

*The English Tonic Sol-fa System originated in Norwich, England, in the 1930s. Although credit for this development is frequently given to John Curwen, the author was Sarah Glover, a Sunday school music director. Glover's system began with simplified notation for sol-fa syllables and rhythms. The system and its accompanying teaching strategies were discovered in 1841 by John Curwen who subsequently popularized and adapted them. Conflict arose between the two educators regarding the modifications Curwen made in the system, yet the impact of Glover's work on Curwen and, eventually, music education in general, cannot be disputed.*

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## Sarah Glover: A Forgotten Pioneer in Music Education

The English Tonic Sol-fa System owes its modern form not to a Son of Jubal but to one whom I may call a Daughter of Miriam. It is the only great musical movement inaugurated by one of the gentler sex. (Harris, 1918, p. 184)

In the spring of 1841, Reverend John Curwen was charged by a conference of teachers at the Sunday School Union with recommending a suitable way to teach music in Sunday school. Curwen was already known as a brilliant teacher and was the author of a highly successful pioneer story for children entitled *The History of Nelly Vanner*, yet he considered himself "completely without musical skill" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 53). Already having experienced the difficulty of teaching large groups of children how to sing, this young educator had little confidence in his ability to fulfill the requests of the conference. It was by sheer chance that a friend, attempting to help Curwen in this task, called his attention to the work of Sarah Glover, and, by this introduction, paved the way for the consequent popularization and lasting educational implementation of her ideas. The friend had given him a copy of Glover's *Scheme to Render Psalmody Congregational*, and it was from this publication that

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Sarah Glover, 1786–1867

*Note.* From *The Land without Music—Musical Education in England 1800–1860 and Its Continental Antecedents* by B. Rainbow, 1967, London, England: Novello. Copyright 1967 by B. Rainbow.

Curwen derived the basic elements of the procedure that was to become known as the Tonic Sol-fa System of notation.

### **SARAH GLOVER: A BACKGROUND**

Born in Norwich, England, in 1786, the eldest daughter of the rector of St. Lawrence Church, Glover had her first formal music lesson on her sixth birthday. This early training was not unusual at a time when young Englishwomen were encouraged to study music to ensure a position for themselves socially, as well as for family entertainment and church teaching. Although she did become an accomplished pianist, nothing



John Curwen, 1816–1880

*Note.* From *The Land without Music—Musical Education in England 1800–1860 and Its Continental Antecedents* by B. Rainbow, 1967, London, England: Novello. Copyright 1967 by B. Rainbow.

more is known of this career until, in her late twenties, the rector's daughter was given the responsibility for music at her father's church.

At a time when Charity Choirs were particularly noisy and incompetent, Glover's childrens' choruses were respected throughout the region for their beautiful singing, and the St. Lawrence Church became known and enthusiastically attended for these musical performances. Inquiries began to surface as to "the identity of the choirtrainer and the method of teaching which enabled these young children to sing with such noteworthy skill, restraint and assurance" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 44). Young women from other parts of the country soon were being sent by their clergy to the young music director for training with hopes that upon return to

their own congregation they would be able to establish choirs of comparable musicality.

Although Glover's initial concern was to improve congregational singing, her sights began reaching much further as she discovered a need for reform in the teaching of music reading skills. In beginning to develop a simple and systematic method for teaching singing and reading music, many of the formerly accepted ways of instruction were sorted through and tossed out. Sarah Glover began afresh.

In teaching children music, I think it best to instruct them on the same principle as they are taught speech; viz by deducing theory from practice rather than practice from theory. (Rainbow, 1967, pp. 50-51)

This statement, made in a section entitled "Direction for Instructing a School," from *Scheme to Render Psalmody Congregational*, reveals an attitude that was far in advance of the procedures adopted in teaching the more usual school subjects of this time. Institutions of the 1800s often required students to memorize facts and information apart from any practical experiences. Deliberately refuting the traditional pattern of music teaching and education, Glover quietly and systematically went about her campaign to revitalize and remodel music education for her students.

