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"Watch That Star!"--The McIntosh County Shouters at the 1981 National Folk Festival, Wolf Trap Farm, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION--THE HISTORY OF THE SHOUT

The shout is the oldest Afro-American performance tradition surviving on the North American mainland. This is the fusion of call-and-response singing, percussive rhythm, and expressive and formalised dance-like movement, affirming group cohesiveness and Christian belief, has survived in continuous practice since slavery times in the Golden community, or as its residents call it, "Briar Patch", east of Bolonia in McIntosh County on the coast of Georgia. First noted by outside observers in 1845 and described during and after the Civil War, the shout in its pure form was concentrated in coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia and has died out in active practice excepting a tight-knit folk community centered in Briar Patch and the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church there. "The only people who shout is right here," shout leader Catherine Campbell affirms. "Calvary was the stoppin' place of the shout. Everybody from everywhere came to Mt. Calvary because we kept the tradition going. We never did let it go by."

Lydia Parrish collected shout songs in McIntosh County and published them in Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands (1942). The shout had also survived near her home on St. Simon's Island in Glynn County, just south of McIntosh; but her informants there were self-conscious about performing it for her, and it was "years before I was permitted to see the Sea Island Negroes indulge in this innocent pastime." (Parrish, p. 54) Parrish encouraged the formation of the Georgia Sea Island Singers on St. Simon's who perpetuated slave-song traditions, including the shout songs, but not, however, the shout itself, or "holy dance." In 1960 Frankie and Doug Quimby of the Sea Island Singers and organizers of the Sea Island Festival, heard reports of a community in McIntosh where Watch Night, or New Year's, shouts were still held, to the beat of a broom on the wood floor. With folklorists Fred Fussell and George Mitchell the Quimbys located the shouters of Briar Patch who consented to present their treasured tradition to the public, first at the 1980 Sea Island Festival on St. Simon's, at several consecutive festivals there, and at other events such as the 1980 and 1983 Festivals of Georgia Folk-life and the 1981 National Folk Festival at Wolf Trap Farm, Virginia.

In their presentations the McIntosh County Shouters conscientiously include all the elements of the tradition. A lead singer, or "songster", usually seated, begins or "sets" a song. At his side sits a "sticker", who beats a broom handle or any other suitable stick, on the wood floor in rhythm. Behind them a cluster of other singers, or "basers", answer the leader's lines in call-and-response fashion, keeping time with hand-clapping. Then the shouters, women dressed in the long dresses and head-rags of their grandmothers' day, move in a counter-clockwise ring, with a compelling hitching shuffle, often stooping or extending their arms in gestures pantomiming the content of the song being sung. This may look like dancing, but Deacon James Cook, the 98 year-old patriarch of the group, points out the difference: "Back in the days of my comin' on the shout, if you cross yo' feet you was dancin', but if you solid, move on the square, you was shoutin'. But if you cross yo' feet you was turned out of the church because you was dancin' somethin' for the devil... So you see those ladies didn't cross their feet, they shouted! And shouting is...praisin' God with an order of thanksgiving. (Interview, Aug. 7, 1981)

The word "shout" refers specifically to the movement and is only incidentally the same as the English word meaning a vocal exclamation. Parrish points out that "Dr. L. D. Turner has discovered that the Arabic word Shout (pronounced like our word "shout"), in use among the Mohammedans of West Africa, meant to run and walk around the Kaaba... I have seen the Negroes do the holy dance around the pulpit." (Parrish, p. 54, quoting Lorenzo D. Turner in Survivals in the Vocabulary of Gullah, "The Leisure Hour," London, Sept. 16, 1871.) Today shouts were informal ring-shouts forgotten, the term "shout" refers to a worshiper becoming overwhelmed by religious fervor and moving ecstatically to this emotion.

