I, Rebecca Clarkson, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Music History.

It is entitled:
Singing With the New Order Amish: How Their Current Musical Practices Reflect Their Culture and History

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Singing with the New Order Amish: How Their Current Musical Practices Reflect Their Culture and History

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music

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by

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Abstract

The culture of the New Order Amish is a culture, like that of the more traditional Old Order Amish, in which a heritage of singing is very important. Multiple researchers have investigated the culture and the singing of the Old Order Amish, but very few have examined New Order culture and even fewer have studied their music. The oral transmission of Amish music has also been examined by past researchers, but there has not been research in this area recently. This is significant, as there have been several new sources of transcription of these rarely recorded melodies. This thesis utilizes observation of a New Order community and interviews within this community, as well as the examination of new transcriptions alongside previously researched material. This reveals the role music plays in the life of these New Order Amish and the relationship of their music to their overall culture. This thesis also updates the research of previous researchers, include Rupert Karl Hohmann and Nicholas Temperley, on the oral transmission of traditional Amish melodies. Adding the new sources of transcription confirms many of these earlier researchers findings. The oral transmission of Amish music is of particular importance to researchers of oral transmission because the lifestyle of the Amish provides an environment almost completely free from outside musical influence. This thesis provides valuable information concerning New Order Amish culture, New Order Amish music and also for the study of oral transmission.
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Chapter 1

The Amish: Their History and Their Music

The New Order Amish are a culture within the United States with a unique musical heritage and specific current musical practices. They are a relatively new branch of the very traditional Old Order Amish who are known for their simple life-style and their rejection of the outside world. The New Order still hold to a core of the centuries-old traditions that make them a part of the Amish faith but have in more recent years broken free of some of the strict regulations laid down by their ancestors and still upheld by most of the more conservative Old Order Amish. The New Order Amish provide the opportunity to examine many of the original Amish musical traditions, while witnessing the establishment of new traditions brought about by the introduction of change. There has been a little research on the New Order Amish. Donald Kraybill explains their history and basic beliefs in his book *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. However, there has been no in depth study into their culture and traditions or their music. This research will add to the growing body of literature on the New Order Amish as a culture and a community, as well as their musical practices. A study of New Order Amish music is important to a full understanding of New Order culture. An Amish person’s awareness of their cultural history, as well as much of their religious convictions, is intricately connected to the musical practices of the Amish.

The study of Amish music is also important as an opportunity to examine a carefully controlled preservation of an antiquated musical culture that utilizes oral transmission. This thesis will build on a foundation of works by several scholars who have conducted some rather extensive research in the area of the music of the Old Order Amish and their use of oral
transmission. These works include John Umble’s paper from 1939, “The Old Order Amish, Their Hymns and Hymn Tunes,” George Pullen Jackson’s article “The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish” published in 1945, and Rupert Karl Hohmann’s dissertation “The Church music of the Old Order Amish of the United States” completed in 1959. Information from Bruno Nettl’s “The Hymns of the Amish: An Example of Marginal Survival” and Nicholas Temperley’s “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” published in 1957 and 1981 respectively, is also used. The work of all of these scholars, both the transcriptions they used and the findings they mad, will be examined. New transcriptions that have come about in more recent years, partially because of the work of some New Order Amish, will be added to the discussion of these works.

This thesis investigates current musical practices of the New Order Amish while placing them in a historical context. It considers the thoughts and beliefs of the Amish concerning several key elements of these musical practices. Additionally, previous research into one of these practices, oral transmission of melodies, will be reconsidered with the addition of new material. This study provides new information to the study of the New Order Amish, shows some of the key elements that may arise from an isolated, religiously influenced society, and provides additional research to classic studies in oral transmission. This research combines previous research, information from fieldwork conducted by the author and primary source material.

There are four main sections to this thesis. First, a synopsis of Amish history and musical practice provides a context in which to place current Amish musical thought. This includes a look at the continuities and discrepancies among views held by various communities in different time periods and locations. This information will be drawn from the previously
mentioned work by Kraybill, as well as Thomas Meyer’s and Steven Nolt’s book *Plain Diversity* published in 2007 and Brigitte Bachmann-Geiser’s book *Amish: The Way of Life of the Amish in Berne, Indiana* published in 2009. The second section gives a snapshot of one particular modern community. This is obtained through a presentation of fieldwork by the researcher including cultural observation and interviews. Observation was conducted over 2 two-day visits. Time was spent in several homes and the church services of the selected community. Informal conversations were held in three different homes and formal interviews were conducted with four leaders of this community. The examination of these observations, conversations and interviews communicates some of the thoughts held by current New Order Amish groups. Though the thoughts and opinions of this community provide a look into a small percentage of the modern population, most of the members of this community have contact with other communities. The third section uses this research to provide a more in-depth commentary on some of the specific musical issues encountered by Amish communities. These specific issues will be discussed in contrast with the beliefs of other Amish groups. The fourth section focuses directly on one of these issues, oral transmission. It reconsiders previous research with the addition of newer source material, including a shape-note song book used by the New Order community studied and a transcription made of a recording held at the Mennonite Historical Library in Goshen, Indiana.

**Historical Background: From Anabaptists to Amish**

The earliest roots of the Amish go back to the time of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe. The Reformation is generally considered to have started in October of 1517 with Martin Luther’s posting of the Ninety-Five Theses. The movement was a reaction against
the theologies and corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic Church with a call to reforms. The movement’s leaders included Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in England, and Huldrych Zwingli in Switzerland. The Amish trace their first roots back to the reforms of Zwingli.

Zwingli believed that the church should be for everyone, not just the elite and was opposed to the use of the mass. In the early 1520s he led Bible studies in Zurich attended by supporters of his reformations. However, some of Zwingli’s original followers in these studies desired more reforms than those he was promoting. Zwingli was working with the Zurich city council and would at times compromise his beliefs to keep in their good graces. In 1525 a group of his most radical reformers held a secret meeting at which they affirmed their desire for a church based solely on scripture and separate from any civil government. As one of their grievances with the state church was the practice of infant baptism, they marked their separation from the main church by re-baptizing one another as adults. This was the beginning of the group known as the Anabaptists.

In 1527 the Anabaptists produced a written statement of beliefs that were a radical extension of other Reformation beliefs. They stated the authority of the New Testament in all matters of the church as well as seven major principles. These were baptism for adults only, church as a covenant community, exclusion of errant members from this community, literal obedience to the teachings of Christ, refusal to swear oaths, rejection of violence and separation

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from the outside, evil world. Following their formation the Anabaptists faced large amounts of persecution. All participants in the Reformation movements were facing some amount of persecution, but the Anabaptists were persecuted not only by the Catholics but by the Protestants as well.

Within the first five months of their formation, the first Anabaptist had been killed for his beliefs. In the next two centuries thousands of Anabaptists were martyred. Pushed by persecution and economic hardship they spread through Switzerland, Alsace, Germany, the Netherlands, and eventually the New World.

The Amish began from a schism within the Anabaptist movement. In the late seventeenth century in Alsace an Anabaptist preacher by the name of Jakob Ammann called for reforms in the church. He believed that the Anabaptists were becoming too lenient in some areas. Among these reforms was a call for more frequent communions and much harsher standards for shunning. Ammann had many followers but also many dissenters. In 1693, after several failed attempts at reaching an agreement, Ammann’s followers broke away from the

4 Ibid., 6.
6 Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, 4.
7 For information about the persecution and migration of the Amish and other Anabaptists, see H. Frank Eshleman’s work *Historic Background and Annals of the Swiss and German Pioneer Settlers of Southeastern Pennsylvania: And of Their Remote Ancestors, from the Middle of the Dark Ages, Down to the Time of the Revolutionary War; an Authentic History, from Original Sources ... with Particular Reference to the German-Swiss Mennonites or Anabaptists, the Amish and Other Non-resistant Sects* provides a detailed account.
8 Shunning refers to the practice of the barring of errant members from participating in church gatherings. Under Ammann’s reforms, church members were required to have no association or communication with errant members at all. This is still practiced by members of Old Order Amish communities.
other Anabaptists. The name Amish was derived from the name Ammann. Many of the other Anabaptists became known as Mennonites, named for one of their leaders, Menno Simmons.

The Amish began immigrating to the New World in the eighteenth century. In North America there were two major waves of Amish immigration; the first from 1727–1770 and the second from 1815–1860. The first immigrants settled in northwest and eastern Pennsylvania with the largest concentration in Lancaster County. The second, much larger wave, settled in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Ontario, Canada. Many of these later immigrants found that their practices had become more liberal than those that had been maintained by the earlier immigrants. This led to many of these Amish merging with members of the Mennonite church in North America.

Issues of identity related to theology and community practices occurred many times throughout the history of the Amish. Currently in the United States there are at least twelve different types of Plain churches, all of which stem from Anabaptist beginnings. Through the history of the Amish in North America there have been three major splits. The first was in 1877 over a dispute concerning whether worship services should be held in private homes or in meeting houses. This lead to two groups: the Old Order Amish and the Amish-Mennonites. The second split occurred in 1910 beginning with a dispute over the severity of shunning. This

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10 Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish, 6.

11 Hostetler, Amish Society, 50.

12 Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish, 15.

13 Plain churches are characterized by the simple dress of their people, the simplicity of their church buildings, if church buildings are used and their utilitarian view of technology. Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, Quakers, Shakers and Dunkards are all examples of groups that are or have been considered to be Plain.
disagreement led to a breaking away of the Peachy Amish from the Old Order. After the break, the Peachy Amish shifted to following more Protestant practices and began to allow modern technologies. The last major split was in 1966. This split from the Old Order lead to the formation of the New Order Amish. The break began in Holmes County, OH because of disagreements concerning the use of some technologies, mainly farm machinery.\textsuperscript{14} The New Order, however, began to develop differences in their religious practices as well.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{The New Order Amish: A Developing Tradition}

The New Order Amish have grown and spread since their beginning in the late 1960s. They had about sixty church districts as of 2007 with the majority of the districts in Ohio,\textsuperscript{16} along with some settlements in Indiana and Michigan as well. The New Order Amish are the moderates of the Amish communities. They do not have as many restrictions and are not as far removed from outside society as the Old Order Amish but they are still more conservative than some of the other groups, such as the Beachy Amish who allow technologies such as the automobile.

The New Order Amish are organized in much the same manner as the Old Order. Communities are divided by church district with the church bishop as the head of each community. Communities are fairly independent in their decisions as to what their specific restrictions and allowances will be. The New Order groups are connected, though, on some

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 25.

\textsuperscript{15} Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, \textit{An Amish Paradox: Diversity and Change in the World's Largest Amish Community} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 51.

