictated by some higher source to Shaker scribes who wrote them down. This may account for the fact that the melody for Simple Gifts included on this record is almost identical to a Concerto a Cinque from the 17th century Italian Baroque.

The songs were used in appropriate settings in the communities in which they originated, and exchanged with other communities. Frequently, they would undergo modifications in text or tune as they moved to various parts of the country.

The unfettered richness of Shaker music derives from the fact that their songs represented a newly emergent religious experience as well as art form and were not cramped into the conventions and restrictions of religious orthodoxy.

The Shakers didn't restrict music to their worship services. They sang whenever there was an appropriate occasion... at work...at social gatherings...while marching from one place to another.

One of the songs they sang while at work expresses eloquently their passion for perfection in everything they did and in every item they made:

My Mother's wisdom is so rare
In every branch of science
That in her wisdom I can trust
And place a firm reliance.

My Mother is a carpenter
She hews the crooked stick
And she will have it strait and squair
Altho it cuts the quick.

My Mother is a Joiner wise
She builds her spacious dome
And all that trace her sacred ways
Will find a happy home.

By the end of the Civil War, those religious, social and economic circumstances which had enabled the Shakers to flourish began to change. New converts to Shakerism became fewer and fewer. One after another, communities across the country were closed. Inexorably, the Shaker movement withdrew toward its roots, with the last communities to survive those in New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine.

The wealth of contributions the Shakers have made to American life fills a large place in museums, textbooks and the folk literature. The music on the record cannot, unfortunately, be anything more than a representative sampler of the rich Shaker legacy.

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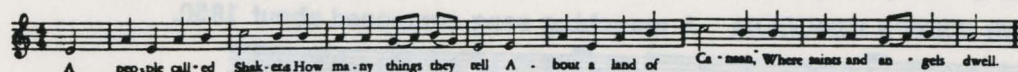
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SIDE 1

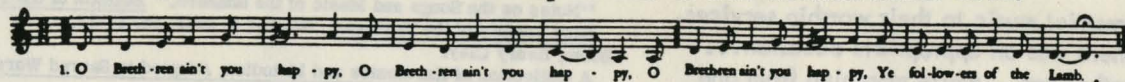
FANFARE It was not until the late 1800's that musical instruments were permitted in Shaker worship services.

THE PEOPLE CALLED THE SHAKERS This is a hymn with the qualities of a white spiritual. It was written about 1810.



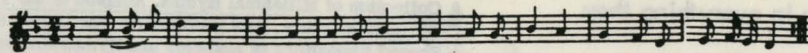
Shaker meetings.

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB A form of a spiritual. It was written about 1848.

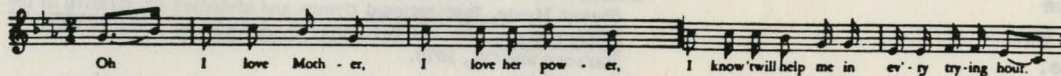


I. O Breth-ren sin't you hap-py, O Breth-ren sin't you hap-py, O Brethren sin't you hap-py, Ye fol-low-ers of the Lamb.

MOTHER ANN'S SONG This flute solo is the oldest wordless hymn in the collection. It dates from the 1780's.

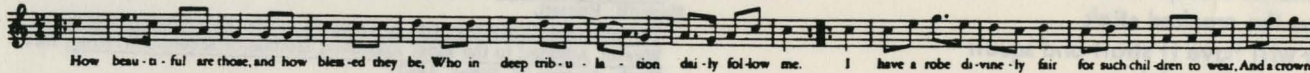


OH I LOVE MOTHER A dance/ritualistic hymn which was written about 1847.



Oh I love Moch-er, I love her pow-er, I know twill help me in ev-ry try-ing hour.

SHEPHERDESS SONG A hymn which dates to about 1844.



How beau-ti-ful are those, and how bless-ed they be, Who in deep trib-u-la-tion dai-ly fol-low me. I have a robe di-vine-ly fair for such chil-dren to wear, And a crown



shin-ing bright they shall wear with de-light, When done with the fad-ing things of time.

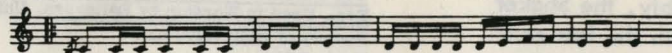
MOTHER ANN'S SONG Another of the many songs dedicated to Mother Ann, this one being sung in unknown tongues. It dates to about 1844.