Another defining element of the shout tradition is that it is not a regular part of a church worship service, but takes place after the prayer meeting, or on other occasions. In earlier times the benches were pushed out of the way, and the shout proceeded in the prayer-house. In modern times churches have been modernized, the pews are fixed to the floor, and the floors carpeted. Deacon Cook speaks of such "holy churches with a concrete floor." However the Mt. Calvary Congregation has built an annex with a wooden floor, to allow room for the necessary resonance of the stick. The shout is also seasonal: as Deacon Cook put it, "shoutin' ain't no easy job. The tradition of shoutin' is when it was cold weather." This meant the holiday season, though in earlier times shouting was done at other times of the year. Vertie McKiver says that as she was growing up, they would have shouts from house to house on Christmas week, go to the church to shout on Christmas, and finally go to Mt. Calvary on New Year's, and "shout all night long until the prayer meeting, they would "go into the shout, and shout until the day break, and they would sing the song "Farewell, Last Day Goin', Farewell."" This tradition continues to this day.

There is little doubt that the basic elements of the shout were brought from West Africa by the slaves, in part via the Caribbean. Besides the term itself, the call-and-response singing, the hand-clapping to the basic "habanera" rhythm, the drum-like percussion of the stick, and the swaying and hitching shuffle of the shouters, all derive from African forms; the fusion of dance, song, and rhythm in fervid worship, is an African practice. Deacon Cook says that his forebears, born in slavery, told him his ancestors brought the shout off the ship from Africa in the 1700s. Laurence McKiver affirms that the shout moves to "an African beat. But the slave," he continued, "after he got over here, they got a little bit mo'--time brings on a change--they could get hold a little bit of the Bible, that's the way they tell me, and the one that could learn a little bit of singing, could,--they make--that's the way they make the songs." Of course the slave adapted the English language and Christian forms to this African-derived musical traditions encountered in America, to the African-derived shout forms.

Dena Epstein cites fragmentary descriptions of the shout dating from the 1840s, and the first published use of the term "shout", in a condescending 1860 account by an Englishman, who nonetheless recognized the African origins of the practice. (Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, pp. 233-34.) She further points out that the first perceptive observations of the shout came from northern participants in the Port Royal experiment during the Civil War. The coastal barrier islands, separated from the mainland by salt marshes, were important cotton and rice plantation areas, and they came under temporary control by the Union Army. African-Americans and Northeners came into contact with freed slaves at Port Royal, South Carolina, and many were impressed with their songs, and the shout tradition. W. E. Dubois wrote that here "perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face and heart
to heart with no third witness." ("Of the Sorrow Songs" from Souls of Black Folk (1903, reprinted in Katz, p. xx)) Henry George Allen, who had interviewed many who had visited Port Royal in 1863, wrote an article describing the shout and offering transcriptions of several shout songs. (Continental Monthly, August, 1863; reprinted in Katz, pp. 3-8) Several other accounts of the shout as performed by black schoolchildren, freedmen, and soldiers in the 1860s are given in Epstein, (pp. 278-287) including an entry in William Francis Allen's diary describing a Christmas shout. Allen's observation of the use of drums in a harvest-time ring shout: "We had a few good times in music. The drummers had a good time. We gave them a ring, we shout an prayer." (WPA, p. 159) And Lawrence Baker of Darien, the county seat of McIntosh, even described a ring shout at funerals: "We gave them all a good time, we sung them on." (Smythe, p. 201) Both of these dramatized shouts continue to be performed by the McIntosh County Shouters, though they are quick to point out that they differ from secular games, or "ring plays."

Lydia Parrish collected "Where is Adam?" in McIntosh County, and describes the proficiency of the shouters and singers there: "No leader ever sings a song twice alike, and no two ever sing exactly the same version; yet the beat, the accent, and the tune remain so stable that even the white Slave Songs of long ago, by any other that I know. Shouters sometimes clap their hands; on St. Simon's they always call for a broom handle, which, knocked on the floor, produces an exasperating tom-tom. In McIntosh County, they 'are so proficient in tapping out the rhythm with their heels that they can dispense with both sticks and hand clapping. With their hands free, they are able to do things descriptive of the text which less skill would not be at liberty to attempt."