\textsuperscript{16} Steven M. Nolt and Thomas J. Meyers, \textit{Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures and Identities} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 146.
levels. Members of different communities, most often the youth, visit one another and occasionally attend one another’s singings. Singings are social events for the unmarried youth of Amish communities. Often marriages occur between communities, which creates family ties. Also, many of the New Order communities buy books, teaching materials, and songbooks printed by the same publishing companies, such as Prairie View Press and Rod and Staff. On occasion there is also communication between members of New Order communities and members of other Amish or Mennonite groups. The largest connection is the publishing companies from which almost all Amish and Mennonite groups obtain their copies of the *Ausbund* and other singing books. Occasionally a New Order member may also have relatives who are members of other types of Amish communities. The Amish themselves are very aware, though, of the distinctions between Old Order, New Order, and other groups. They are the ones to assign the labeling of the various types and are very careful to make distinctions when referring to each group. This becomes clear after a short time of talking with them.

Since the split each New Order community has formed its own guidelines concerning what technologies are allowed. Some do not use all of the technologies that caused the initial split. Some technologies that are allowed in some communities and not permitted in others include telephones inside the house, bicycles and tape recorders. There is also some variation in the rules concerning matters such as the photographing of people and the strictness of dress codes.

The main theological difference between the Old and New Order Amish is in the understanding of whether salvation is worked out in one’s actions or is assured by one’s faith in God alone. Donald Kraybill explains this difference between Amish ways of thinking in his

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17 Ibid.
book *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. He explains, “By linking salvation to obedience and life long living, the Amish [referring to Old Order] accent the importance of *practicing* the traditions of faith....One member said it simply, ‘If you believe in assurance of salvation, you are not Old Order Amish. You are New Order.’” 18

**Amish Music: A Varying Identity**

The music of the Amish is a major part of their cultural identity. The practice of singing as a part of both personal and group worship, as well as the texts of their *Ausbund* hymns, have always been an important part of Amish life. *Ausbund* singing is as much a part of an Amish person’s identity as their style of dress or their black, horse-drawn buggies. However, the restrictions applied to singing are very different community to community and especially between traditional Old Order Amish and the New Order.

All Amish groups have a formal Sunday morning service every other Sunday. Most groups sing only the very traditional slow tunes with *Ausbund* texts at these services, though some of the most progressive Amish groups, such as the Beachy, may include hymns other than those written by the first Amish brethren. Social singings for the youth on Sunday evenings are very common across all groups of Amish; however, the type of music allowed at these gatherings is dependent on the group. As each group has different regulations regarding allowable technologies and dress, they also have different understandings of what music is appropriate. The standard of what is allowed in each group has changed and developed through the years, at times causing rifts in some Amish communities.

Through all the change the Amish have undergone, there are two main consistencies that undergird their traditions. These are their liturgy and their hymnbook, the *Ausbund*. The

18 Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish*, 37.
location of worship, the rules and regulations of everyday living, and the content of secondary services and community events may have changed over the years, but in Old Order and New Order communities the Sunday morning church service which they claim has remained almost entirely unchanged from the early years of the Amish. The body of the service, from the selection of the minister to preach, to the singing of hymns with the second hymn always being the *Lobt Lied*, to the recited prayers and location of the sermons in the service, are rituals clung to by the Amish through the ages. 19 Because of this the singing of the *Ausbund* hymns, too, has become a vital, unchanging fixture of Amish life, having a consistent presence in the lives of the Amish people.

**The Ausbund: The Backbone of Amish Music**

The *Ausbund*, which is the primary hymnal used in all Amish church services, has a long history. It is the oldest Christian hymnal still in active use today with the first version assembled in 1564. 20 The Swiss Brethren Anabaptists originally assembled the *Ausbund*. Many of the details of the early history of this hymnal are unknown as the book was considered heretical and therefore many church authorities throughout Europe banned it. This resulted in any names or places of publication being omitted from all European *Ausbunds* published through 1622. Dates in European *Ausbunds* still were not included until the thirteenth edition published in 1807. 21

19 Rupert Karl Hohmann, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish of the United States” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1959), 44.

20 Ibid., 46.

The very first known *Ausbund* was a collection of fifty-three ballad-like hymns by Swiss Brethren martyrs who had been held in a Moravian prison at Passau.\textsuperscript{22} These original hymns are very long and generally speak of suffering and sorrow experienced by believers on earth, as well as the hope of heaven. By the second edition of the *Ausbund* in 1583, the number of hymns had grown to eighty. The European *Ausbund* reached its final form with the sixth edition when one hundred thirty-seven hymns were collected. Several of the hymns included in this hymnbook were written well before the compilation of this final collection. These had been included first in other Anabaptist hymnbooks, which have since fallen into disuse. The fourteen oldest hymns included in the *Ausbund* are dated from before 1530. All of the Passau martyr hymns were penned between 1535 and 1537. When the Swiss Brethren compiling the *Ausbund* took hymns from other books, they would at times change the original versions to be more fitting with their specific theological views. This resulted in a hymnbook tailored to the specific views of the Anabaptist faith.\textsuperscript{23}

As the *Ausbund* developed, it was laid out in a specific pattern. The first hymn speaks of the principles of spiritual singing. The second contains creeds of belief including the Athanasian and the Apostle’s Creed. The third and fourth hymns are both lengthy retellings of the persecution of the saints. Hymns five through eight are instructions in doctrine. The ninth through the twenty-ninth songs are the Passau martyr ballads. The remaining hymns are texts Anabaptists wrote later. Though the largest contributors to the *Ausbund* hymns is the Swiss

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 8–9.
Brethren, there are also hymns from North German and Dutch Anabaptists, the Hutterites, and the Bohemian Brethren.\(^{24}\)

Amish and Mennonite groups brought copies of the *Ausbund* when they immigrated to the New World. They used it as their primary hymnal in their church services. For a time they were dependent on hymnbooks coming from Europe to use for their services; however, in 1742, a man named Christopher Sauer, a member of the Dunkard Brethren Anabaptist group, printed the first American *Ausbund*. He printed it in Germantown, PA and was the first German book printed for the Amish or Mennonites in the New World.\(^{25}\) The American *Ausbund* is very similar to the European book with a few small exceptions. There are three additional hymns in the main portion of the American version. It also contains an index of the first lines of text, an index of all the texts which go with each tune, the Confession of Thomas von Imbroich, a history of the persecution in Zurich from 1635–1645 and an appendix of six additional songs used at weddings all concerning the apocryphal character of Tobias. The *Ausbund* changed very little from the sixth edition, save for the changes initially made to the American edition. Through the entire development of the hymnbook it remained a book of note-less hymn texts.\(^{26}\)

Through the years different Amish and Mennonite groups have taken selections out of the *Ausbund* and compiled separate books of hymns. In the 1800s some groups combined some *Ausbund* hymns with more contemporary hymns. One popular collection that included primarily *Ausbund* texts was the *Unpartelische Liedersammlung*, which first appeared in Lancaster in

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 9.
1860. Later song collections added more “fast” hymns. These became the standard for the Mennonites and the Ausbund fell into disuse by Mennonite churches. Some Amish groups did not combine the Ausbund with other books; they simply choose the hymns which were most commonly sung in their communities. With these they have created a smaller, more convenient book, as no community ever makes use of all one hundred forty hymns contained in the full version of the Ausbund. Through the years, however, this became confusing as people moved from community to community, and many people had different collections with different hymns and different page numbers. Over time a few collections became standard among most communities. Two of the most common collections are known as the Gingrich songbook and the Liedersammalung. The Liedersammalung was created specifically to be a common replacement for other collections that could be used in many communities and is currently one of the most widely used. It contains strictly Ausbund hymns, though some of the hymns have been shortened by omitting some of the lesser-sung stanzas. This book is still in the same note-less format as the Ausbund. Recently there has been an edition of the Liedersammalung that includes English translations underneath the Old German text meant as an aid to visitors, and even the Amish themselves, to better understand the hymn texts. Most Amish no longer have a fluent knowledge of Old German.

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28 Beachy and Ohio Amish Library, Songs of the Ausbund, 10.
Chapter 2

Into the Field: A Visit With the New Order Amish

The New Order Amish provide the opportunity to study a combination of old Amish traditions and new developments. Musically this results in old-style Ausbund singing, while allowing the inclusion of some more modern hymn traditions into some parts of their musical culture. Thus the New Order Amish provide the opportunity to observe the traditional service and slow-tune Ausbund singing in the same manner as it occurs in Old Order communities, while also provided examples of how change has slowly occurred in the other areas of Amish musical life.

The Field Research: An Introduction
Research into one New Order community provided a more personal and current view into the world of the New Order Amish. This research included field observations of a Sunday school service, a formal Sunday morning service, and a social singing event as well as some time spent in the homes of the Amish of this community. I also had the opportunity to conduct several formal and informal discussions that helped to provide personal insight from members of the Amish community about their musical culture. Two women and two men, including one of the church leaders, participated in formal interviews. I had informal discussions with six additional members of the community about their musical practices, beliefs, and daily life. These observations and discussions enabled me to examine this progressive Amish community’s musical ideals.

The Community

The community chosen for this study is a New Order community located in the Midwest. Though each individual community is ultimately responsible for deciding upon their specific principles and restrictions, this group has close ties with several other New Order groups in Indiana and Ohio, all of which use the same book of doctrinal statements and the same shape-note books for their church singing. This particular community organized in the 1970s and formed from families from both Amish and conservative Mennonite backgrounds. Through the years, as decisions about doctrine and practice were made and families moved in and out of the community, they established themselves as a New Order Amish community.¹ This group has experienced several challenges to its identity, at least one of which resulted in some families

leaving the community to join a community of Beachy Amish. Through these challenges they have maintained their identity as New Order and continue to hold to this today.

This community is now an average size New Order settlement consisting of about thirty households. There is a section of land devoted to a simple church building and a schoolhouse along with stables to accommodate horses while these buildings are in use. In addition to these buildings, Amish in this community own a substantial number of the fields within a several square mile area and shops where they sell various goods. This area is not exclusively Amish, as there are several non-Amish homes and fields scattered among the Amish residences. Many of the men in this community have some specific trade, such as carpentry or masonry, while others raise horses or dairy cows.²

The average family is quite large with five children being about average. It is not unusual for a family to have as many as nine children. The houses are generally spacious and are similar to other American homes, with a few exceptions. No photographs of people are displayed on the walls and items without a practical function, such as wall hangings and knick-knacks, are minimal. Surprisingly it is typical to see lights, refrigerators, or freezers in these homes. It is only after some investigation that one will find that these items are powered by natural gas and not electricity, which the Amish are famous for forbidding. Unlike the Old Order, and some New Order Amish, this community allows phones inside their houses and the use of bicycles.

