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Rhapsody On a Shape-Note Hymn (string orchestra version)

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**Publication Date**

2020

# RHAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN

"IDUMEA"

(1988)

*for string orchestra*

Joseph F. Weber

*adapted from the original string trio version by  
Steven Paxton*



**CREATIVE SPIRIT**

creativespiritonline.com

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**R**HAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN was composed by Joseph Weber in 1988. His original version, also available through Creative Spirit, was for a string trio consisting of two violins and double bass. The basis for the work is an American hymn tune called *Idumea*, composed and published by Ananias Davisson (1780–1857, Virginia) and first appearing in his *Kentucky Harmony* (1816) with lyrics by Isaac Watts (“My God, My Life, My Love”).

Davisson was a singing school teacher, printer and compiler of shape-note tunebooks, best known for compiling and publishing *Kentucky Harmony*, which is generally considered the first Southern shape-note tunebook. The *Idumea* melody, as well as its harmony, is itself most likely based on the English ballad *Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinder*. In fact, many of Davisson’s “compositions” were actually re-worked versions of folksongs from England, Scotland and Ireland, which would have been familiar to the southern churchgoers, singing school teachers, and camp meeting participants for whom Davisson published his tunebooks.

Variants of *Idumea* are found in at least 29 tunebooks published throughout the 1800’s, and it appears that Weber’s *Rhapsody* actually utilizes a variant published in William Walker’s 1835 *Southern Harmony*, as well as Davisson’s own tenor part, published in the 1816 *Kentucky Harmony*. More detailed information on the southern folk hymns can be found in David W. Walker’s excellent (and comprehensive) *A Selection of Shape-Note Hymns from Southern United States Tune-Books, 1816-1861* (A-R Editions, 2005). *Idumea* itself gained renewed recognition as part of the soundtrack for the 2003 film *Cold Mountain*, in which it was performed by The Sacred Harp Singers.

**J**OSEPH F. WEBER (born July 31, 1936, in Antioch, California; died January 21, 1999, in Santa Fe, New Mexico) was a composer, pianist, organist, and teacher. In the 1950’s and 1960’s he attended the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and San Francisco State College, studying woodwinds, organ, and composition with William O. Smith, Roger Nixon, Wendell Otey, and Raymond White, and receiving private instruction from Harry Partch in Sausalito. It was at San Francisco State College that Weber found himself within a circle of classmates, friends, and fellow composers that included Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Loren Rush, Stuart Dempster, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Subotnick, Ken Benshoof and others—a dynamic group of musical innovators that was behind the creation of the pioneering San Francisco Tape Music Center, and that gestated some of the most important developments in modern American music.

**W**EBER MOVED TO SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO IN 1979 and soon became active in New Mexico’s new music scene, helping to form the Composer’s Society of Santa Fe, presenting numerous organ recitals at St. Francis Auditorium (especially of the music of Messiaen), participating in the Tone Roads West Festival, and touring to Mexico City and Guanajuato as music director of the theater troupe *Zona de Teatro*. In 1984 he was awarded special citation by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts for contributions to new music. From 1992 until his death in 1999, he taught composition, music theory, and piano in the Contemporary Music Program at the College of Santa Fe, where he influenced dozens of young composers and musicians with his energy and enthusiasm for music and ideas. According to friends and students, he had the ability to be fiercely opinionated and inspirationally open-minded at the same time. Everyone who met him remembers him.

*With so much to be done with one tone, how do we ever get from one tone to the next?*

Joseph Weber, 1972, San Francisco

EDITOR’S NOTE: I became “caretaker” of Joseph Weber’s musical manuscripts, printed scores, recordings and writings soon after I took over the chairmanship of the Contemporary Music Program at the College of Santa Fe. They had been carefully organized and catalogued by his long-time collaborator, the dancer/choreographer Michele Larsson, and by composers Steve Peters and Paul Botelho. Beginning in 2018, an online archive is being created, as are performing editions of many of Weber’s 120+ compositions:

<https://joseph-weber.creativespiritonline.com>

Steven Paxton, Santa Fe, New Mexico

# RHAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN

Harmony and melody variant by Ananias Davisson (1816)

JOSEPH WEBER (1988)

adapted for string orchestra by Steven Paxton

$\text{♩} = 72 - 80$  Tense, strained, high fervor \*

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The score is in 3/2 time and begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Violin I part features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Violin II part provides harmonic support with a similar melodic contour. The Viola and Cello parts play sustained chords and moving lines. The Contrabass part is mostly silent, indicated by a series of dashes.

Musical score section A, marked with a box 'A' and a first ending bracket '1'. The score continues for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The dynamics remain forte (*f*). The section concludes with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket.

Musical score section B VAR. 1, marked with a box 'B' and the tempo marking 'Un poco più mosso'. The score begins at measure 14 and is marked mezzo-forte (*mf*). The tempo is slower than the previous section. The Violin I and II parts play a more lyrical melody. The Viola and Cello parts provide harmonic support. The Contrabass part is mostly silent.

\*Little or no vibrato throughout, slightly nasal and *ruvido*; use open strings whenever possible.

C

Musical score for section C, measures 1-7. The score is written for five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef (C4), and two bass clefs. The music consists of a single melodic line in the upper staves, with the lower staves providing a simple harmonic accompaniment. A first ending bracket labeled '1' spans the final two measures of the section.

D

## VAR. 2—Ancora un poco più mosso

Musical score for section D, measures 28-31. The score is written for five staves. Measure 28 is marked with a '2' and a fermata. The music features a more complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). Hairpins indicate crescendos and decrescendos. A first ending bracket labeled '1' spans the final two measures of the section.

Musical score for section D, measures 32-35. The score is written for five staves. The music continues with the complex melodic line from the previous section. Dynamics include *f* (forte). The section concludes with a final flourish in the upper staves.

E

Musical score for section E, measures 35-38. The score is written for five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef, and two bass clefs. The music features a complex texture with many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The third staff has an alto clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fourth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fifth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp.

Musical score for section E, measures 39-42. The score is written for five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef, and two bass clefs. The music features a complex texture with many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The third staff has an alto clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fourth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fifth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The score includes first and second endings, indicated by '1' and '2' above the staves.

F VAR. 3—Semplice

Musical score for section F, measures 43-48. The score is written for five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef, and two bass clefs. The music is marked 'p' (piano) and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The third staff has an alto clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fourth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp. The fifth staff has a bass clef and a key signature change to one sharp.

G

1

VAR. 4 H

Free—do not attempt to synchronize moving parts

I Free—After each player reaches and holds fermata, release together and then proceed in the same manner



L VAR. 5—Tempo I° ♩ = 72 - 80

Musical score for measures 58-78. The score is written for five staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Alto, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The dynamic marking *ff* (fortissimo) is present at the beginning of each staff. The music features a variety of note values including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and slurs.

Musical score for measures 79-85. The score is written for five staves. A box labeled 'M' is positioned above measure 80. The dynamic marking *mf(pp)* (mezzo-forte pianissimo) is indicated for each staff starting at measure 80. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and note values as the previous section.

Musical score for measures 86-92. The score is written for five staves. The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) is indicated for each staff starting at measure 86. The music concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs. The final measure (92) includes first and second endings, both marked with *pp*.