At the commencement of scientific instruction in music, let all theory not immediately connected with practice, be omitted and let the technical terms and signs be as simple as possible. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 51)

From the early Charity Choir, which she trained, Glover's influence eventually spread through those who studied with her into the homes of the poor working classes as well as the affluent. Although her system was not published until 1835, this pioneer had begun her first efforts at a new system a full 20 years earlier. Influential support and the ability to exert social pressure propelled some music educators into public prominence, but the Norwich Sol-fa System remained in relative obscurity until that chance discovery in 1841 by John Curwen.

## METHOD

The early Sol-faists, though rarely cultural musicians, were practical working psychologists, basing all their methods upon actual experience in the classroom, and past-masters in the art of grading their instruction by steps so small as to offer no obstacle. (Blum, 1968, p. 147)

Glover's first attempts at a new way to teach music resulted from frustration at seeing her sister Christiana trying to drum a tune into the head of a young Sunday school teacher by playing it repeatedly on the piano. As much to relieve the student of this fruitless drill as to aid Christiana, the clever teacher "pasted lettered labels upon the keys of the instrument, leaving the young man to pick out the notes of the melody for himself with the aid of a crude alphabetical notation specially

contrived to meet the occasion" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 46).

This hastily chosen notation was soon discarded in favor of a more representative system of lettering that corresponded to the initial letters of the sol-fa syllables (D, R, M, F, S, L, T). In addition, the movable form of the notation was used; each syllable always corresponded to the same degree of the scale no matter what the keynote was.

The success of this early attempt encouraged Glover to pursue what intrigued her as a way to teach music without the mystery and confusion surrounding traditional notation. Four principal defects were cited as the primary reason for inventing alternative notation for beginners in music study.

1st.—*The inadequate representation of the scale on the staff, no difference being made between the whole and half notes.*

2nd.—*The encumbrance of non-accidental sharps and flats which embarrass the practice and perplex the theory of music, rendering some keys much more abstruse than others, though the construction of all of them is equally simple.*

3rd.—*The confusion arising from the contrivance of clefs, by which device, characters varying in appearance, are used to express identical names and sound.*

4th.—*The needless variety and (in some instances) complexity of characters employed to represent notes, differing in nothing except the octave where they occur. For example—observe the entire absence of analogy in the representation of five out of the six C's on the piano-forte. (Glover, 1982, pp. 16–17)*

Determined to try out her findings on others, permission was asked to work with some children attending a local school. Apparently, school officials saw little value in allowing time away from other subjects for such "unorthodox and unprofitable" experiments (Rainbow, 1967, p. 46). Glover wrote:

Some thought that the attempt to teach music by notation of letters was chimerical; on the other hand, some thought that a plan to teach music scientifically to children in a Charity School was dangerous. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 46)

At first, Glover took two or three, then several girls from her community to train. Soon the rector of a nearby parochial school allowed all the children in his school to be taught by these new methods and even offered to print 100 copies of a set of psalm tunes in the new notation for that purpose.

In developing a plan for the students to be able to produce representative sounds for the symbols, Glover soon realized that visual means were needed for making those relationships an aid to hearing and singing. Thus, she developed what became known as the Norwich Sol-fa Ladder.

... a long, narrow chart of pasteboard bearing throughout its length three octaves of note-names, with a sliding major-scale upon the other. But this

device proved too cumbersome to deal quickly with transient modulation, and the sliders frequently failed to operate smoothly so that the singers were held up and the rhythm of their singing was spoiled. Miss Glover consequently replaced it with a simple chart bearing only constant solfa initials . . . relegating the variable details introduced by the use of modulation and the employment of different keynotes to a subsidiary chart, the Table of Tune. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 47)

Being very much a pragmatist and wanting to accommodate the limited training and equipment of the poorer classes, Glover felt the need to invent an instrument that could be played by a nonmusician and could provide melodic and harmonic support when a piano was not available. The instrument she developed was a specially contrived dulcimer, made of glass resonators instead of metal to save on expense, and "equipped with a movable chart of sol-fa initials upon an adjustable roller" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 47). This instrument, called a Glass Harmonicon, was produced by a Norwich firm at a minimal cost. Probably similar to the modern day autoharp in prerequisite musical knowledge of the player, the Glass Harmonicon "enabled the least talented teacher to fix the key and demonstrate the pitch of a melody by rule of thumb" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 47).