Like most Amish communities this community has a bishop and two other ministers who are regarded as both the spiritual and community leaders. Schooling is provided for grades one through eight. After the eighth grade children are expected to start working and often begin learning a trade. Even girls, whose main “trade” is expected to be taking care of a house and

² Indiana Amish Directory
children, will work for a few years during their young adult years. They often work in the stores, in the fields, or in a school.

**The Music**

When speaking with members of this community about music, it became apparent that though they thought they did not know much about music, they all utilized it on a very regular basis. Most were unsure as to whether they would be able to answer my questions. After talking with them, however, it became clear they knew more they may have originally thought they knew. A few individuals felt more comfortable with their musical ability, but even they felt that they simply sang as a part of life and that they really didn’t know anything specific about it. As with many parts of New Order Amish life, the way music is sung, thought about, and regulated are in some areas unchanged from centuries of traditions, while in other way has gone through a series of changes.

Singing plays an important role in the life of every member of an Amish community. This is true regardless of whether an individual may be musically talented or generally tone-deaf. Singing is seen as an important part of worship and is viewed as a command, not a suggestion, in the Bible. Members of this community quoted verses such as Ephesians 5:19\(^3\) and Colossians 3:16\(^4\) when speaking of their reasons for the importance of singing.

*The Truth in Word and Work* is a small book that serves as a statement of faith for several groups of Amish in Indiana and Ohio and provides a bit more background information about the beliefs of this community including their beliefs about music. This book, compiled by an

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\(^3\) Eph. 5:19: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (KJV).

\(^4\) Col. 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (KJV).
unnamed group of Amish ministers and church members, states that its purpose is, “to currently substantiate and clarify to ourselves, to oncoming generations, and to the world around us what is the doctrinal position and understanding of our brotherhood.”5 A copy of this work was given to the researcher as a source of what this particular community believed. The booklet covers a multiplicity of topics including God, the church, the home, excommunication and ban, hell, heaven, simplicity of life style, the relation of church and state, worship, singing, and several other issues.

There is about a page devoted to worship and another page devoted to singing. The entry on worship states the belief that man is inclined to worship something and that one’s entire life will reveal whom they worship. Worship is explained as an act expressed by lifestyle. Worship of God is seen in holy living, of which reading, prayer, and praise are given as important components. Sunday is seen as a special day devoted specifically to rest, Christian fellowship, meditation, and the listening to and reading of the Bible and praise. The section on singing deals more specifically with the musical portion of worship. It states: “Singing is a divine gift of praise and worship.” It is always to be directed to God and never for mere pleasure or entertainment. These conditions are given for songs: “[they] must be of such content that they harmonize with the Scriptures, express sound doctrine, cause the feeble to be comforted, call the erring unto repentance, and encourage the faithful to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” It then goes on to say that the music of these songs must be simple as to not distract from the words and so that those with “lesser talents” can still participate. It says, “special singing for entertainment is not Biblical worship.” 6

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5 Ministers and Brethren of Amish Churches of Holmes Co, Ohio, and Related Areas, The Truth in Word and Work (Sugar Creek, OH: Schlabach Printers, 1983), 4.
6 Ibid., 37–38.
In this community, as in many others, the musical life of these Amish consists of three main types of singing: formal church service singing, other church organized singing apart from the Sunday service, and private singing in the home by families or individuals. Formal church singing has remained the most consistent throughout time and involves singing solely from the *Ausbund* at church services held every other Sunday. Church organized singing includes singing at Sunday school services and Sunday evening social sings. Sunday school is particular to New Order communities and includes the singing of *Ausbund* texts to different, relatively newer tunes. Sunday evening social singings are held on the same Sunday evenings as the morning services and are primarily for the youth of the church providing them with an opportunity for socialization. Informal singing or private singing by individuals and families is used for private worship in the home, for instruction of children, and leisure activity. The songs chosen for these purposes generally reflect the principles maintained by the whole community for appropriate singing as displayed by what is appropriate for Sunday school and the Sunday evening singings.

**Delving In: A Dialogue of Research and Observation**

The next portion of this paper is a dialogue between research drawn from written materials and interviews and observations made on the field that further explores these three roles of singing. The investigations of the formal church service, singing at Sunday school, and the social singing, will consist of introductory background material, and a narrative of the researcher’s field experience. It will conclude with some reflections and further commentary on each event. The investigation of home and personal singing will be drawn from other scholars’ work and material from my interviews and conversations with members of the field community.
Centuries of Heritage: The Traditional Sunday Service

The Sunday morning church service is the most formal and traditional service in the Amish tradition. The liturgy is the same as that used by the Old Order Amish and has been passed down for hundreds of years. Sunday services are held every other week. The only major change that has occurred throughout the years is the exact book from which the Ausbund texts are selected as many communities use a Liedersammelung, not a full Ausbund. The community I researched uses the new edition of the Liedersammelung that contains the High German hymn texts and English translations. Some of the men will also, on occasion, make use of a small shape-note books of melodies, which is often kept tucked in their coat pocket in case it is needed for reference during the service.

The singing style used for Sunday services is referred to as the slow style of singing. It is slow and very melismatic, often having eight to ten notes per one syllable of text. The singing is intended to be strictly in unison, with allowances for differing octaves between the men and the women. In some communities one man serves as the appointed song leader, though in this community a different song leader is selected each service from among all the adult men in attendance. The song leader’s duties include the selection of the hymn texts for the day from a list compiled according to the liturgy, selecting the tune to go with the text if there is a choice (there maybe at least two possible tunes per text) and leading the singing at the beginning of each hymn. The one hymn that does not need to be chosen is the second hymn of every Amish service, which is always the same hymn sung to the same tune. The hymn texts are always in High German and the tunes are chosen from those that have been transmitted orally for hundreds of years.

On the Field: Witnessing Four Hundred Years of Tradition

7 Donald B. Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 124.
One Sunday morning I was invited to attend an Amish church service. This was my second experience in the Amish church, as I had the opportunity to visit a Sunday school service prior to this visit. The morning of the service I pulled my vehicle into the lane and parked near the schoolhouse as I had when I attended the Sunday school service. I thought I was going to be ten or so minutes early, but as I stepped out my vehicle, I heard singing. I found out later that there had been a confusion when I was told the time of the service and I was actually just a minute or two late. The sound of the singing was beautiful and somewhat haunting as it came pouring out of the small church building on the overcast day. It was chant-like, intoned, and not at all like any hymn I had ever heard. The voices were nasal and piercing, the style very melismatic and even to one whom can generally make out some German, completely unintelligible. I walked in the basement entrance, noticing that the three ministers were gathered in the far corner. I climbed the stairs to the back room and slipped into the back pew of the women’s section. The lady whom I sat next to began sharing her Liedersammelung with me as they came to the close of the first song. There was a time of silence and the woman flipped to the next song automatically. When the singing of this hymn began she handed me her songbook and sang from memory. I followed the words, trying to match the High German words being sung to the English translation provided and listened to the singing. The man performing the duties of the song leader that day sang the melisma of the first syllable of each stanza. Some of the congregation would join on the last note of this melisma and everyone would begin singing at the start of the second syllable. There was a lot of vocal “scooping,” particularly at the beginning of larger melismas. The breathing was staggered among the congregation, and there did not seem to be any logic to the selection of where to breathe.
The ministers entered the room following this second hymn. Two of them sat on the bench, while the third stood at the front and delivered a short message. This message was in English. At the end of this teaching, as if on cue, everyone slipped from the bench on which they were sitting, turned and knelt. A short period of silent prayer followed. Then, one of the men read scripture in High German. A longer sermon followed given by one of the other ministers. This sermon was in Pennsylvania Dutch. Following the sermon a couple of men from the congregation shared some commentary, which seemed to be related to what had just been preached, some in English and some in Pennsylvania Dutch. The minister then made a couple of closing remarks. Again, everyone turned and kneeled and the minister spoke a prayer in German. Then a final hymn was sung. Like the earlier hymn, it was about ten minutes in length and about four or five of the listed seven or eight stanzas were sung. The singing style was similar to the earlier hymns. After this hymn, the service was over. I was informed that there was to be a short church meeting, during which I would be asked to step into the back room. I complied and a few of the younger teenage girls came to the back with me. After a few minutes one of the women came and informed us the meeting was over at which time many of the men and women, in separate groups, began talking and visiting with one another. After a few minutes of visiting, everyone went down to the basement to eat the lunches each family had brought. I joined in, having been invited the day before to eat with one of the ministers and his family.

Additional Notes

One distinct difference between these New Order Amish and many Old Order groups is a more open attitude toward including outsiders in their services. This can be seen with the inclusion of the English translation in the Liedersammelung and also in their having part of their

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Pennsylvania Dutch is a language influenced heavily by German with a small influence from English as well. It is spoken only in Amish and Mennonite communities.
service in English rather than only Pennsylvania Dutch and High German. The scripture and hymns are still read in High German and the second sermon is still in Pennsylvania Dutch, but anytime an outsider is present the first sermon and some of the discussion are conducted in English. Other than these few accommodations to interested outsiders, the service appeared to be exactly like the Old Order Amish services described by other scholars. The Amish in this community also told me that the service was the same.

**A New Tradition: Sunday School**

The Sunday school service is held the Sunday mornings on which formal services are not held and is a practice primarily found in New Order Amish communities. In recent years there have been a few Old Order groups who have adopted the practice, but most hold church services only every other week.\(^9\) Sunday school was a dividing point between some Amish and Mennonite groups in the nineteenth century. The groups opposed to Sunday school were so mainly because it meant joining in a cooperative Sunday school program with several Protestant denominations.\(^10\) The Amish and Mennonite parents were not involved in most of these classes and did not have control over the doctrine that was taught. Some Mennonite groups embraced Sunday school classes while many Old Order Mennonite and Amish rejected them. Over a hundred years later, when the New Order were establishing their practices, they began adding Sunday school. This Sunday school is much different from the nineteenth-century Protestant classes. The New Order Amish Sunday School is held in the church building, with all ages

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\(^10\) Though the ancestors of the Amish, the Anabaptists, were a part of the Reformation along with several ancestors of Protestant churches, the Amish do not consider themselves to be Protestant, but separate entirely from the Catholic/Protestant dichotomy. They consider any Protestant church to be much more theologically and socially liberal, and more worldly than their church.
together in the same room, similar to the Sunday morning services. As it is a newer practice, Sunday school is much less standardized from group to group.

The singing used in the Sunday school services is referred to as “fast” singing. This does not mean the *tempi* are necessarily fast. The term is used in contrast with the “slow” singing of the traditional *Ausbund* tunes. The fast tunes are hymn tunes taken primarily from the American hymn tradition. Some of these tunes include those found in some Protestant hymnaries and are mainly in the style of traditional Protestant hymnody such as those composed by Charles Wesley, Fanny Crosby, and Philip Bliss.