Vum vi-ve vum vi-ve vum vum vo, Ve vum vi-ve vum vi-ve vum vum vo,



Vum vi-ve vum vi-ve vum vum vo, Ve vum vi-ve vo ve vum vum vo.



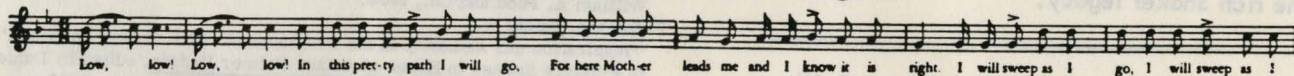
Vum vi-ve vum vi-ve vum vum vo, Vi-ve vi-ve vi-ve vi-ve vum vum vo,



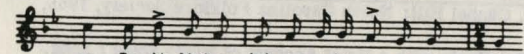
Vum vi-ve vum vi-ve vum vum vo, Ve vum vi-ve vum ve vum vum vo.

SIDE 2

SWEEP AS I GO A ritualistic/work song with uncertain origins.

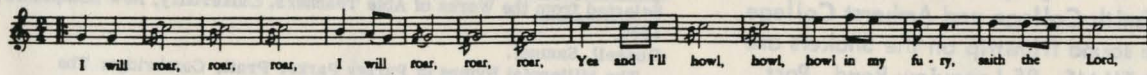


Low, low! Low, low! In this pret-ty path I will go, For here Moch-er leads me and I know it is right. I will sweep as I go, I will sweep as I



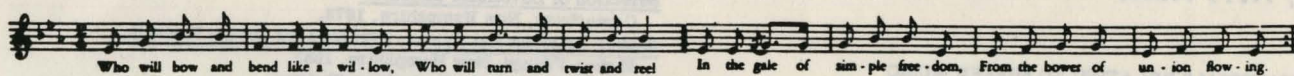
go, For this Moch-er beds me and it is my de light.

THE VOICE OF GOD A ritual song which was probably written about 1841.



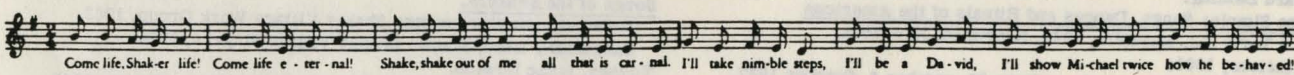
I will roar, roar, roar, I will roar, roar, roar, Yes and I'll howl, howl, howl in my fu-ry, saith the Lord,

WHO WILL BOW AND BEND LIKE A WILLOW A "Negro" song written about 1843.



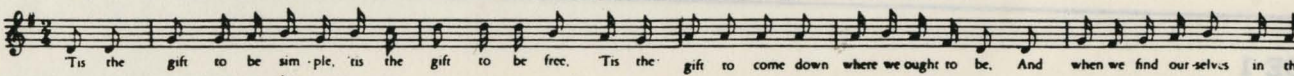
Who will bow and bend like a wil-low, Who will turn and twist and reel In the gale of sim-ple free-dom, From the bower of un-ion flow-ing.

COME LIFE, SHAKER LIFE A dance/ritualistic song, with uncertain origins.

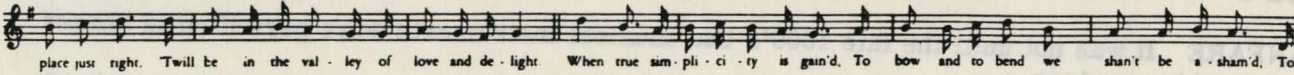


Come life, Shak-er life! Come life e-ter-nal! Shake, shake out of me all that is car-nal. I'll take nim-ble steps, I'll be a Da-vid, I'll show Mi-chael twice how he be-hav-ed!

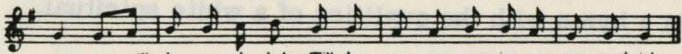
SIMPLE GIFTS The most famous of all Shaker hymns, written about 1848. It was incorporated into the score of Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring.



Tis the gift to be sim-ple, tis the gift to be free. Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, And when we find our selves in the



place just right. Twill be in the val-ley of love and de-light. When true sim-ple-ci-ty is gain'd, To bow and to bend we shan't be a-sham'd, To



turn, turn will be our de-light Till by turn-ing, turn-ing we come round right.

I'VE SET MY FACE FOR ZION'S KINGDOM A marching song composed about 1850.



I've set my face for Zi-on's king-dom, Ho-ly, bright and glo-rious.