Sol-fa syllables were the primary tool for teaching sight singing. All the tones necessary to sing a major key were provided by the syllables *do*, *ra*, *me*, *fah*, *sole*, *lah*, and *te*, (Glover's anglicized version of Guido's syllables) and minor was introduced by beginning on *lah*. To indicate the chromatic alteration of the sixth and seventh notes for the minor scale, *bah* and *ne* were introduced and printed in red on the ladder.

doh ra me fah sol lah te = diatonic  
 lah te doh ra me fah soh = minor  
 lah te doh ra me ba ne = melodic minor  
 doy roy moy foy soy loy toy = chromatic sharps  
 dow row mow fow sow low tow = chromatic flats (Blum, 1968, p. 136)

As one can see from the chart, a sharped note maintains the initial consonant of the syllable, but changes to "oy," and the flatted pitches receive the "ow" added to the initial letter. Through this system of notation and note-learning, deficiencies created in conventional staff notation (previously cited in this article) were remedied.

Part-singing was carefully nurtured, as the teacher often sang harmony with the students and vice versa. The use of canon singing was frequently the beginning of part-singing and about six German canons had been selected for this purpose.

No consensus predominates in music education as to which intervals should be taught in what order or whether tonal memory should be the focus rather than isolated interval recognition. Glover only taught the pitches of *doh me soh doh* in isolation and the other intervals were learned in the context of the canons. The precise spellings of these sol-fa syllables differ according to which source is quoted.

Rhythmic notation began with a capital letter followed by a lowercase

letter to indicate duration (*D d* or *R r r*) with each additional letter prolonging the sound by one beat. By 1839, the notation was changed to the use of hyphens (*D -* or *R -*) for the same purpose. A plus sign indicated a beat rest while longer rests were shown by numbers in the silent beats. "The rests are counted backwards like the figures on milestones in approaching a city (5, 4, 3, 2, +)" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 48). The plus sign was used in place of the number "1" because it could be too easily mistaken for the symbol for *lah*, "l".

According to Bernarr Rainbow, the weakest feature of Glover's system involved the matter of modulation. Similar to the treatment of sharps and flats but much more complex, new syllables were attached to the initials of the note-names.

Thus Me, for instance, would become Mu, Mi, Maw, Moo, Maze or Moze, to indicate the degree of change involved. But since in her limited repertoire of hymn-tunes and "German Canons" modulation if it occurred at all was of the simplest kind, this arrangement proved inadequate for her purpose. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 48)

No further explanation is given for these cumbersome syllables and how they indicated "degree of change"—perhaps they somehow showed key relationships within the modulation. One can appreciate the added statement suggesting that, had there been a need to revise this system to meet modulation demands, a simple procedure would surely have evolved.

Examples of Glover's notation and explanations are on page 56.

## PERSPECTIVES

But no amount of her work would be complete which failed to emphasize the refreshing originality and humanity of her general approach to children at a time when most teachers in England depended upon marathon memorizing and catechizing for their teaching methods. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 50)

A document that could give insight into the personal intentions and reasons for development of particular techniques within Glover's Sol-fa System exists in the *History of the Norwich Solfa System*, which she published anonymously in 1844. Unfortunately, there is only one copy extant, and it is preserved at the Tonic Sol-fa College of Music in England as the property of John Curwen's estate.

A major stumbling block to the acceptance of Glover's system by her students and other educators was the use of her unique notation. "The pupils concluded, I believe, that the old and new notations were totally at variance; and very naturally regarded the literal notation as *babyish* and *unladylike* in comparison with that used by their teachers" (Glover, p. 12). "Apology for a New Notation" is the first chapter in *Scheme for Rendering Psalmody Congregational* and begins, "The usual notation of music by points presents, if I mistake not, an unnecessary obstacle to the general cultivation of music, nor am I alone in my dissatisfaction" (Glover, p. 33).