**On the Field: A Different Sort of Sunday School**

The Sunday school service was my first experience inside the Amish church. In anticipation I was trying to picture what it would entail and had some idea it might be similar to the protestant Sunday schools with which I have some experience. Perhaps the classes would be sitting around tables, studying Bible stories, and working on memorizing scripture. My host family, who attended the Amish church for several years, had mentioned that perhaps I should prepare a memorized Bible verse. After experiencing the service I discovered that my expectations were far from actuality.

When I arrived at the church building many families were already present, while several others were still pulling in. I parked my car off to the side, out of the way of the road used by the horse-drawn buggies, which was the most common mode of transportation. Some younger people also arrived on bicycles. I walked in the main door that leads into the basement area. As it was cold outside, coats and women’s capes were piled on a table by the door, while plain, black men’s hats were hung on pegs above these tables. Upon walking up the stairs I found a group of women and children congregating in a small room that was open to, though behind a
large room, which was the main meeting room. The men were elsewhere. I had met a few of these women before, and they greeted me and introduced me to several others. They told me I could either sit with the single girls, or if I felt more comfortable I could sit in the back room with the women who had babies. I decided for the full experience I should go sit in the main room. One single girl, who was close to my age and with whom I had talked at some length the day before, offered for me to sit next to her. Shortly before the service was set to begin the women began lining up. I stayed next to my friend, unsure as to the purpose of the line. Once everyone had assembled, the men began walking out into the large room, taking their seats on the hard, wooden benches. The teenage boys and young, single men sat in the front benches while the older men, some holding young boys or girls, sat in the back half of the room. After they had taken their places, the women filed in, in much the same manner.

Though the feel and organization of this service were similar to the church service I later attended, the content of this service was markedly different. There was a teaching given by one of the ministers that was comparable to the shorter sermon given in the church service. This minister directed most of the service. It was in English this day but it was mentioned that this was for the benefit of a visitor. The one lesson was the only set preaching time, however; there was also a time for men to share anything that they felt God had been teaching them or a truth they believed He wanted them to share with the group. There was also a time when, going down the rows, both men and women recited a verse they had memorized sometime in the past two weeks. Some recited these verses in English and some in German. Two hymns were sung toward the beginning of the service and two were sung at the end. The nasal singing quality was present, though the scooping and the feel of intoning that I would observe later at the formal Sunday service were not as prevalent. At the conclusion of the service, people stayed and visited
for a while, the men and women still staying on their respective sides. I was invited to eat dinner at a younger couple’s house across the street from the non-Amish family with whom I was staying. I readily accepted this invitation. After this invitation, I was also offered a meal at another family’s place; this type of hospitality was evident throughout my visits with the Amish.

Additional Notes

This Sunday school service seemed as if it originally had a similar liturgy to that of the church service but was then simplified and allowed to become a bit more informal. It is a definite balance between old and new ways of thinking. Ausbund texts are used, but sung to the newer “fast” hymn melodies. These tunes are kept to unison melodies and no harmony is utilized. One striking characteristic of this service was that the women are allowed to speak, though only when reciting their scripture passage, but this is in contrast to the church service where the only sound heard from women is that of their singing.

The Young People’s Event: The Social Sing

The social sing is an event that is held in both New and Old Order Amish communities, though the structure and content varies from community to community. In all groups the singings occur on the same Sunday evening as that of the church service. The attendees are primarily single youth and young adults. This event serves as one of the primary social outlets for unmarried teens and young adults. In many Old Order groups the sing begins with a period of time dedicated to singing the slow Ausbund tunes followed by a devotional. After the devotional, fast tunes still consisting of Ausbund texts are sung. In many New Order groups the common practice is forty-five minutes of fast German tunes with Ausbund texts, a devotional,

11 A devotional is a short lesson on a scripture passage or a biblical concept often with some practical application.
and a final forty-five minutes to an hour of hymns in English. In some communities, including the one I studied, the English hymns are sung in four-part harmony. A few communities may include some traditional folk songs, yodels, and harmonica playing in the second half of the sing but this seems to be far less common.\footnote{Brigitte Bachmann-Geiser, \textit{Amish: The Way of Life of the Amish in Berne, Indiana}, trans. John Bendix (Rockland, ME: Picton Press, 2009), 146.}

\textit{On the Field: An Evening Sing}

After the formal Sunday morning service and fellowship lunch, I spent the afternoon at the house of a widow and her three daughters. It was interesting to note the amount of anticipation and preparation that surrounded the sing. One of the teen-aged daughters particularly liked to sing and enjoyed finding new songs to request at the singing. She invited an older, single woman over to the house, to help her practice for the sing. We spent about an hour of the afternoon, six of us, sitting around the dining room table practicing hymn singing. I was told the first thirty to forty-five minutes of the sing would consist of the fast German songs followed by a half-hour devotional. The singing would conclude with about forty-five minutes of English songs. These English songs were taken from one of several approved songbooks, which were what are generally called hymnals. These women showed me several of their songbooks that were used in this community. Mennonite publishers printed many of these songbooks. The notes of many of these books, including the one chosen this day, were notated with shape notes set on a traditional staff.\footnote{The practice of shape-note notation was one used in many nineteenth and early twentieth century hymnbooks. Each solfege syllable is assigned a separate note head shape. The singer learns to associate that shape with the degree of the scale, rather than using the staff for reference. It is possible for shape-notes to be notated without a staff. Almost all notated music used by the Amish is written in shape-notes. They refer to traditional, western notation as being “round notes,” which very few of them know how to read.} The selections of hymns included several traditional protestant hymns that I knew, though the hymns I knew seemed to be those that the women practicing had never heard of before. Many of the songs they chose to sing through that
afternoon had texts speaking about heaven and the hope of life after death. The songs had an
old-time gospel feel and unlike the German songs, were sung in four-part harmony. During the
course of the practice one song in particular was decided upon to be one that one girl would call
for that night, and it was given particular attention and practice.

I drove my car to the sing, carrying one of the Amish girls with me, so as to not get lost.
Riding in a car was not unusual for her as the members of her community often hire outsiders to
drive them distances longer than they are able to drive in their buggies. When we arrived at the
house I was surprised to see that there was electricity in the house! What I learned from later
inquiry was that the family who was hosting had only recently moved into that house, which had
previously been owned by a non-Amish family. I was told they had a certain period of time
before they had to completely convert the house over to being non-electrical. We arrived a few
minutes before the singing was to begin and the girls were congregating in a kitchen area
attached to a rather large living room. The young men were already seated in the living room.
Like the church services, the seating arrangements were divided by sex, although unlike the
services, the young men and women were seated facing one another. The women all walked in
together and sat down primarily on wooden benches that had been placed long-ways in the
middle of the living room. Some of the older people in attendance sat along the back in sofas
and easy chairs. I got the impression that the front benches of either section were the most
desirable seats, as to be the closest to those of the opposite sex. I was grateful that my friend
who was accompanying me gave the option for us to sit in the second row of benches, as the first
row was literally inches from the knees of the young men in the opposite row. The event
proceeded as it had been described earlier to me. Different people would take turns calling out
numbers, both during the German songs and the English songs. Whoever called out the number
was in charge of leading the singing. Surprisingly in this setting, women were allowed both to call for and lead out in the singing. Not as many youth called for German songs and the older woman who had helped us practice earlier led out on several of them, as did another young woman in her mid-twenties who was known to be a very good singer. She was about to be married and one of the other girls had mentioned to me that they were going to be sorry to lose her help at the singings, as she would no longer attend after she was married. During the German singing time there was only text with no notation, but I did recognize several of the melodies as hymn tunes with which I was familiar from the protestant hymn tradition. During the English singing time I did not recognize any of the tunes, but as these were all notated, I had no trouble joining along in singing. My friend called for her song and we sang it out to the best of our ability. During this and several other English songs that were clearly lesser known tunes the singing was not as loud, and there were several individuals who hardly participated. The nasal quality that was so distinct during the church services was still present though not as pronounced in this setting. After the sing was over, water and lemonade were handed out, and everyone stayed for a time of socialization. The women stayed on their half of the room. The men stayed on their half for a while, but after one of the horses got loose, they congregated outside. After a time of brief conversation with some of the women, I departed for home.

Additional Notes

At this event, as at the Sunday school service, there was clearly an effort to maintain a careful balance of long held traditions and newer ideals. The Ausbund is still kept as a central part of their religious life, while also allowing the use of newer hymns and four-part harmony. The attitudes of the younger Amish towards singing are quite intriguing. Perhaps because of interaction with the young men, the women seemed to be more focused on the skill of singing.
Overall, it seemed that many of these youth were still learning the ways of their parents. They displayed less confidence in their knowledge of the tunes and accuracy in singing than the adults displayed during either the Sunday church service or the Sunday school meeting. This was evidenced by the youths’ shyness in calling for songs, which they would have to lead out on if they were to call for them. It could also be observed by their much softer volume level while singing. Their lack of confidence and participation during the lesser-known English hymns (which are notated) may also suggest that many of these young people are unable to read musical notation.

A Personal Level: Singing in the Home

The one use of music in Amish culture that has been the least written about and which also seems to have the least amount of restriction is music sung in the home. What is sung in private homes is more difficult to observe and seems to vary widely even within communities with similar beliefs and practices. The general rules and ideals of each Amish community are meant to extend to every part of a community member’s life. In this way, the type of singing within a private home could be expected to remain similar to that which is found at a service or a singing and this seemed to hold true when discussing this in interviews and conversations.

Music is an integral part of Amish life, but this is not something of which the Amish themselves are very aware. When I asked permission to interview them about their music most said that although they were willing they were not sure they would be able to answer my questions because they really did not know that much about music. All of them, though, spoke of music being used on a regular basis in their homes. The most common use for music in the
home seemed to be as a part of family Bible study times or as a way to help teach children. One family said they tried to sing together every morning, another every evening before bed. One family with two younger children said they would sometimes sing their prayers before meals rather than speak them and would teach their children what they referred to as “little children’s songs” with titles such as “Read Your Bible” or “Peter, James, and John had a Little Sailboat,” (which is a reference to a Biblical story). More than one individual mentioned that songs were sometimes sung or whistled while completing chores. Another function of music in the home was using music as a pastime, particularly as something to do with extended family when they were visiting. In a culture without TV, movies, or computers, singing is a bonding activity for friends and family.

Though it seemed that everyone participated in forms of personal singing to some degree, there was mention of some people as being particularly drawn to or good at music and some who were not. One couple said that while she had sung some as a child, he had not sung much with his family until he was older. He also said that while he could help with the singing fine in church, he couldn’t hear the distinction between the different parts when there was four-part singing and that when he sang by himself he sometimes got “off tune.” Some referred to different family members and friends as always singing and as loving to sing. When someone was particularly good at reading music, they were said to be “good at their notes.”