Oh Eve--where is Ad-um? Oh Eve--Adam in the garden,

It is a good exercise to replace them with the hymns of white Protestantism. 'One great advantage,' he had told the planters, 'in teaching them good psalms and hymns, is that they are thereby induced to lay aside the extravagant and nonsensical chants, and catches and hallelujah songs of their own composing; and when the rhythm is settled, they will have something profitable to sing.'

In this century Robert W. Gordon studied the shout in a Georgia town and described its forms in "The Negro Spiritual" (Smythe, etc., Carolina Low Country, 1932.) He describes the "ring shout", and its variants, the "ring shout" characteristic shuffle and the stipulation that the feet not rise from the ground, but he does not mention any shuffling apart from the shouters were singing. "The line between shouting and dancing was strictly held. Shouting could be indulged in only while singing a spiritual. (Gordon does not, however, distinguish as others, and as the present-day shouters do, between the shout and speech spirituals.) Under no circumstances might the feet be crossed. These two rules were inflexible... It was universally agreed that shouting is dignified, and that it was a worship of the Lord, that certain notions were not fitting." (Smythe, p. 201) Gordon quotes another important point about the shout that still apply to the tradition of today's Georgia shouters. First, the shout was important as an educational and religious ceremony. "When work was over, shouting was a favorite form of devotion... it was a separation, or celebrations, or weddings, and particularly on Watch Night, it was a regular custom. Second, its forms it even showed tendencies to become a game. Acting out the story was not infrequent. 'Rock, Daniel,' shows a trace of this. A better word for it would be "games and Where is Adam?" In this song the heavy sorrowous call of God is answered by the highest pitched quicker reply of Eve, while at the proper places the shouters stand to the ground to pick up the leaves or go through the motions of planting them." (Smythe, p. 201) Both of these dramatized shouts continue to be performed by the McIntosh County Shouters, though they are quick to point out that they differ from secular games, or "ring plays."

In the place of a Christmas shout as performed by black schoolchildren,.added to the other accounts of the shout, are a later addition to the tradition. Though some of the tunes of the shout songs that have come down to today's Shouters belong to the same melodic family ("Read 'Em, John", and "Hold the Baby") are sung to nearly the same tune ("Kneebone Bend" and "In This Field We Must Die"), the shout songs are sung to many very distinct and interesting melodies that suggest the richness of antebellum African-American music.

The content of the shout songs is surprisingly varied, ranging from vignettes of daily life to elegies ("Hold the Baby") which are entirely secular, through coded jokes on the master who have both a religious and worldly cast ("Draw Down, Body") through apocalyptic visions ("Eve and Adam") and powerful statements of the indestructability of the human spirit ("Lay Down, Body"). The meanings of the songs are not incidental, and singers and shouters are continuously aware of their import. The interplay of leader and chorus is not simply a musical convention, but a continuous affirmation of the leader's expressive and rhythmic skills as they serve the needs of the oldest of the antebellum spirituals. The old spirituals, line-out hymns, and more recent jubilee and gospel songs are used in regular worship services; the shout songs are invariably associated with the total performance of the shout, on Watch Night or other occasions.

"Eve and Adam, Pickin' Up Leaves"--ring shout presentation at 1963 Sea Island Festival, St. Simon's Island. The shout songs are almost always antiphonal, with a leader's lines being answered by the chorus of basars, sometimes joined as well by the shouters; one exception is "Walk Through the Valley in the Fields", sung in unison. The basars sing in unison, with no use of harmony; this is the case with Spaulding's and Allen's transcriptions from the 1860s, and one wonders if the harmonies in the performances of the 20th century Georgia Sea Island Singers of St. Simon's are a later addition to the tradition. Though some of the tunes of the shout songs that have come down to today's Shouters belong to the same melodic family ("Read 'Em, John", and "Hold the Baby") or are sung to nearly the same tune ("Kneebone Bend" and "In This Field We Must Die"), the shout songs are sung to many very distinct and interesting melodies that suggest the richness of antebellum African-American music.
the group and the meaning of the song. The basers overlap the end of the leader's lines, and their energy and rhythmic solidity leaves him/her free to improvise on the melody and text. A loosenings of concentration — a drop in the leader's basers is understood to be more than a weakening in the performance of the song—it is a breakdown in communalness. I have heard a leader exclaim after a song: "I don't have the basers!" and her disappointment was more than musical. This function of call-and-response is a feature of West African culture. Robert Farris Thompson quotes a Yoruba refrain: "You are rejected in the town, yet you continue to sing for them. Who will sing the chorus? The chorus, as in ancient Attic tragedy, is a direct expression of public sanction and opinion. Call-and-response goes to the heart of the notion of good government, of popular response to the actions of an ideal leader." (Thompson, African Art in Motion, 1963, p. 27)