13th Canon. --Column O. Foot. | . 1

Metronome 61. Pendulum 20.

The musical score consists of four staves of music in a single system. Below each staff is a line of rhythmic notation using letters (D, M, L, F, R, T, S) and symbols (dots, exclamation marks, bars) to indicate pitch and rhythm. The notation is as follows:

- Staff 1: .x | D .D !M .M | L .2 .+ .D | F .M !R .S | D .S !L
- Staff 2: .T | D .M .D .2 | + .L !T .D | R .M !F .T | D .+ !D
- Staff 3: .R | M .+ !S .S | F .+ !F .M | R .+ !S .F | M .3 !2
- Staff 4: .+ | S .2 !+ .D | F .F !R .D | T .D !R .R | D .2 !+ }

The term *Column 0* refers to the method of establishing the pitch of the tune by means of the *Glass Harmonicon*. By turning the roller until 0 coincided with *Do* above the resonators, the teacher was able to set the little instrument in the key of C major. *Foot* relates to the *measure*—by analogy with poetic scansion—and was codified in the following manner. An accented beat was shown by a barline; a soft beat by a dot; and a subsidiary accent by an exclamation mark (or, as Miss Glover preferred it, an 'admiration stop'). Thus, . | . implied C  $\dot{\bar{C}} \dot{\bar{D}} \dot{\bar{E}} \dot{\bar{F}}$ . Her metronome marking is familiar, but the less obvious term *Pendulum* referred to an alternative method of establishing pace for the use of those who did not possess a metronome, and gave the length of a weighted string which would swing at the same rate. Rests were indicated in the manner already described.

ABRIDGE, C. M. *Plaintive.*

Columns U. J. Foot.( | .) Metronome 63.  
Pendulum 36.

U	{	.D (   S.— ) .D' (   D'.T' ) .L' (   S.F ) .M (   M.R )	{	.M
U	{	.D (   M.— ) .D (   S.— ) .F (   M.R ) .D (   D.T )	{	II .D
o	(   L.— ) .S   S ( .tu.— ) (   d.— )	{	.SI (   M.F ) .L'	III
U	(   D.— ) .T (   L .R ) .D (   T.— )	{	.T	D .L .F

In this example, two columns on the Harmonicon roller are indicated. First, column U, which fixed the key of E flat major; second, column, which gave the key of B flat major, into which the tune later modulated. The additional marking ) which occurs in the Foot here indicated that both the preceding beats were to be sung to a single syllable. The bracket was, in other words, equivalent to a *staccato* in staff notation. The rhythmic pattern of this example hence proves to be  $\frac{3}{2} \dot{\bar{C}} | \dot{\bar{D}} \dot{\bar{E}} \dot{\bar{F}}$ . (Rainbow, pp. 49-50)



A general misunderstanding of the Norwich Sol-fa System seemed to stem from the question of to what extent the "new" notation was to replace the "old" notation. Her intent was not to replace traditional notation, but to give understanding and sound to the abstract symbols.

Music is made up of sound in ordered relationships of tune and time. Musical education consists in training the ear, voice, fingers, etc. to recognize and produce these sounds with proper rhythm, intonation, and expression. Music is noted on paper for convenience of reading and reproduction. But musical education has first to do with sounds, and only with written notes in so far as they suggest the sounds. Signs and notes which do not call up sounds in the student's mind as he looks at them are useless. The ear and voice come first, the printed page is merely to recall impressions formed. (Curwen, 1901, p. 1)

### JOHN CURWEN AND SARAH GLOVER

John Curwen is often credited with being the originator of the Tonic Sol-fa System of notation, and there does seem to be some controversy surrounding his adaptation and popularization of Glover's ideas.