Overall, the style of singing in the home seemed to be similar to the singing at Sunday school or the social sings, though not all the songbooks an individual may own must be those specific to the ones used for the church singings. They did seem to all contain songs with similar values. Songs, even most of the children’s songs, contain Christian texts. It did not seem that slow Ausbund singing was used much in the home in this community, though one of the middle-
aged adults interviewed said that she had primarily learned the *Ausbund* tunes from hearing her family sing them at home.

There are a few exceptions to the styles of personal singing from what has been mentioned above. These come primarily from outside, non-Amish influences. Mention of this is found in the work of other researchers, though there were allusions to some outside musical influences in a couple of my conversations. Most of this influence came from hearing the radio or cassette tapes in the vehicles of non-Amish drivers or in non-Amish stores in which they may shop.

Chapter 3

*Regulations and Religious Devotion: Six Aspects of Amish Musical Culture*

Investigation of previously conducted research, field observation, interviews, and casual conversations with the Amish brought out several different defining aspects of Amish musical culture. Some of these concerned practical matters, such as music education in a community or the level of awareness of musical differences from community to community. Others were more philosophical, such as the reasoning for the lack of musical instruments as a part of Amish music as well as the overall perceived role that music is to play in an Amish person’s life. Specific interviews provided the opportunity to get some direct commentary on these issues. Combining the responses from these interviews with other comments made in casual conversations and the
thoughts of other researchers provides a deeper look at what shapes this musical culture. A look at these issues explores the cultural aspects of Amish music.

In this chapter, six aspects of Amish musical culture will be addressed: what is the role of music education in an Amish community, why oral transmission is the primary method for *Ausbund* hymns, why musical instruments are forbidden, what music is appropriate and how this is determined, whether a member of one community is aware of musical differences in another community, and what the role of music is to be in an Amish person’s life. Most of the answers to these questions will be drawn from my field research. Thus it will answer these questions for one particular community and their experience in and perception of other communities. However, there will be information presented from other researchers as well which will provide a brief look at how these issues in this community may relate to similar issues in other communities.

**Music Education and Musical Skill**

Conversations with members of this Amish community revealed that although everyone in the Amish community sang and was expected to sing, there was a wide range of both musical ability and musical training. Often these two were connected as those who were musically inclined enjoyed singing and sought instruction. Some people referred to musical terminology, such as solfege, quite naturally while others claimed they only knew what they had heard and couldn’t read notes at all. Some individuals in the community were spoken of as being “good at their notes” and “good at singing,” while others claimed they were not very good at “staying on key” by themselves or that it took them a while to feel confident with a new song. Upon further questioning it became apparent that some members of this community had received training,
either in school or from tutoring by individuals, while others had never had any formal training at all.

There has not been a lot written about music education among the Amish, though Joseph W. Yoder in his book *Rosanna of the Amish* writes that only those who had a good sense for music learn the hymns well enough to lead out.¹ He tells a story of two boys who wanted to gain this skill and would help one another to practice leading so that they might become good enough to lead.² The community that I researched gave insight into their scope of musical instruction, which they presented as being typical for New Order communities. In these communities musical instruction is optional at school. Some teachers choose to include it as an extra project or course while others do not. The teachers at the school rotate every two to three years, so children are likely to have a teacher that includes music lessons for some part of their eight years of schooling. When music lessons are included they normally cover the basics of solfege and shape-note singing. Sometimes an individual who has more musical knowledge will also offer to teach young people outside of school. This may occur on an informal basis, as was mentioned in the previous chapter during the preparation for the singing. It may also be a more formal type of training. One of the men who was interviewed mentioned that when he was about sixteen, he and some other boys his age were very interested in singing. There was a man in their church who was a good musician and had even composed some songs. They asked this man if he would give them music lessons; he agreed and they went to his house one evening a month and were instructed by him. Another woman mentioned that at one point several years ago, some of the communities in the area would get together every so often and have singing events, but they all

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¹ This is a fictional book based on the true story of his Amish mother’s life.

had different styles of singing and were all doing some things “incorrectly.” So one man from a neighboring community who was a good singer and a songwriter had some singing classes for the youth of the different communities. The aim was for all the youth in the area to have a similar and “correct” singing style. However, aside from those who took a very particular interest in singing, even those who had had some lessons in school implied that the bulk of their musical knowledge came simply from singing at church every Sunday and at home with their families.

One thing in particular stood out while speaking with the Amish about this topic. There was a dichotomy between everyone singing regularly with no emphasis on entertainment or skill and there also being some who have more musical aptitude and make music a part of their day-to-day life. It seems that although they are a very musical culture and it is considered to be a part of everyone’s Christian life, some come by it much more naturally. One woman summed this idea up when she said: “it [singing] is so much a part of life, we don’t stop and think about it too often; we just grew up singing. And I guess both of us [she and her husband] were privileged to have parents that could sing. I mean there are a few people that they have trouble with it or it doesn’t just come naturally to them, but we always, we just sang.”

**Oral Transmission: The Way It Has Always Been Done**

One of the defining characteristics of Amish *Ausbund* singing is the oral transmission of its hymn melodies. This has been true since the Amish first used *Ausbund* hymns for worship in the sixteenth century. In his book on Old Order Amish society, Hostetler mentions that the learning of tunes by oral tradition, much in the same manner as a folk tune, is “an assumption”
among the Amish. In the New Order community it is still an assumption that the primary vehicle for teaching the *Ausbund* melodies will be oral tradition even though shaped-note books have been made available. The notated books are used more as a reference guide to allow a man “leading out” in a service a greater degree of confidence. These books also serve as a way to help unify several different Amish communities by providing them with a set standard for each melody. The fact that a standard is needed brings to question how the melodies may have changed over the course of several hundred years of oral transmission. This issue of variance will be addressed in the following chapter.

Among those Amish who I interviewed, there was no one reason given for why oral transmission is always used, but several explanations stood out. The general response was summed up by a man who said, “I don’t know, that’s the way it’s always been done, I suppose.” After some reflection some Amish gave further suggestions as to the purpose of this particular practice. One suggested that it was a practice for the purpose of unity. Not everyone could learn to read notes as well as others, but everyone could learn by listening. One of the ministers who took a particular interest in music suggested that the hymns may have remained in oral for so long because there was no need to write them down. They were repeated Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, so no one had trouble learning them. He also commented that he thought a lot of the four-part hymn singing came as a result of more Amish people learning to read notes and that perhaps four-part singing would not be able to be passed down orally as easily as the unison hymn tunes have been. In his dissertation on Amish church music, Hohmann agrees with this supposition that written notation was unnecessary to the Amish. He suggests that music is not

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notated because of the impracticality with the lack of music-reading ability and the high cost of printing at the time many of the Amish hymnbooks were being produced.4

**Musical Instruments: Forbidden Objects**

The forbidding of musical instruments in Amish communities is an issue that provides an example of a combination of both tradition and personal conviction. The Amish have traditionally rejected musical instruments. In the 1800s some Amish groups dealt with issues concerning immigrants who were coming from Europe with much more liberal beliefs than those that had been maintained by the Amish in the United States. One of the issues that caused concern was immigrants bringing musical instruments.5 Two groups that were opposed to the traditional ban on instruments were the Hessian Amish and the Stuckey Amish. These groups eventually broke away from the traditional Amish and formed their own groups.6

Most Amish today hold to the restriction on instruments, though there does seem to be a few different explanations given for this ban. In his book The Amish People, Elmer Smith writes that some of his informants attribute the ban to an interpretation of Amos 6:5,7 while others claimed that it had nothing to do with scripture at all and was merely cultural.8 A book entitled The Amazing Story of the Ausbund has Amish and Mennonite readers as the intended audience.

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4 Rupert Karl Hohmann, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish of the United States” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1959), 47.


6 Ibid., 146.

7 This chapter opens with the condemnation “woe to you” and precedes to list a description of these people who are being lamented; verse 5 states “You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments.”

It casually mentions this about the use of musical instruments: “The small but distinctly different intonation all human beings have makes for a blend and beauty of music that cannot be equaled by the artificial sounds of any musical instrument.” *The Truth in Word and Work* has this explanation for the absence of instruments in its New Order communities:

In the Old Testament dispensation the sounds of instruments and strings were often employed to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. At that time worship emphasized outward ritual. That is no longer what God desires. God desires the expression of our spirit with joy and praise....Jesus said, “...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” (John 4:23) There is neither spirit nor truth in any musical instrument; therefore the Christian has no use for them. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15).

When individually questioned, the members of this particular community gave several slightly varying answers as to the absence of instruments in Amish music. The reasons given include humility, unity, and nonconformity to the outside world. One man expressed that he believed instruments put more emphasis on the music and the musician than the words and their meaning. His wife added that this might be why they encouraged singing by the entire congregation and not any special groups. Another man said that one main reason for not using instruments was that it played on the emotions and they were taught not to go on feelings but to sing from the heart. He also mentioned that some communities allow the harmonica. He said his community does not allow it because it was more convenient to just say no instruments. As soon as the harmonica was allowed then perhaps someone would want to add another instrument, like a guitar. He said they wouldn’t want to use guitars because a lot of country singers use them and in general a lot of the music in the world today uses musical instruments. He then quoted Romans 12:2, which says “do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the

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renewing of your mind.” His wife added that the verse that says “sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord,” would also be a verse they would use to explain their belief in using only voices. They also commented that using instruments would make musical worship less of a unifying practice. Not everyone can use musical instruments. By having everyone sing, worship is a community practice, and everyone has a part and is needed. They did make a point to say that they could see that this choice may not be right for every Christian. This man said that he wasn’t saying someone couldn’t use an instrument and still have his or her “heart tuned to the Lord.” However, he believes that pride could become an issue much more easily if a musician is using an instrument.

Almost every person that was asked about this practice had to think before expressing the reasons for this belief. This gave some indication that this was just part of common practice and was not generally given much thought. The ban on musical instruments is part of the traditional Ordnung, a set of standards all Amish live by. Any practice, including the banning of musical instruments, that is a part of these standards is unlikely to be easily changed. In his book The Riddle of Amish Culture, Donald Kraybill echoes this thought. He writes, “Musical instruments, consistently forbidden by the Ordnung, are less likely than calculators to be accepted.”

How Music Is Judged: An Issue of Appropriateness

The issue of what music is appropriate for singing is an issue that confronts the members of every Amish community. The Ausbund hymns are always considered to be appropriate by any Amish community as they are a vital part of Amish life and heritage. Beyond these hymns, though, it becomes increasingly ambiguous as to what is in keeping with the Amish regulations

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10 Donald B. Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 303-4.
and their desire to remain separate from the world. Many Old Order groups allow only *Ausbund* texts, though a majority still allows the texts to be sung to fast tunes. Some groups allow some English hymns, but only if they are sung in unison. Part-singing is considered by some groups to be a display of pride.\(^\text{11}\) Other groups do not have a problem with four-part harmonies. Some allow a larger selection of “English” songs (hymns in English rather than German) than others. The New Order Amish allow a much wider selection of songs than the Old Order, which increases the importance of how a song’s appropriateness is determined. There is a delicate balance maintained between allowing what they believe to be good, new songs and becoming too lenient.