There is a large body of shout songs which today's shouters have inherited from their parents, or all of them are in active use in performances of the shout. Some less familiar songs require rehearsal so that all participants can comprehend and perform. The shout is not a spontaneous unthinking expression of feeling, but is a learned art, with aesthetic principles and standards understood and articulated by singers and shouters. I have been present at rehearsals as an engaged discussion about just where and how the basers should come in, and just how the shout should go.

I am in the foreword to the 1965 edition of Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands, Bruce Jackson implies that the slave songs Parrish collected in the late 1800's was musical nostalgia for the old era that had produced them and are of little use today: "Folklore is a dynamic thing -- musical folklore is of historical interest and present importance (so we may better understand the present), it is nevertheless of only collateral current interest, our interest is sentimental only." (p. xi.) Aware of the continuing slave song tradition at that time mainly in informal and unsystematically organized context of the Sea Island Singers, Jackson did not realize that blacks in nearby McIntosh County would sustain a slave-song tradition for reasons of their own, far from sentimental. The shout has taken on a spiritual form as a way, besides serving God, of honoring the ancestors who endured slavery. Lawrence McLkver says, "We pray the songs, we do it from our core parents." Deacon James Cook, born in 1881, says, "I found them (his slave-born father, Nathum Cook, and grandfather, Ishmael Nephew) doing it when I got old enough to realise anything about the shout... in those days they were so loving of each other that after the service they would move the benches in the prayer-house and shout... We are still holding to that over here. We shout by our fathers and mothers that brought it from our homeland in Africa. They would make one shout—that was one of the ways they gave thanks to God... Someday we'll be shouting the harvest home.

A WATCH NIGHT SHOUT -- 1982

Mt. Calvary Baptist sits under great live-oak trees in the community of Belden, or Briar-Patch, named after the nearby Briar-Patch Cemetery. The members of the settlement cluster around the church and are set back from state highway 99, which loops from Brunswick to Meridian, where the shrimp fleet and the boat for Sapelo Island dock in an inlet in the salt marsh; dirt roads lead to other houses among the woods and fields. Most of the core group of shouters who perform the shout away from these homes live in easy walking distance of one another, as they have all their lives, and are related by blood or marriage. They attribute the survival of the tradition only in their community to their closeness and cohesiveness. After I had arrived and for them to appear at the 1980 National Folk Festival, the Shouters invited me to attend and record the Watch Night shout on New Year's, 1982.

We arrived during the New Year's Eve prayer meeting in the church and heard some good soul-stirring and masterful performances in the modern gospel style by the church's Youth Choir. I went around to the annex, an oblong room with a low ceiling and a hardwood floor, with a kitchen at one end, to set up my recording equipment. As midnight approached I was learned a song by "Uncle" Palmer, the "sticker" of the shouters who sat with his broom stick, waiting for the service to begin. Normally, at the end of the service over a little loud speaker on the ceiling, and at midnight the pastor's voice announced that there would be food, and a shout, in the annex. An instant later people began to pour into the annex, many the young and restless. Some folk bands burst and shouters began to set out food from the kitchen, and eat and talk. Soon, above the din, came the shout. The leaders and singers did not calculate and steeped in tradition. I give the following as an extended conversation which conveys the livelihoods of the members of the McIntosh County shouters are linked to the coast and the sea. Most of the women work in a crab-picking plant, and Andrew Palmer and Lawrence McLkver were shrimp fishermen. McLkver lives alone in his modest house across the road from the church. He was born in 1915; his mother, Charlotte Evans, lived with him until her death at age 106, of "old age". He told me about his experience with the "war that free" the slaves. I returned to the subject of the shout, and asked about one old sister whom he had spoken about.