As he studied Sarah Glover's treatise, John Curwen began to realize why his earlier attempt to learn to read music had failed: although he had "got off by heart" the various symbols and their meanings with which Ford's *Elements* was crammed, that achievement had represented only an exercise of memory—for he had learned nothing of the musical significance of those symbols. But now he saw that Miss Glover's plan was "to teach, first, the simple and beautiful *thing*, Music, and to delay the introduction of the ordinary antiquated mode of writing it," until the pupil had mastered the thing itself. Delighted with his discovery, Curwen experimented with teaching Sarah Glover's method to a child living at his lodgings, and found that as a result, within a fortnight, he was himself able to read a psalm-tune written in solfa notation. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 142)

The immediate popularity of the children's storybook, *The History of Nelly Vanner*, meant a sudden shift into a position of authority on education for children. With the succeeding lectures, articles, and conferences that required him to state his views on education, Curwen found himself including discussions on the teaching of vocal music. It was at many of these engagements that Curwen decided to refer to the advantages of Glover's system.

With such wide audiences for his ideas, Curwen began to regard each facet of the Norwich Sol-fa System with a more scrutinous eye.

In a sense it was a measure of the esteem in which he held Miss Glover's treatise that he should have assessed its qualities as if it were his own. And as he fell to criticism his enthusiasm increased, so that he apparently forgot that the system was not something of his own devising. . . . Only when he had been carried so far—too far—on the crest of his enthusiasm did it occur to John Curwen to write to Miss Glover herself. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 142)

The following facsimile letter from Curwen represents his first communication with Glover and details his suggestions for her work.

Stowmarket,  
Oct. 4, 1841

Dear Madam,

For it is to a Lady, I think, that I address myself; I hope you will excuse the liberty I take in writing to you, though unknown, concerning the Solfa System of Musical Notation.

Early in the Spring of this year Mrs. Reed visited several of the schools in Norwich. She was particularly interested to perceive the facility with which children taught on your method, learnt to read music. She kindly lent me your books, "The Scheme for Rendering Psalmody Congregational" and "The Solfa Tune Book," and informed me of the surprising effects which they had produced. I studied them with deep interest, for during the time which I spent at Basingstoke I had taken great pains for a long time in teaching children to sing. We used Mr. Hickson's "Singing Master" and had two hundred children in the Singing meetings twice a week. But there are so many puzzling preliminary things to be taught, according to the old notation before we reach Interval, and that is so uncertain a thing (unless a child can carry the signature along the staff)—never decided by half a tone, that we were unable to make any real progress.

I am persuaded that your method is not only practically efficient, but that a child taught by it will possess a more thorough knowledge of the Theory of music than half the country choristers in the Kingdom.

Lately journeying in the north I have had opportunities of recommending the Solfa system very strongly. But I recommended it with some alterations in regard to the mode of presenting it to the eye. These I think important; and it is due to you that I should mention them.

1st., I would use only the small letters, and indicate the octaves above and below by figures thus; d d<sup>1</sup> d<sup>2</sup>. Transition (Modulation) into a key a fifth from the Tonic should be marked by Italic letters which point to the right. Transition into a key a fourth from the Tonic by letters leaning backwards, pointing to the left.

It is difficult for the eye to alter its focus suddenly and frequently as in the change from Capital to small letters.

Secondly: although the analogy you mention of the arrangement of the prismatic colours—with the divisions of a monochord—is very interesting, yet, as we do practically treat Do as the Tonic—the first note of the scale, both in the Table of Tune and in your exercises on the common chord—I cannot yield up its right to Lah. Making Lah the first note in the diatonic scale when we practically treat Do as such only puzzles the beginner. [Curwen misunderstood this feature.]

Thirdly: As it is not probable that the point notation [staff notation] will be superseded for instrumental music, and as the common instruments will generally be used for pitching (or giving the keynote)—would it not be better to indicate the pitch notes by the letters of the common notation?

Fourthly: Merely for the sake of more distinct marking and convenience of printing I would express the aliquot parts of a Measure thus . ! : ; and would cause the same space on the paper to be given to each aliquote or Beat.

Fifthly: For dividing a beat I think you would find the following signs useful.—

- . To signify that the note preceding fills half a beat
- , To signify that the note preceding fills a quarter of a beat
- " To signify that the note preceding fills three quarters of a beat

I feel the more anxious to inform you of these things, because, before I felt so strongly convinced as now I am of the importance of these improvements,—I had advertised to print a little Tune Book for children in the Solfa notation, and now I fear whether you will permit me to call it by that name when it has undergone so many changes. But I have only altered its outward form. The principle and the whole idea of the thing remain the same.