Based on conversations with members of this New Order community, there were a few standards that most New Order groups seemed to apply to determine the appropriateness of a song. Song lyrics must have spiritual themes. Patriotic songs are never appropriate.\(^\text{12}\) They also try to avoid songs that come from the gospel music industry, as they see these songs as having been composed and performed primarily to entertain and for monetary gain. The theology espoused in songs sung by members of the community should be in line with the teachings of the church. There is still some deference from these regulations in some communities. One is the occasional allowance of folk songs or teaching songs for children that are not specifically Christian. Also, one girl said that in a community she had lived in before, they had been allowed battery-operated tape players and would sometimes learn songs from gospel tapes.

This community sings a variety of English songs and allows some four-part harmony singing. This has not always been the case, and it was mentioned that there had been a bit of a


\(^{12}\) This is partly because of a general distrust of government developed as the result of their heritage of persecution. It also stems from their desire to be separate from worldly institutions and their strong pacifistic beliefs.
disagreement among some of the community members as to how much English singing and how much of the old style singing should be used in the community. The current balance of the two seems to be a form of compromise between differing views. Anyone who has not liked this balance has joined a different community. The community as a whole has selected about four songbooks that are viewed as appropriate for social singings. There is an appointed youth leader who is in charge of youth events, including the singings. He chooses which book will be used every rotation. One book is used for about three or four months and then a new one is selected. Most families own a copy of all of the books used for the singings and employ these books for singing in the home as well. Some families own books in addition to these for their own use. It is typical for someone to own a book that other families in their community do not. One of the church ministers said that everyone pretty much knows what is acceptable and they do not have too many problems with people having books that are inappropriate. He said occasionally there will be books that are mostly ok but which contain certain songs that they will not sing. These are generally patriotic songs, such as “America the Beautiful.” Many of the songbooks that are used by members of this community are published by Mennonite publishing companies such as Prairieview Press or Rod and Staff, and are ordered by catalogue.

The selection of appropriate sources of songs seems to be an issue much like many other issues in Amish culture. Within the more broad scope of Amish belief, each community determines the specifics. The members of the community generally desire to hold to the beliefs and principles their community has chosen. Within a community there may be slightly differing views, but everyone who desires to be a part of the community works to be in agreement with one another.
We Sing, They Sing: The Awareness of Differences among Communities

As every community has somewhat differing standards concerning what may be sung, each also has slightly differing ways of singing as well. When someone mentioned their experience living in or visiting a different community, they often mentioned differences in that community’s practice or style of singing. It was clear that each community is individualistic in many ways and that the Amish who live in these communities are aware of these variations. One difference in practice that was mentioned was the way the singing is led. Some communities have a designated song leader, while others rotate among any baptized, male church member. Also, during slow tune singing some groups have the song leader lead out at the beginning of every line while others have the leader lead only at the beginning of every stanza.

Differences occur not only in practice, but also musically. Examining how different individuals perceived musical differences not only gave insight into these variations but also into different ways these individuals think about music. Some people were aware of specific differences in the notes of certain melodies while others noticed differences in style or selection. This showed that some think about music specific to the individual notes while others think merely in terms of sound and qualities of sound. One woman mentioned that when she was younger she and her mother visited another Amish community for a wedding. They noticed that this community used more “slurs” (referring to the melismatic movement used in the slow singing) than what they used in their community. She wasn’t as sure about any other differences, as she was a child at the time, but she remembers her mother commenting that she could hear quite a difference in the way they sung their songs. She mentioned another instance of a community who sang their hymns at a much higher pitch than to what she was accustomed. She said the men sang almost in the range of the women of her community and the women much
higher than that. She said when she tried to sing that high she couldn’t for very long, but that when they sang it didn’t sound “screechy” and that they must be used to this range.

One of the men in this community had a good ear for music. When asked about differences among communities he said that he had noticed some communities sang slightly different notes for some songs. He then provided the example of one New Order community with whom he had sung. During the Lobt Lied they stayed on mi for a certain word rather than going down from mi to do as his community typically did. He said he had noticed several other small differences similar to this.

Music and Culture: The Role of Singing in Amish Life

Though there are many ambiguities in Amish music, every member of this community had very similar answers as to what the role of music was to be in the life of an Amish person. This similarity may come from the same doctrinal teaching, which each of these members have received or simply from their similar upbringing. Either way it was clear that in this matter there was a consensus. Perhaps it is these principles that keep the Amish unified despite differing opinions about the specifics of their musical practices, much as they remained unified as the Amish despite the differences among specific practices in each community.

To the Amish, music is more than an intellectual or artistic endeavor. Both Bachmann-Geiser in her book about the Swiss Amish in Berne, Indiana and Hostetler in his book on Old Order Amish society refer to singing not only as being an essential part of Amish culture and heritage, but also as being a very emotional and spiritual form of expression.\footnote{Brigitte Bachmann-Geiser, \textit{Amish: The Way of Life of the Amish in Berne, Indiana}, trans. John Bendix (Rockland, ME: Picton Press, 2009), 72-73.} Hostetler writes:
“to the Amish the singing of them [hymns] evokes the deepest emotion of the human spirit. Singing is a source of emotional support and reflects the content and psychology of a culture.”\textsuperscript{14}

As to New Order Amish beliefs, \textit{The Truth in Word and Work} reads: “Singing is a divine gift of praise and worship. While it is a pleasant, wholesome, and upbuilding activity to be engaged in, it is not intended for mere pleasure, entertainment, or for the gratifying of the senses. It is to be directed to the Lord, and its message is for the edifying of the saints.”\textsuperscript{15} The Amish who were interviewed echoed these sentiments. To them, singing was important first and foremost as a means of communicating to God in worship and secondly as a vital part of Christian community. One man said: “I think it’s [singing] worship; it’s one way we can worship the Lord. And it helps, you know, as something the young folks can do that’s conducive to a godly life.” Several people also related that music allowed the expression of feelings in a much deeper way than mere words and played a part in a person’s emotional and spiritual well being. Another man said:

I think songs and music express a lot of thoughts and feelings that a lot of people have a hard time putting into words. And I think it just speaks to a lot of the human race’s needs and desires and heart-longings...singing can bless your heart and be a blessing to others and it can also bring conviction in our lives and it can bring comfort when we’re sad or depressed or lonely. It can lift our spirits and encourage us.

\textbf{Music: A Window into Culture}

\textsuperscript{14} Hostetler, \textit{Amish Society}, 123-24.

\textsuperscript{15} Ministers and Brethren of Amish Churches of Holmes Co., Ohio, and Related Areas, \textit{The Truth in Word and Work}, 40.
In Amish culture music is viewed in a much different light than many other cultures. It is not simply a pastime, one of many forms of artistic expression, a hobby choice or a possible source of income. It is studied only on the most basic level, rarely recorded, used for socializing, but not entertainment and never to gain fame or money. Amish historical and cultural identity is tightly inter-woven with their religious beliefs and music is a vital part of both. Music not only functions as a form of cultural expression, and in the form of the Ausbund, is one of the most vital aspects of Amish identity.

The music of the Ausbund is a vital pillar of Amish culture, as is the practice of singing in general. However, music not only exists as a vital part of their identity, but also provides a good indicator to the way their communities function as a whole. Strict Old Order groups, who follow strict codes concerning simplicity and separation, only allow Ausbund texts hymns. The more lenient New Order, who allow more technology and contact with outsiders, allow English hymns and harmony. All Amish in a particular group follow basic guidelines, but each community decides their own specific rules. By understanding the musical issues and practices within an Amish community, one can come much closer to understanding the community as a whole.
Chapter 4
Oral Transmission: A New Look at an Old Issue

One of the practices associated with Amish Ausbund hymn singing is the oral transmission of tunes. The recent introduction of shape-note songbooks in some New Order communities has not diminished the heritage of oral transmission. Listening to and singing with older members of a congregation on a regular basis is still the primary method of learning these tunes. Many members, even in New Order Amish groups, still cannot read any form of musical notation. The consistent use of oral transmission provides a rare chance to observe this practice in a western-style, European-based music that is still in use today. Amish music is some of the last of European-based music that is still almost entirely transmitted by oral transmission. There has been some use of oral transmission in other western-style hymn traditions, including those used in the New England Congregational Churches and Appalachian Baptist churches, as well as varying folk song traditions. These types of singing are now primarily extinct.¹ This chapter will review previous research of oral transmission in Amish music, introduce some new source material, and reexamine the findings of this previous research in light of the new source material.

Scholarship and Sources

The Works of Other Scholars

Several scholars have investigated the possible effects of oral transmission using Amish Ausbund singing as a point of study. A classic article by Nicholas Temperley published in the Journal of the American Musicological Society concerning what he referred to as “the old way of

singing,” is one important work dealing with the oral transmission of Western music. He uses the term the “old way” to refer to the style of singing that develops when a group of people, specifically a church congregation is “left to sing hymns without musical direction for long periods.” In this article he discusses several different singing traditions that developed in England and America as a result of the Reformation including the American Mennonites. In the traditions he examined there were several uniting factors. The tunes most commonly used were originally folk tunes. The music was sung without trained leading (i.e., a choir or trained music director) and was conducted without instrumental accompaniment. In these instances Temperley found that the “tempo becomes extremely slow; the sense of rhythm is weakened; extraneous pitches appear, sometimes coinciding with those of the hymn tune, sometimes inserted between them; the total effect may be dissonant.” These characteristics all define the Old Style. He recognizes this style in the American Mennonite singing which shares much of the same history and characteristics of Amish singing in the United States. Because of this shared history, many of these observations made by Temperley about the morphing of tunes in this style of singing coincide with the style and probable changes over time of the Ausbund tunes in the Amish tradition. George Pullen Jackson, in his article “The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish,” also refers to the tendency of groups with no musical guidance to gradually slow in tempo and to add vocal waverings. He cites early American psalm singing as an example of this phenomenon. 

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2 Ibid. 511.
3 Ibid., 513–15.
4 Ibid., 511.
In his dissertation, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish,” Rupert Karl Hohmann discusses the influence oral transmission may have had on the Ausbund tunes. He points out that many of the songs that served as source material for these tunes were simple and syllabic in their original form. This is much different from the complex, highly ornamented melodies sung today, which suggests that there have been notes added and changes in tempo and rhythm over time. His suggestion is that because of the rote method of transmission, the root melodies gradually changed by sections. His work shows that in this process parts of the source melodies were also omitted completely. Within his detailed analysis of several Amish tunes, Hohmann discovered many characteristic opening and cadential structures which were consistent across geographic regions. Bruno Nettl also mentions this phenomenon in his article “The Hymns of the Amish.” He suggests that characteristic structures may be indicative of ornamental figuration borrowed from the unwritten traditions of embellishment in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European music.