"Yeah, that was Miss Fannie Ann Evans.
Some of them get so they couldn't work out they tasks, they got so much—rows they have to work a day, and if they couldn't come to the specific time, sometimes they get whipped. Sometimes the strong one got to go back and work one, you know...maybe I say I don't want you to get a whippin'. I don't want the boss to be comin', just get in the field with they hoe, and hell be the only one they fiel'--they swap work and they go to the next one's field and work out that, and they go to the others' until they go around the whole plantation, and they work 'em all out. See, I help you an' you help me--we're like that as a gang, let's get together. And while things growin'—a bunch of the ladies, they get together, they get them a scaffold just the length of a quilts, they get them old cloths and they sew...quilts... And this one will help this one make them quilt, and these women they quilt, until they go all around like that. Then they take in the corn, take in the rice, take in the beans, they kill the hogs, stock would be back in the woods, everybody have they hog, have a mark on them—I know my hog from yours—kill up and hogs, pigs, and they'd be good, you could believe that, that ol' hickory smoke, you take a kid to be with it. And then we turn around back, get the cane...and everybody get they cane cut down, they start grills...at the same time, some weeks before Christmas, and they have candle pullin' until cinin' up to the week Christmas, to Christmas Eve, we shoot the New Year in. In that show, they had a '影院', and we have that coffee, then biscuits, tater, pones, all different things...and that's the way they do it. I asked McKiver what makes a good singer in the shout songs.

He explained how he would sing the lines "Lay down a little while" and the others would answer "Lay down a little while. He would give them the lines "tombstone movin'" and "grave is bustin'..." I said, he continued. Lay down a little while, I would say that two or three times, that's an expression you see, I would say. Oh, body, Lay down a little while, Need some restin'.

Lawrence McKiver at his home in Brier Patch, describing the shout, August, 1983.

I asked him about dances, and he said they did have dances when he was young. They'd play both top of the ball and bottom--he didn't have all kinds of things, one, "Walk, Billy Arbor", that I have seen him and some of the women in the group do...and the other one, and she walk on that song..."Oh, and carry the water on up the settlement...and she set this bucket down, that bucket down, she reach up on her..."
In this energetic shout song, the singer exhorts the Archangel Gabriel to blow his trumpet on the day of judgment; it is the antecedent of later spirituals on that theme. Parrish (pp. 87-88) gives a similar version she collected on St. Simons Island. Here, the characteristic stick and clapping rhythms can be heard clearly when the singers leave off singing for a time. In the transcription of the text, below, I will give the leader's line on the left, the basers' response to the right; when the antiphonal pattern has been set, only the leader's lines, separated by a slash (/), will be given.

Leader: Blow, Gabriel 
Basers: Judgement 

Leader: Blow that trumpet! 
Basers: Judgement bar! Calm and easy / Tell everybody My God say / That they got to meet Oh, blow, Gabriel / Blow that trumpet Louder and louder / Get to wake my people Wherever they be / On lan' or sea Tell everybody / My God say / That they got to be / Blow, Gabriel! Blow that trumpet / Louder am' louder Con' see my mother / My father, too Blow, Gabriel! / Blow your trumpet Louder 'n' louder / Tell everybody That they got to meet / They got to meet Blow, Gabriel! Calm and easy / Wake my people Wherever they be / On lan' or sea Blow, Gabriel / God say my mother Am' my father, too / Oh, blow, Gabriel Oh, blow yo' trumpet / Blow yo' trumpet Blow, Gabriel! / Blow yo' trumpet Wake my people / Wherever they be On lan' or sea / Tell them I say My God say / That they got to be Oh, blow, Gabriel / Blow yo' trumpet Blow, Gabriel! / Blow your trumpet Blow that trumpet! / Oh, blow, Gabriel Louder am' louder / Wake my people Wherever they be / On lan' or sea Oh blow, Gabriel / Blow your trumpet See my mother / Am' my father, too Blow, Gabriel! / Blow your trumpet Louder am' louder / Blow that trumpet Blow my people / Wherever they be On lan' or sea / Blow, Gabriel! (Similarly, until end)

SIDE 1, Band 1 BLOW, GABRIEL Lead, Lawrence McKiver; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1983.