I have been engaged to write articles on Sabbath School Education for a periodical which will be published next year. I should like to be able to print music in it; and thus to introduce solfa notation to a wide circle of those who must require it.

I should be anxious till I hear from you on this subject; if indeed I may presume to ask such a favour from one to whom I am unknown.

The notation as thus altered with specimens of tunes will accompany this. Believe me, dear Madam, Yours with sincere respect,

John Curwen  
(Rainbow, 1967, pp. 175–177)

A letter written many years after the event gives a personal account of the Glover-Curwen relationship by one of Glover's teaching assistants. Details are sketchy as to when Curwen visited the Norwich teacher, yet the description of what changes the former had made in the system seem to agree with his statements in the letter of 1841. Apparently, the visit took place in the early 1840s, and although it created a more amicable communication for the two educators, it did not cause Glover to warm to Curwen's changes in her system.

Letter to the editor of the *Norwich Mercury*  
April 26, 1879  
Miss Glover's Sol-Fa Notation  
To the Editor

Sir,

In your issue of Wednesday, the 23rd inst., there is a letter signed "Tonic SolFa" in which the writer says Miss Glover was a consenting party to the change made in her system by Mr. Curwen. This I can most confidently deny. Her consent was never asked at all. I was at that time employed by Miss G. To teach her system in the Norwich Schools, and was in consequence very frequently at her house in Chapel Field Grove. I remember Mr. Curwen coming from London and getting an introduction to Miss G., and how she made him welcome to her house, and took him to the school in the Black Boy Yard, St. George's and taught him her system, under a promise from him and Colonial Schools, with which he was, or pretended, to be connected. I remembered after his return to London she waited several weary weeks before she heard from him. But one evening I called on business, and before I left she said, "Oh! I have heard from Mr. Curwen at last." I was pleased to hear it, and said: "May I ask what account he gives of

I am sorry; and perhaps some  
 surprising effects which they had  
 produced. I started them with  
 deep interest, for during the time  
 which I spent at Baling I had  
 had taken great pains for long  
 time in teaching children to sing.  
 We used Mr. Strickland's "Singing  
 sheets" and had two hundred  
 children in the singing meetings  
 twice a week. But there are  
 so many puzzling preliminary things  
 to be taught, according to the old so-  
 lutions, before we reach Strickland,  
 and that is so uncertain a thing  
 (unless a child can carry the figure  
 tone along the staff) — never de-  
 cided by half a tone, that we  
 were unable to make any real  
 progress.

I am persuaded that you are  
 that it is not only practically ef-  
 ficient, but that a child's thought  
 that will produce a more thorough  
 understanding of the theory.

Dear Madam,

Oct. 4. 1794.

Dear Madam,

I trust, to Lady I think,  
 that I address myself; I hope  
 you will excuse the liberty I  
 take in writing to you, though  
 unknown, concerning the doct<sup>r</sup>  
 system of Musical notation.

Early in the Spring of this year  
 I had read several several of the  
 school in London. She was  
 particularly interested to persons  
 the facility with which children  
 taught on your method, learnt to  
 read music. She kindly let  
 me your book, & the scheme  
 for teaching children only, con-

### Opening of John Curwen's letter to Sarah Glover, 1841

Note. From *The Land without Music—Musical Education in England 1800–1860 and Its  
 Continental Antecedents* by B. Rainbow, 1967, London, England: Novello. Copyright 1967 by  
 B. Rainbow.

was a visit on Tuesday no-  
 t that they will make allowance  
 for a life hospital receipt  
 than my sister & it should have  
 led to have given them under  
 other circumstances. The house  
 in which we are located over the  
 this week with inhabitant at-  
 tracted to Herford by ferry and  
 social powers. My sister Christina  
 & I are both invalids; & added  
 to her customary infirmities, she  
 has met lately with a severe  
 fall, down a staircase, which  
 makes it necessary for her  
 to keep in a reclining posture  
 a great part of the day.  
 I enclose in kind regards  
 to you with, dear love,  
 your aged friend  
 in affec. bonds  
 P. M. Curwen.

