The Old Way of Singing

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In the 19th and 20th centuries, lining-out or the ‘Old Way of Singing’ provided a way to sing psalm verses for those that did not have songbooks in a way that they could internalize the lines they listened to, and then repeat them. The Old Way did not have fixed melodies for the psalms and would often be sung upon ballad tunes that could be learned through oral transmission by congregations, families, and churchgoers with slight variations. Through this way, it deeply impacted the way the Psalms was sung and internalized by the people. It provided them with an emotional outlet, especially for congregation members that did not have songbooks, allowing everyone to participate in the singing[[1]](#footnote-1). Thus, it gained popularity, as psalmody was not restricted to the “musically inclined” only rather anyone could join and internalize the message.

The addition of extra notes in lining-out were termed as ornaments by Temperley (1981), which sometimes made the original tune barely recognizable. The loss of rhythm and tempo in the ‘Old Way’, according to Temperley (1981), was a result of the lead singers shifting to the tune’s next note, while the more timid stragglers who are not acquainted with the tune, or whose pitch sense is unreliable, follow them gradually. In the process, they slide down and up towards the subsequent note through the pitch-matching process[[2]](#footnote-2). Subsequently, everyone is able to join, often briefly, on a new note until the shift towards the new note starts again.

In the ‘Old way of Singing’, the voice who is singing upon a particular tone does not need to coordinate with others, and thus that voice can decide when to add ornaments or change the pitch. Generally, singing together requires a way to change the pitch in unison which is either done through text, memory or using tunes that have predictable turns[[3]](#footnote-3). Church music experts traditionally view the genre to be simple, correct, chaste, have no ostentation, and the music and the text should be handled with care and enhance each other[[4]](#footnote-4). The Old Way sometimes defies exact melodic lines and may seem vague or unstandardized owing to the multiple groups of notes usually in its rhythmic scheme. In this, it differs from the Baroque style wherein turns, slides, trills, and appoggiaturas were used as an effect to delaying the main note[[5]](#footnote-5).

# Bibliography

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1. Temperley, Nicholas. "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (1981): 511-544. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cantor Institute. *Melodies for Psalms.* 2006. https://mci.archpitt.org/prostopinije/melodies/Psalm\_tones.html (accessed January 21, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Brittanie. *Lowell Mason - the Father of Music Education.* 2007. http://www.angelfire.com/ego/cobbist/mason.html (accessed January 21, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Temperley, Nicholas. "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (1981): 511-544. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)