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SIDE 1, Band 1 BLOW, GABRIEL Lead, Lawrence McKiver; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1983.
Chorus:
Oh Pharaoh's host got los', los', los',
Pharaoh's host got los', in that Red Sea

Leader:
Oh Moses, please lay your rod
Leader and basers:
In that Red Sea
Lay your rod, let the children cross
In that Red Sea

Chorus:
Oh Pharaoh's host got los', los', los',
Pharaoh's host got los', los', los'
Such a weeping when the host got los',
los', los'
Such a weeping when the host got los'
In that Red Sea.

SIDE I, Band 6 KNEEBONE BEND
Dorothy Skinner, lead; introduced by
Lawrence McKiver; Balatonia, December 17, 1983.

Mckiver was told that this song was once used
for rowing, to the rhythm of the oars. Though
the version she collected is similar
to the one sung here, she remained in-
nocent of the meaning of the song, dis-
closed by Lawrence McKiver in his elo-
quently introduction. (Parrish, pp. 60-84)
Alan Lomax recorded this song from the
Georgia Sea Island Singers in 1959 (Presa-
tige LP 25001, reissued on New World
NW 278.)

Spoken:
That's the oldest slave song that ever
was singin' by black people when they
first come over from Africa over here.
See, the song would say, "Kneebone in
the wilderness," you see, they didn't
know where to go—so they would
sing this song, "Kneebone in the wilder-
ness—kneebone in the valley," they
were praying then, that's why they say
"kneebone bend." They were bendin' down,
they were praying, they would say, "Knee-
bone bend to save my soul," they were
praying, understand? That's the way my
mamma done tol' it to me, and aunties. I
had some ol' ancestors that put out
these songs, y'know.

Leader:
Kneebone, kneebone
Basers:
Oh, Lord, kneebone
Leader:
Kneebone, kneebone
Basers:
Oh, Lord, kneebone bend
Leader:
Kneebone hear God call you / Kneebone hear
God call you
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone
Kneebone, what's the matter? / Kneebone
what's the matter?

Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone
Kneebone bend to save m' soul / Kneebone
bend to save m' soul
Kneebone in the valley / Kneebone in the valley
Kneebone, kneebone / Kneebone, kneebone
Kneebone, what's the matter? / Kneebone
what's the matter?

SIDE I, Band 7 WATCH THAT STAR
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Eulonia, December
17, 1983.

While the chorus of this song is probably
of black origin, the verses are derived from
the white hymn "Evening Shade," written by
John Leland in 1835; the tune may also owe
something to white hymnody. McKiver's verses
are more vernacular than the original, with
"death will soon disrobe us all of what
we have possess'd" becoming "rob us all." A beau-
tiful gesture, with arms stretching toward the
heavens, accompanies the shout to this song.

Chorus: (sung solo)
Oh, watch that star, see how it run
Watch that star, see how it run
Oh, watch that star, see how it run.
If the star run down in the western hills,
You oughta watch that star, see how it run.
(Everybody)

Chorus: (leader and group)
(Oh, members)

Chorus: (leader and group)

Solo:
Well the days is past and gone,
The evenin' shadow care,
Oh may we all remember well
The night of death drawin' near.
(Everybody)

Chorus: (leader and group)
(Oh, members)

Chorus: (leader and group)

Solo:
Well we lay our garment by,
Upon our bed to res';
Oh death will soon rob us all
Of what we have possess'd
(Everybody)

(Chorus, as above, and repeat previous
verse and chorus)

(Chorus, as above, and repeat previous
verse and chorus)
Solo:
Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
An' all this world go free?
No, he bears the cross for everyone
And bears the cross for me.
(Everybody)

(Chorus, group)
SIDE I, Band 8 LAY DOWN, BOY
Lawrence McKiver, lead; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1983.