? 12th St. Hermsen Monday Aug 19/  
 11th St. Hermsen 1867  
 Dear Sir,  
 I said it may prove  
 as gratifying to your son John  
 to see me as it will be to me  
 to behold my univ. and  
 obliging correspondence from  
 Pains Ferry. However if he is  
 imbued with an antiquarian  
 taste, he may value the sight  
 of one of these scarce human  
 beings who has accompanied  
 eighty years. I presume by as  
 he has been rendered somewhat  
 notorious by his father's singu-  
 larities  
 I enclose you  
 aff. Father & son know me

Letter from Sarah Glover to John Curwen, 1867

Note. From *The Land without Music—Musical Education in England 1800–1860 and Its Continental Antecedents* by B. Rainbow, 1967, London, England: Novello. Copyright 1967 by B. Rainbow.

his progress in introducing it in London?" For an answer she put into my hands a large envelope, which contained a musical ladder, a fac-simile of Miss Glover's with this difference, where she had capital letters he had Roman small; where she had Roman small, he had italics; and where she had italics, he had Old English. There was also a little book of school songs in the letter notation with the same alterations. When I looked at the contents of the envelope I was thunderstruck, and sat staring at them. Miss Christiana, who was more impulsive than her sister, suggested, and using an epithet, that he ought to be prosecuted. "Richly, richly!" I exclaimed. When Miss Glover said, "Oh, sister, sister; hold your tongue, and remember we should forgive our enemies, and pray for those who despitefully use us." Turning to me she said, "I must say I am greatly pained at this breach of confidence, but with God's help I will get over the pain."

I have a letter from Miss Glover, dated December 13th, 1858, in which she says, in reference to some business matters, "I advise you not to communicate it to others, for sly opposition seems to me to be so prevalent in these days, that one need beware how one publishes an idea that may suggest an opportunity for counteracting a prosperous plan."

Miss Glover's musical ladder consisted of three columns, the middle column always represented the tonic or key of the tune being practised, the right hand column the dominant, and the left hand column the sub-dominant; thus if C was the tonic, G was the dominant and F the sub-dominant—s D f. Mr. Curwen's first ladder marked thus—s d f. Miss Glover never intended her system to supersede the common notation, but as an introduction to it, for in her book called a "Scheme to Render Psalmody Congregational," published by Jarrold and Son, Norwich, you will find the set of diagrams, which on a large scale were the table of time, the table of degrees and the table to which the pupils were regularly drilled till they could sing from the common notes as easily as they could from the sol-fa, and visitors to the school frequently brought tunes and wrote them on the black board to test their proficiency. The diagrams were the table of time, the table of degrees and the table of tune. The Government Inspectors' reports were very favourable to the plan of teaching laid down by Miss Glover. In hopes you will find room for this,

I am, Sir, respectfully yours,  
J. B.

P.S.—By this plan singing was as easy in one key as another, or in any of the cleffs, bass, tenor, alto or treble, and this I believe was Miss Glover's object, not to establish a new notation. (Rainbow, 1967, pp. 185–186)

By the time she had received the 1841 letter from Curwen, Glover, in her mid-fifties, had already established a successful if not celebrated career and was emphatically not prepared for accepting modifications of her already prosperous system by a bold, assuming young man. Her letter of response to him has unfortunately been lost, but it is known that for over 20 years she "resisted Curwen's attempts to secure her endorsement of his modifications" (Rainbow, 1967, p. 143). Although correspondence between them continued until her death in 1867 and seemed to indicate a gradual waning in their professional conflict, theirs was a

strained relationship from the first communication.

In the year of her death, Glover wrote the following facsimile letter to Curwen, apparently in response to a request for a visit with her from his son, John Spencer. The correspondence has been interpreted here from a copy of the original manuscript and not all the words were clearly decipherable.

