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The first popular music education movement in England and subsequently in the English Colonies in America began in the sixteenth century, in response to Calvin's dictum that singing Psalms was to be part of individual worship in church and at home. The incorporation of psalm-singing into Church of England service, as well as that of Calvinist congregations, created the problem of providing rudimentary singing instruction for the general population. At first the solution was to have the singing led by a proctor who used one verse at a time, pausing after each for the congregation to repeat it. This procedure was not satisfactory to many church leaders, however, because the flow of meaning, and thereby of worship, was interrupted. It therefore became necessary for members of the congregation to learn to read music.

The historic consequence of the development of music printing at this time made possible a more satisfactory solution. Psalm-tune books with master transcriptions of the Psalms were printed, and almost from the start, as in the Sternhold edition of 1564, they included several pages of instruction on how to read notes in time and time.

In addition, a number of English musicians assumed the responsibility of writing more complete music texts as fill the void left when the monastic schools (where the principal music teaching had been carried out) were closed by Henry VIII's confiscation of church lands in 1536. The psalm-tone book inoduction, however, was the music text for most congregations and practically the only music text in the Colonies, where it was reprinted (with almost identical content) in each new psalm-tone collection.

Contemporary readers of these music texts could well be puzzled by the solmization system utilized in them. It employs only five of the six Gregorian syllables, and these five do not necessarily occur on the accented scale degrees, i.e., when sol mi la sol represent the first through sixth scale steps, the ascending major scale. In the English system (known in the United States as "fasola" and in England as "old English solmfa") as in the Gregorian syllables, the syllables were assigned to the first, second and third degrees as well as to the fourth, fifth and sixth, and the seventh tone (which in Gregorian solmization was accomodated by mutation) was called "tiw, the master tone.

The origin of fasola is obscure. It is clearly an offshoot of Guido's Gamut and constituted it. More instructive Words with the Gamut has not explained it with fasola. The Gamut was shown on a chart of ten or eleven lines. On the lines and in the spaces were the letter names of the seven scale pitches, A to G, repeated over a three-octave range. Next to each letter name was the syllable or syllables by which it could be called, e.g., the three lowest notes were Gamut-wise (the lowest G) was written with the Greek letter Gammata, A and B were written with the Greek letter Gamma. The next three notes were coo G, which while they were fa sol la of the series starting on C, they were written as Gamma on the order to the series starting on C. Thus, in the Gregorian solmization, by shifting one overlapping hexachord to another, the unamed seventh tone was circumvented. In England, as on the continent, this was the method used to learn the scale and note reading to choristers in monasteries and cathedral song schools.

Whether some sixteenth century choral master, seeking to simplify the learning process, decided to eliminate the multiple scale degree names, or whether it was a response to the emergence of the major/minor key dominance observed in other modes, the use of fasola was apparently in common usage in England by the end of the sixteenth century. Thomas Morley (1557-1608), who wrote the first comprehensive music text in English, acknowledged the practice of fasola solmization in his Historie Plate and Fille Introductions to Practiscall Musicke (1597) when, after explaining the Gamut, he used fasola syllables to spell out the scales. He also provided a rule to govern the choice of syllable to a note identified by more than one—namely, it was never to be used except as the lowest note of the scales on G, C or F major. Consequently, when G is sol, la and ti are and the above rule are and la. Continuing, the la fa is fa, sol re is sol, la sol re is la and la is mi. The reason for the change of syllables for sol and fa is that sol may be an unaccented but understood practice: since fa at sol must be called fa when G is sol, sol and la. For the fa is fa over the place, according to another rule, when G is natural it is la, whilst la, fa.

Meredith offered more explanation and justification for the use of fasola than the seventeenth and eighteenth century authors of music texts. William Bathe (1564-1611), in his Briefe Introductions to the Skill of Song (c. 1596), noted only that the seventh tone immediately following a hexachord is fa of the overlapping one (e.g., if following the hexachord on G is fa of the hexachord on C). He directed that the sixth tone which would be an even should be called sol, and every re to fa, "epheus practica" (for the sake of euphony) to place the each, except in the case of the lowest. He had some trouble with the logic of this but capitulated to contemporary custom saying it was best to name the notes as near as possible to their names in the Gamut, since that was how they were taught. He asserted it was the custom of Morley and Charles Butler (c. 1447) in his Principles of Music (1563) wrote that to change at re to sol fa was "valuer practica" (i.e., common practice) and advised: "after that you have sung at to sol fa is twice upward . . . so and come you to mi again," going on to describe mi as the "Practical or Master tone," a phrase that came to be a motto in teaching with fasola. Similarly, in his Principles (1626) Christopher Simpson (c. 1605-1668) endorsed the practice: "for it is not necessary to "right singing," and re are superfuous, and therefore laid aside by most modern Teachers." The noted Restoration music publisher, John Playford (1623-c. 1686), was listing the last to try to justify the use of fasola. He commented that one of the reasons was that the fa and re were then in use (1669) and were having been changed to sol and la. His explanation was that four were sufficient and ease to remember.

For congregational singers, fasola was both the means to learn the scale and to read psalm tunes. The solmization syllables were used until the music was learned in order not to abuse the sacred words through common, repetitious practice. It is not possible to ascertain whether the prevalence of tunes in the major and minor modes was influenced by the practice of fasola, whether fasola coincided with current musical taste that had discarded all but the major and minor modes. The use of fasola, in either case,
admitted no roots but the major and minor. They were
called the “natural scales.” The same syllables were used
for the same notes—same scale degrees—of related scales (i.e.,
scales with the same signature).

major scale
fa sol la sol fa mi
C D E F G A

minor scale
la sol fa sol la mi
A B C D E F G

It was identified as always being a half-step down from the
chromatic major and a whole-step up in the minor.7

Another consequence of the fixed system was: what is
now known as “movable do.” Since in this system each
syllable had a function, and since transcription was effected
through “mi, for master note,” each scale degree was always
named by the same syllable. When, in the nineteenth century,
syllables for the seven notes were generally adopted
though several practice will persist in some rural areas of
the South5, i.e., do re mi sol fa sol fa, the same concept of
five degree system was always de.

It must be assumed that the teaching of music rudiments with
this syllable system was successful, since it was used without variation in
England and the English Colonies in America for over a

In the adoption of related back to Calvin’s
disciple to sing Psalms and to Henry VIII’s thank with Rome.

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