Lawrence McKiver's emotional and masterful performance of this dramatic song, is a high point in Afro-American traditional singing. His comments about how he intended to sing the song (see interview, above), given the day before this was recorded, show that this is conscious art rather than spontaneous expression. The refrain "sit down and rest a while" occurs in the later spiritual, "Sit Down, Servant"; here it serves as a foil for the dramatic imagery of "tombstone moving, grave busting, soul rising."

Leader:
Lay down, body
Basers:
Lay down a little while

Lawrence McKiver, 1983.

SIDE I, Band 1 RELIGION, SO SWEET
Lawrence McKiver, lead; St. Simon's Island, August 20, 1984.

McKiver usually precedes the performance of this shout with a skit he does with the Shouters in which he assumes the voice of a woman assembling her children to sing this song, for her birthday. See Allen, p. 15.

Leader:
Oh, that 'ligion
Basers:
So sweet

About the 'ligion / Oh, Lord
Oh that 'ligion / Eh, child
Now sing you 'ligion / Now sing that 'ligion
Now shout that 'ligion / Now rock that 'ligion
Eh, child / Ah, child
It made me happy / So happy
It made me happy / I told everybody
About my 'ligion / I sing my 'ligion
How shout the 'ligion
Eh, Lord
Oh, that 'ligion
Shout that 'ligion
Shout yo' 'ligion
Now rock the 'ligion / Now rock the 'ligion
Now rock the 'ligion / Oh, yeah
Made me happy / Early one mornin'
Sing yo' 'ligion / Now rock the 'ligion
Now rock that 'ligion /

SIDE II, Band 2 READ 'EM JOHN
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Bolonia, December 17, 1983.

This song shares its catch tune with the slavery-days banjo reel, "Johnny Booker." For a performance of this shout song by the Sea Island Singers, see Prestige 25003, re-issued on New World 278. McKiver introduces the song, explaining that it was a celebration of Emancipation: "This song—when they was comin' out of slave', none of 'em could read, but they didn't believe it, so they asked John to read the letter, and this is the way it went:"

Leader:
I brought the letter,
Laid it on the table.
Take all the members read 'em oh,
Read 'em, let me go.

Read 'em, John
Basers:
Read 'em

Leader:
Oh, that 'ligion
Basers:
So sweet

Now shout the 'ligion / Now sing the 'ligion
It made me happy / Early one mornin'
I shout the 'ligion / I talk about the 'ligion
I sing about the 'ligion / It made me happy
Early one mornin' / I tell everybody
About the 'ligion / Eh, Lord
Now sing your 'ligion / Now shout your 'ligion
It made me happy / Early one mornin'
I tell everybody / About the 'ligion
I sing the 'ligion / I shout the 'ligion
It made me happy / Early one mornin' / I shout the 'ligion / I pick the 'ligion
I told everybody / About the 'ligion
Oh, that 'ligion / Oh, that 'ligion
It made me happy / Early one mornin'
I rock the 'ligion / I rock the 'ligion
I sing the 'ligion / Cause it made me happy
Early one mornin' / I told everybody

SIDE II, Band 3 EVE AND ADAM
Lawrence McKiver, lead; Bolonia, December 17, 1983.

This is one of the liveliest shouts; see the Introduction, above, for comments on the pantomime by Robert Gordon and Lydia Parrish. Further notes: Since the version I have encountered in Glynn and Camden Counties holds to 'pinnin' leaves,' I am inclined to believe that some McIntosh shout took an artist's license and substituted 'pickin' up' for 'pinnin' for the sake of more varied, more picturesque action." (Parrish, p. 85)

In the later Ghost-Dance McIntosh shouters continue to "pick up" rather than "pin" the leaves that the first man and woman used to cover their nakedness. See also "Adam", in befo the War Spirituals (McIlhenny, p. 37).

Leader:
Oh Eve, where is Adam?
Oh Eve, Adam in the garden
Pickin' up leaves.