In this study of the oral transmission of Ausbund melodies, two suggestions about the effects of oral transmission on the melodies have emerged. These are that the original melodies have been gradually modified over time, specifically by the slowing of tempo and the addition of notes, and that ornamentation was originally added to the melodies by some unwritten rule of embellishment. This chapter will re-examine some of the source material used for these studies. This will be presented along with some additional source material. After presentation of this

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7 Ibid., 105.

8 Ibid., 81.

source material, I will reconsider the suggestions of this original research. This research is an additional step towards a more complete understanding of the effects of oral transmission as well as the history of Amish Ausbund singing.

**Looking for Tunes: Source Melodies for the Ausbund Hymns**

To obtain an idea of how Ausbund melodies have been altered over time, one must first have an idea of what the original melodies were like. Though Ausbund tunes were not notated or recorded by the Amish until the twentieth century, the tunes used for Ausbund singing for the most part were not original to the Amish. Sources for Amish tunes include songs from fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century Europe from both sacred and secular traditions. There are written records of many of these tunes. ¹⁰ Many of the tunes still in use have been traced back to specific sources within these traditions. Included with all of the texts in the Ausbund is a name of a suggested tune name that has been included since the first editions of the hymnbook. They refer to pre-existing melodies that were paired with the then newly written Anabaptist texts. Research of several scholars has shown that some of these suggested tunes are still the ones in use today. Other texts have now been paired with other tunes, sometimes tunes originally assigned to different texts and sometimes different tunes entirely.

There have been several different theories espoused over the years as to the primary origins of these suggested tunes. Joseph W. Yoder, a scholar who came from Amish background, was one of the first transcribers of Amish hymn tunes. He suggested that the melodies were descendant from Gregorian chant primarily because of the tempo and melismatic structure of the melodies. He also conjectured that Gregorian chant was the only liturgical form

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of music in common use throughout the areas of Anabaptist development and growth.\textsuperscript{11} More recent research has shown that many of the tunes are actually folk songs with some inclusion of melodies from the new protestant tradition. They may also include a few chants or devotional songs from the Catholic tradition.\textsuperscript{12} However, the Anabaptist rejection of anything Catholic makes it unlikely that they would have consciously chosen melodies associated with Catholic worship.\textsuperscript{13} Some specific source tunes have been fairly positively established while others remain ambiguous.

One of the scholars to seek out tunes of origin for the \textit{Ausbund} hymns is George Pullen Jackson. In his article “The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish,” Jackson examines the transcriptions made by Joseph Yoder compared with tunes in a collection of European folk tunes put together by Ludwig Erk and Franz Bohme in the 1890s. He also references an extensive collection of German chorales put together by Johannes Zahn in the late nineteenth century. Jackson attempted to remove “extraneous” notes from the \textit{Ausbund} melodies that were most likely added over the course of being transmitted orally. He broke the Amish tunes down to what he believes may have been the original base melody. He then worked to match this skeleton of the \textit{Ausbund} melody to one of the tunes found in the above-mentioned sources. Jackson made twenty-six matches he felt were accurate, as well as a handful more for which he offers possibilities but which he is not convinced are correct. There are a few tunes he studied for which he could not find any source possibilities. His research helps to establish that the

\textsuperscript{11} Joseph W. Yoder, \textit{Amische Lieder} (Huntingdon, PA: Yoder Publishing Company, 1942), v.

\textsuperscript{12} Hohmann, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish of the United States,” 105.

majority of the original tunes date back to the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and that many were originally associated with secular texts.\textsuperscript{14}

Fourteen years later Rupert Karl Hohmann revisited Jackson’s work. Hohmann employed a similar methodology as Jackson, but changed the precise way in which he established the primary notes of the Amish tunes. Jackson had used the first note of every word or syllable whereas Hohmann employed the most predominating note. Hohmann uses the Erk-Bohme\textsuperscript{15} and Zahn collections as well as consulting a separate collection of old German tunes by Bohme published in 1877.\textsuperscript{16} Hohmann proposed tunes for twenty-four of the thirty tunes that Jackson had identified. Of the twenty-four, twelve of the tunes Hohmann suggested agree with those proposed by Jackson while twelve did not.\textsuperscript{17} Hohmann also gives tune suggestions towards a couple of the tunes for which Jackson had admitted defeat. Combined, these two works provide the groundwork for speculation about the development of the tunes throughout their four hundred years of transmission.

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\textsuperscript{15} It should be noted that while Jackson cites the 1925 edition of the Erk-Bohme collection, Hohmann cites the 1893 edition.
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\textsuperscript{17} Jackson, “The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish,” 282–83.
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Continued interest in the hymnology of the Amish, as well as the increasing interest of members of Amish and Mennonite communities in notating their music, has led to a variety of sources for Amish hymn tune study. These source materials range in date from the late 1930s to 2008 and include tunes in the tradition of communities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, and Iowa. Some sources contain only a few hymns while others provide as many as thirty of the most common tunes. Combinations of these sources will be used to analyze the differences among the singing of the same hymns in different locations and time periods. It is important to understand a little about each in order to have a full understanding of the transcriptions.

One of the first compilations of Ausbund tune transcriptions was a book completed and published by Joseph W. Yoder in 1942. It was simply entitled Amische Lieder. Yoder was a scholar of Amish heritage from Kishacoquillas Valley, Mifflin County, PA. This area claimed to have preserved the oldest, most original style of singing. Yoder’s Amische Lieder contains eighty-seven Amish hymn tunes, both slow and fast. They are notated on traditional treble staves with shape notes. Yoder’s hope was that his collection would be used by the Amish to help maintain consistency among the different settlements and throughout time. To compile this book he traveled around Pennsylvania and recorded the singing of different Vorsaengers and used these recordings to create his transcriptions. He wanted to transcribe the music as it was sung, with all of the fluctuations present in their singing. Because he hoped the Amish would use the book, Yoder kept the note values simple (an eighth note is the shortest rhythmic value

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18 Yoder, Amische Lieder, v.
used).\textsuperscript{19} The tunes from this book are labeled Pennsylvania/Yoder in later presentations of the
tunes.

Hohmann’s dissertation, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish of the United States,” was completed in 1959 and includes transcriptions of \textit{Ausbund} tunes from three separate
sources. The first source is the transcriptions of Joseph Yoder mentioned above. The second is a
group of transcriptions Hohmann made from recordings by John Umble. Umble had made
recordings of an Amish \textit{Vorsaenger} and his family singing \textit{Ausbund} tunes in Iowa in 1939.
These will be labeled Iowa/Umble.\textsuperscript{20} The third source is the transcriptions of recordings made
by Hohmann himself. These recordings were made of several Amish couples in Kansas in 1955
and 1956.\textsuperscript{21} They will be labeled Kansas/Hohmann.

John Umble, in his article “Old Order Amish Hymns and Hymn Tunes” published in the
\textit{Journal of American Folk-Lore}, used several transcriptions made by other scholars. The first is a
notation of the \textit{Lobt Lied} by Arthur W. Roth who learned the song by attending Amish churches
in southeastern Iowa.\textsuperscript{22} The lines from this transcription will be labeled Iowa/Roth. The second
is also of the \textit{Lobt Lied} and is a transcription by Walter E. Yoder. This transcription was made
from a recording made in northern Indiana in 1938 by Alan Lomax who was at that time
assistant in charge of the archives of American Folk Song for the Library of Congress.\textsuperscript{23} The
recording contained the singing of two Amish \textit{Vorsaengers}. I have not found these
transcriptions published in any other manner other than as a part of Umble’s article. Thus the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Hohmann, “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish of the United States,” 110.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 111.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 112.
\item \textsuperscript{22} John Umble, “The Old Order Amish, Their Hymns and Hymn Tunes,” \textit{The Journal of American Folklore} 52, no. 203 (January-March 1939): 92-93.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 92-94.
\end{itemize}
selections used in this paper are from the transcriptions contained in Umble’s work. They will
be labeled N. Indiana/Lomax.

_Nota Buch_ is a collection of Amish hymn tune transcriptions by Noah Hershberger of
Ohio. The original design copyright is listed as 1984. The book used as a reference for this
study is marked as a part of the seventh printing in 1996. It contains 51 tunes. These melodies
from this book will be labeled Nota Buch.

In her book _Amish: The Way of Life of the Amish in Berne, Indiana_ Brigitte Bachmann-
Geiser includes several transcriptions she made of Amish hymn singing by the community in
Berne. These transcriptions include examples of slow and fast tunes as well as a few secular
tunes sung in this particular community. The transcription used for this study is that of the _Lobt
Lied_. It is marked “Hymn 131 in the _Ausbund_, the so-called Praise Song. Sung on April 5th,
1987, in Berne, Indiana.” This melody will be labeled Berne/Bachmann-Geiser

The community that I studied makes use of a small book of _Ausbund_ tunes entitled
_Ausbund and Lieder Sammlung Songs_. An Amish man, Ben Troyer, with the help of three other
Amish men, compiled this book. Beyond these four, eight other Amish are mentioned as having
“shared tunes.” It contains seventy-two _Ausbund_ tunes as well as a few tunes contained only in
the _Liedersammlung_. All of the tunes are presented in shape-note notation. It was first printed in
1997. The book used for this study was the sixth printing that was completed in 2008. The tunes
from this source will be labeled Sammlung.

I completed one other transcription for this study. I transcribed it from a recording found
at the Mennonite Historical Library in Goshen, Indiana. The recording is of the 1973 meeting of
the Mennonite Historical Society in Lancaster, PA and contains a singing of the _Lobt Lied_. The
spoken introduction to the recording welcomes some Amish attendees and announces that they will be singing according to the Amish tradition. This melody will be labeled Goshen.

**Putting It Together: Comparing Transcriptions**

I chose three *Ausbund* tunes for this comparative study. The comparison will make use of several of the sources that were utilized in the studies discussed earlier, as well as the newer sources that were introduced. The first few lines of each hymn tune from the available sources. I will also include a proposed source tune for the lines selected from each hymn. Some of the sources provide rhythmic transcriptions while others do not. Because some transcripts did not give consideration to rhythm, I will present all transcriptions in a rhythmically static manner. To enable ease of comparison, transposition has been applied when necessary in order to place all of the transcriptions and their source tunes in the same key.