Monday, Aug. 19, 1867  
11 St. . . .  
Hereford

Dear Sir,

I wish it may prove as gratifying to your Son John [?] to see me as it will be to me to behold my invisible and obliging correspondent from Queensberry. However, if he is imbued with an antiquarian taste, he may value the sight of one of those scarce human beings who has accomplished eighty years, especially as she had been rendered somewhat notorious by his father's imaginative [undecipherable].

If Father [undecipherable] honors me with a visit on Thursday next [undecipherable] they will make allowances for a less hospitable reception than my sister and I should have liked to have given them under other circumstances. The house in which we are located overflowed this week with inhabitants attracted to Hereford by Jenny Lind's vocal powers. My sister Christiana and I are both invalids, and added to her customary infirmities, she has met lately, with a serious fall down a staircase, which makes it necessary for her to keep in a reclining posture great parts of the day.

She unites in kind regards to you with, dear Sir, your aged friend.

in Solfa bonds,  
S. A. Glover  
(Rainbow, 1967, p. 192a)

Although the original conflict between these two music educators seems to have been resolved in later years, supporters and opponents of each had perhaps more lasting allegiances and opinions. An example of the alienation that resulted from the Curwen-Glover conflict is an instance involving a music education enthusiast of the 1840s. Reverend J. J. Waite, a devotee to the reform of Congregational singing but an avid opponent of the Tonic Sol-fa System of notation, called on Glover in the later years of her life, full of sympathetic interest in her work.

Convinced that Sarah Glover had been duped by Curwen, Waite was anxious to contribute from the profits of his own teaching towards her living expenses in retirement. But this token Miss Glover firmly refused. (Rainbow, 1967, p. 183)

An appropriate background for this beneficent gesture is that Waite and Curwen were on nonspeaking terms for the better part of their lives over their professional disagreements.

## SUMMARY

Principles of the Tonic Sol-fa System have been long-lived and valued in the teaching of music. Invented in the 1830s to aid young students in sight singing, the *movable do* system of hearing, reading, and writing music is still recognized as a staple in many music classrooms.

The circumstances surrounding the popularization and publication of Glover's method have apparently obscured her contribution to music education. That hers has been a neglected story is substantiated in the limited number of sources giving accurate and thorough information on her work.<sup>1</sup> The impact of the Norwich Sol-fa System on music education methods continues to be seen a century and a half after its inception. Certainly, in the history of music education, Sarah Glover deserves considerable recognition for her unique and admirable contributions.

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December 7, 1983

<sup>1</sup>Edward Bailey Birge, in *History of Public School Music in the United States*, does give proper credit for the originator of Tonic Sol-fa, but mistakenly refers to Sarah Glover as "Elizabeth" Glover.



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## PUBLICATIONS OF JOHN CURWEN AND SARAH GLOVER

### **Sarah Ann Glover**

- Scheme to Render Psalmody Congregational*, Hamilton and Jarrold, 1835  
*The Solfa Tune Book*, Hamilton and Jarrold, 1839  
*History of the Norwich Solfa System of Teaching Music in the Schools*, Hamilton and Jarrold, 1844  
*Norwich Guide to Solfaing*, Hamilton and Jarrold, 1845  
*Manual Containing a Development of the Tetrachordal System*, Hamilton and Jarrold, 1850

### **John Curwen**

- The History of Nelly Vanner*, T. Ward, 1840  
*The Child's Own Hymn Book*, T. Ward, 1841  
*Independent Magazine*, edited, Simpkin, 1842  
*Singing for Schools and Congregations*, Curwen, 1843  
*The Standard Course*, Curwen, 1848  
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*The People's Service of Song*, Curwen, 1850  
*Pupil's Manual of Tonic Sol-fa Method*, Curwen, 1852  
*Tonic Sol-Fa Reporter*, Curwen, 1835—(regular publication)  
*Musical Statistics*, Curwen, 1874  
*The Teachers' Manual*, Curwen, 1875  
*The Art of Teaching*, Curwen, 1875  
*Musical Theory*, Curwen, 1879  
*How to Read Music and Understand It*, Curwen, 1881

### **John Spencer Curwen**

- Memorials of John Curwen*, Curwen, 1882  
*The Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee Handbook*, Curwen, 1891
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