God called Adam
Basers:
Pickin' up leaves

Leader:
God called Adam
Basers:
Pickin' up leaves

God call y', Adam / Eve an' Adam
Eve an' Adam / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Why don't you answer?
Where is Adam? / Where is Adam?
Eve an' Adam / Pickin', pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Oh, Adam
Oh, Adam / My God call you
Pickin', pickin' / They was pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
My God call you / Why don't you answer?
Hey, Adam / Oh, Adam
My God call you / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Old Adam 'shamed
Adam, you 'shamed / My God call you
He won't answer / Eve an' Adam
Parrish further notes: "Since the version I have encountered in Glynn and Camden Counties holds to 'pinnin' leaves,' I am inclined to believe that some McIntosh shout took an artist's license and substituted 'pickin' up' for 'pinnin' for the sake of more varied, more picturesque action." (Parrish, p. 85)

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Leader:
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Pickin' up leaves.

God called Adam
Basers:
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Leader:
God called Adam
Basers:
Pickin' up leaves

God call ye', Adam / Eve an' Adam
Eve an' Adam / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Why don't you answer?
Where is Adam? / Where is Adam?
Eve an' Adam / Pickin', pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Oh, Adam
Oh, Adam / My God call you
Pickin', pickin' / They was pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
My God call you / Why don't you answer?
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My God call you / My God call you
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Eve an' Adam / Pickin', pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
Why don't you answer? / Oh, Adam
Oh, Adam / My God call you
Pickin', pickin' / They was pickin'
Pickin', pickin' / My God call you
My God call you / Why don't you answer?
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In the later Ghost-Dance McIntosh shouters continue to "pick up" rather than "pin" the leaves that the first man and woman used to cover their nakedness. See also "Adam", in befo the War Spirituals (McIlhenny, p. 37).
Leader: I stand; I ask you to stand. I speak to you from the place I have always loved. Bases: Some shout songs. This is the song sung on Watch Night. Parrish gives a version of "Aye Lord, Time is Drawing Nigh," apparently from St. Simon's, and prints another text from McIntosh County "fitted out with an entirely different set of words. None but a Negro poet could have created the imagery of the...lines..." and her McIntosh County text is close to Palmer's; she had tapped the sacredness of the tradition. McKeiver sings a still different variant.

Spoken comments: Rev. you want to sing us a song? One. One. Please, one, for the New Year, one... Yeah, he'll do it, he'll do it.

Leader: Bases: Some shout songs. This is the song sung on Watch Night. Parrish gives a version of "Aye Lord, Time is Drawing Nigh,"

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The McIntosh County Shouters
Slave Shout Songs from the coast of Georgia

The McIntosh County Shouters: Lawrence McKiver, Doretha Skipper, Andrew Palmer, Catherine Campbell, Odessa Young, Thelma Ellison, Vertie McIver, Onetha Ellison, Elizabeth Temple; also, James Cook, Lucille Holloway, Rev. Nathan Palmer.

SIDE I
Band 1 BLOW, GABRIEL Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 2 JUBILEE Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 3 SOLDIER OF THE JUBILEE Sung by James Cook
Band 4 MOVE, DANIEL Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 5 PHARAOH'S HOST GOT LOST Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 6 KNEEBONE BEND Doretha Skipper, lead
Band 7 WATCH THAT STAR Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 8 LAY DOWN, BODY Lawrence McKiver, lead

SIDE II
Band 1 RELIGION, SO SWEET Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 2 READ 'EM JOHN Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 3 EVE AND ADAM Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 4 JOHN ON THE ISLAND, I HEAR HIM GROAN Lawrence McKiver, lead
Band 5 HOLD THE BABY Doretha Skipper, lead
Band 6 I WANT TO DIE LIKE WEEPIN' MARY Lucille Holloway, lead
Band 7 WADE THE WATER TO MY KNEES Lucille Holloway, lead
Band 8 TIME DRAWIN' NIGH Rev. Nathan Palmer, lead
Band 9 FAREWELL, LAST GOIN' Lawrence McKiver, lead

Recorded, produced, and annotated by Art Rosenbaum
Photographs by Margo Newmark Rosenbaum
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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