

Rural Route 4 Sacred Harp Singing

Standing outside the historic Cades Cove Primitive Baptist Church in the Smoky Mountains, I was transported to my youth by the beautiful singing coming from within. Suddenly, I was sitting on a hard wooden pew inside New Hope Primitive Baptist Church cooling myself with a funeral home fan.



Phillip Burgess

The church was a stone's throw or so from our house situated in the corner of a dirt road on Rural Route 4. My Granddaddy Bohannon was an elder for the congregation and many of my ancestors are buried in the adjoining cemetery.

It was a hot Sunday afternoon. Screenless windows were raised as high as they would go, allowing flies, wasps, and other flying creatures to freely enter and capture the attention of the congregants. Occasionally, someone would swat at an annoying fly with their funeral home fan.

It was the fourth Sunday of the month, when New Hope Primitive Baptist Church gathered for worship. But on this day there was also dinner on the grounds, followed by a singing in the afternoon. But this was no ordinary singing.

Granddaddy Bohannon and others were leading a shape-note singing, sometimes referred to as a fasola (Fa-So-La) singing. This unique brand of singing has its origins in New England and was promoted through singing schools in many communities prior to the Revolutionary War.

Development of gospel music gradually replaced it; but in many regions of Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas fasola singing took root, so much so that "singing conventions" that lasted several days were commonplace. It was a popular social event that provided the community with a respite from the rigors of farm life. Fasola singing is a far cry from the singing styles used today. Many churches employ instruments like guitars, organs, pianos, and drums. Fasola singing is a cappella.

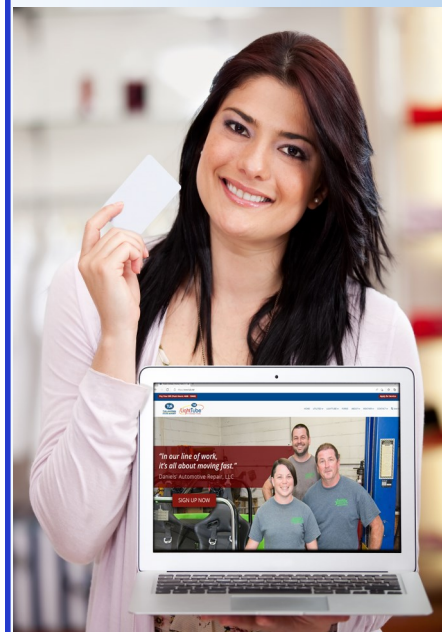
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Watts Happening

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Following time-honored practices, singers (referred to as “the class”) arrange themselves in a hollow square with rows of chairs or pews on each side assigned to each of the four parts: treble, alto, tenor, and bass. The treble and tenor sections are usually mixed, with men and women singing the notes an octave apart. There is no single leader or conductor; rather the participants take turns in leading and stand in the middle of the square facing the tenors.

Singings are not performances. There are no rehearsals and no separate seats for the audience. Various songbooks are used. Perhaps the best-known today is “The Sacred Harp,” published in 1844.

In recent years this unique form of singing has been featured in many films. “Cold Mountain,” a movie set during and after the Civil War, prominently featured fasola singing. It was played over the scene of fighting civil war soldiers, and the devastating toll of battle.

Many years have elapsed since I last visited New Hope Primitive Baptist Church; but the memories I have carry me to a much simpler time when the joy of singing was celebrated in a very unique way.

Cold or Hot: Winter Safety Tips

Winter weather can cause potentially dangerous situations. Stay safe with these tips:

Water pipes and freezing:

- *Disconnect hoses and consider covering outside faucets to prevent freezing.
- *During below-freezing temperatures, let indoor faucets drip, and open any cabinet under sinks.
- *Shut water off immediately if pipes freeze. Open faucets completely to relieve water pressure and prevent a rupture.
- *Use a hair dryer to thaw pipes, not an open flame.
- *Operate your water shut-off valve to be sure it works.
- *Winterize irrigation systems, and remove backflow prevention devices to prevent damage.

Electric and heating:

- *Get your heating unit ready with a tune-up and new air filters for maximum efficiency.

*Make sure wood or coal stoves are properly installed with a chimney or flue, and keep a fire extinguisher handy.

*Use fuel-burning heaters as directed with proper ventilation. They can produce carbon monoxide and can cause suffocation.

Want to use a portable generator?

- *Have it installed and inspected by licensed electricians.
- *Never connect a generator to your home’s main wiring circuit. Disconnect your home from the power system before hooking up a generator. If you don’t, electricity may flow backward into power lines, endangering you, your neighbors, and linemen working to restore power.
- *Don’t exceed recommended generator wattage.

Stay away from downed power lines. Note the location and call TUA immediately at 455-4515.



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