**Lobt Lied**

The first tune of the three that I will present is the tune most commonly used for the singing of *O Gott Vater*, which is commonly referred to as the *Lobt Lied* or *Lobgesang* (Praise Song). It is found on page 770 of the *Ausbund*. Because this hymn is sung at every Amish service, it is the most well known *Ausbund* tune and is also the hymn for which there are the most recorded and transcribed examples. Leonard Clock, who was a minister originally from southern Germany, wrote the text. He was involved in the founding work of the Dutch Mennonites and is known to be the most prolific Dutch songwriter. This hymn first appeared in the second edition of the *Ausbund* that was printed in 1622. It is notated with the instruction “*In der Weis: Auf tiefer Noth schrey ich zu dir*” (to the tune of “In Deep Need I Cry to Thee”),

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which is a German hymn by Martin Luther. This hymn is still included in some Protestant hymnals, such as the Swiss Evangelical Reformed Church hymnal under a title that translates “Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee.” It is this melody that has been used as the source tune for comparison.

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25 This is the tune suggested both by Hohmann and Bachmann-Gieser; Jackson suggest the tune *Es wollt ein Magdein Wasser hol’n*
EXAMPLE 1 *Lobt Lied* from nine sources with source tune.
**So will ich aber heben an**

The second tune is the one cited to go with the text on page 378 of the *Ausbund*, “So will ich aber heben an,” which translates as “So Will I Begin Once More.” This song, composed by Siegmund von Bosch, an elder in the Swiss and southern German Anabaptist churches in the 1540s, is often used at Amish weddings. The notation on this hymn is “*Ein andrer schöne Lied, Sigmond Boschen, von der ausser wählten Braut Christi. Ins Fräuleins von Brittannia Ton.*” (This translates: Another beautiful song; Siegmund Bosch about the chosen bride of Christ. Goes in the tune: ‘The young lady from Brittania’). The tune the Amish used baffled Jackson (he suggested three tunes that might have been source material), but Hohmann found the tune later.

Hohmann suggests the tune “Die junge Markgräfin,” a well-known secular folk song from the mid-sixteenth century that can be found in Erk and Bohme’s collection.  

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27 Ibid., 141.


EXAMPLE 2 *So will ich aber heben an* from four sources with source tune
The last hymn tune to be presented is that sung to the text “Musz es nun seyn gescheiden.” The tune cited in the Ausbund is “In allen meinen Thaten,” but Hohmann says that the actual melody used by the Amish is “Abscheid von Innsbruck,” a tune that can be found on page 333 of Boehme’s Liederbuch. The tune is attributed to Heinrich Isaak. Several Lutheran ministers and composers gave it religious texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. J. S. Bach also harmonized the melody and used it in his St. Matthew Passion.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Ibid., 149.
Musz es nun seyn gescheiden
Kansas/Hohmann

Pennsylvania/Yoder

Nota Buch

Sammlung

Source Tune
Analysis

In examining these transcriptions it can be seen that though there are differences among several of the sources, there is a definite congruity in the singing of these tunes across the borders of time and geographic location. There are deviations among the various sources, but many of the deviations can be seen as the result of varying ornamentation of the same basic tune. This is in keeping with Hohmann’s findings from his comparisons of a few of these sources. He points out that some Vorsaengers will even consciously add their own ornamentation to a hymn, so it is not surprising that there is some variation among the groups.² Of the three hymns examined here, the Lobt Lied held the least amount of variation. This is most likely a result of the consistency with which it is sung.

In examining the Lobt Lied transcriptions, the one with the largest amount of variance from the other sources is that from the group in Berne, Indiana. There are several factors that may account for this. The group in Berne, though Bachmann-Geiser refers to them as an Old Order Amish group, are actually descendants of a group of Swiss Mennonite immigrants.³ The Mennonites who would have been in Switzerland around the time of this group’s immigration (mid-nineteenth century) were probably part of a group who had rejected the leadership of Jacob Amman.⁴ Thus, the history of this group of Amish has a wider gap from many of the other Old or New Order Amish groups in the United States. As mentioned above, this group also differs from other Amish groups in

² Ibid., 106.
⁴ Ibid., 18.
their allowance of secular folk tunes and old Swiss yodels, which provides them with an exposure to musical practices much different from most Amish.

Aside from the rather substantial differences in this transcription, the rest of the transcriptions for all three hymns, were significantly similar. Among the selected portions from the transcriptions of the *Lobt Lied*, excluding the one from Berne, there are only 12 individual notes that are found in fewer than three transcriptions. There are, however, 43 notes that are found in all of these transcriptions. Most differences seem to occur primarily when there is a different ornament, a repeated ornament, or an extra note fills in a skip. The source melodies are also quite apparent throughout the transcriptions. Often the note from the source tune features prominently in the correlating measure, occurring at the beginning of a measure, the end of a measure, or the apex of a measure, and is often repeated multiple times. There are only two individual measures, one in the Berne transcription, in which the note from the source melody is not present at some point in the measure.

The selections from *So will ich aber heben an* show the most differences among the transcriptions, though most of these differences are subtle. Most of the measures show a consistency among their prominent notes, but vary in their use of ornamental passing or neighbor tones. There are a couple of measures, such as m. 21, where certain figures are included in some transcriptions and not in others. Overall there are 63 notes that are found in all of the transcriptions. There are 27 notes that are missing from only one of the transcriptions, 27 extra notes found in only one of the transcriptions and 12 notes found in two of the transcription, but not in the other two. This sample collection of tunes shows much less congruency with the source tune than did the *Lobt Lied*.
selections. There are 7 measures of the 20 total in which the source tune is not found in any of the transcriptions. There are 3 additional measures in which the source tune is only found in one of the transcription sources.

In the transcription selections presented of *Musz es nun gescheiden* there were 69 notes that were exactly the same in all four of the transcriptions. There are 11 total notes that are missing from only one of the four, 10 notes that were extra only to one of the four, and only 5 notes that were found in two of the four. While this hymn tune features the source tune rather prominently in several places, it does deviate from the source tune more than in either of the other two samples. Out of 20 measures there are 7 separate measures that do not contain the source melody at all. Some of these deviations may have a measure of logic to them, however. Measures fourteen and twenty are both cadence points. All of the transcribed *Ausbund* tunes land on a note with a relationship of a fifth, a note that would easily occur if someone were to accidentally harmonize, or wanted to change the feel or weight of the cadential point. Measure sixteen contains the two notes on either side of the source note. This could have occurred as a process of pitch “scooping” around the note that eventually led to two distinct notes below and above the original one.

**Oral Transmission and Changing Tunes**

Are the obvious changes from the source tunes to the present day *Ausbund* hymns a product of gradual change because of the process of oral transmission or are they primarily a result of unwritten practices of embellishment? Temperly and Hohmann suggest that the tunes were simple, probably lively tunes in common use during the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and were performed much as they are recorded in the 
collections of folk tunes. Over hundreds of years of transmission, with a lack of guidance 
from written notes or instrumental accompaniment, the tempo slowed and notes were 
gradually added. The second possibility is that the Ausbund melodies were based on 
these same folk melodies, but either the folk melodies were performed in a much more 
ornamented fashion than was recorded or the Amish were aware of some common 
practice for adding ornamentation. This theory suggests that much of the ornamentation 
that is present in today’s Amish hymn singing was present hundreds of years ago as well 
and has been faithfully preserved by the very regular singing of the Amish and the 
training of their song leaders. This is a theory alluded to by Nettl with his suggestions 
concerning ornamentation presented above.

The small amount of variance, particularly in the regularly sung Lobt Lied, which 
has occurred over a few decades of transmission, indicates a gradual process of change. 
The different method of ornamentation employed by the community in Berne also 
supports this theory. There are, however, some clear patterns of ornamentation. 
Hohmann recognized several ornamentation patterns found particularly at the beginning 
of phrases and at cadential points. For example, the figure found in m. 5 of all the 
transcriptions of the Lobt Lied is a cadential figures Hohmann found to be quite 
common.\(^5\) It could be that these figurations were common practice in the sixteenth 
century, even outside of Anabaptist circles. Or it could be that over time the Amish 
developed certain cadential figure of their own, which gradually became standard 
practice. Unless specific information about the ornamentation practices of these 
particular folk songs is found, it will probably remain a mystery.

Examining transcriptions of Amish hymn tunes from several different geographic areas and time periods provides the opportunity to observe the effects of oral transmission on these tunes over a portion of their transmission history. The collection of newer sources has extended the scope of previous research. This has served to continue to confirm many of the suggestions of earlier scholars.

**Conclusion**

This paper presents new information concerning the music of the New Order Amish and places this information in dialogue with previous studies of both the Old and the New Order Amish. Specific research into one New Order community gives one a look into this isolated, religious, American society. When placed in historical context, it provides a commentary on the changes and developments within some sectors of Amish culture. Additional source material from this community and others allowed for an additional look at oral transmission in Amish music. Thus this thesis provides new research into the culture of the New Order Amish as well as builds on other scholars’ research.

The fieldwork portion of this study investigated the musical practices in a New Order community in the mid-west. It shows that the traditional Sunday Morning service has remained virtually unchanged from those practiced by the Old Order Amish for hundreds of years. Youth singings were still an important tradition in these communities, but the music accepted at these events has changed from previous traditions. It discusses a relatively new tradition in the practice of Sunday school services and the usage of the fast German hymns at these services. Overall it was found that this New Order
community’s musical practices are a blend of centuries-old singing of *Ausbund* hymnody and the acceptance of careful selected music from “outside.”

The thoughts of some members of this community about their musical practices were also surveyed. I presented the information from interviews and conversations with members of this community were presented in dialogue with previous research in order to provide context and a broader perspective into specific aspects of this musical culture. It was discovered that the way music is approached as a part of life and the general perceived purpose of music is fairly consistent among all Amish communities. However, more specific practices such as what music is acceptable, how much emphasis there is on musical training, and how much it is used in daily life varied from community to community and even from family to family. It is acknowledged within Amish society that there is a certain amount of freedom for the leaders of communities and families to decide these things.

One musical practice key to Amish music is that of oral transmission. As the Amish are one of the most isolated western-based cultures still utilizing this practice, the study of their music is very important to a study of this method of tune transmission. Several previous scholars, including Hohmann, Jackson, Nettl, Umble, and Temperley, have conducted research into the Amish and oral transmission. This paper revisits these studies and reconsiders their findings after the addition of more source material. The thoughts of these of these scholars is that while there may have been some unwritten methods of embellishing certain parts of the hymns, most of the hymn’s changes probably occurred gradually as a result of no written music. This supposition is supported after consideration of the additional material.
This paper combined the elements of field research, previous research, and previously unconsidered source material. This provided information on current New Order Amish musical practice necessary for a continued understanding of the development of Amish music, the impact of oral transmission and the overall culture of the New Order Amish.
Bibliography


