

## **A Brief Musical Analysis of Psalm 1**

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The tune for Psalm 1 from *The Bay Psalm Book* comes from Henry Ainsworth's psalter, a collection of melodies that would have been familiar to the Puritan colonists, as Ainsworth's psalter was common among radical protestants in England. I find this tune construction holds the whole of the mystery of Puritan theology in a single note: this F natural that comes at the end of the sixth line of music. It beckons in a profound unsettledness; it becomes representational of the constant knowing/unknowing regarding one's salvation that roils around in the Puritan mind.

Prior to this F natural, the music orients itself primarily around the tonic of D-minor and the subtonic of C-major, one degree away. This movement between D-minor and C-major is what gives the tune its chant-like quality. We're often moving in parallel fifths - a rather unsophisticated harmonic behavior with the moments in C-major directing our ear back to D-minor. This is until we reach the end of the sixth line of music. Structurally, this is the part of the tune that will be farthest away from the melodic center, but held within that distance is an impulse to move towards recapitulation. It is at this moment that the path of the music starts to curve and return home. So it is interesting that this line resolves in F-major, a triadic outline that until this moment, we have not heard. In our scale degrees, F-natural acts as our mediant, the third note of our scale and the center note of our tonic chord: D-minor, D, F, A. This note holds incredible power; if it is raised a semitone, it recharacterizes the tonic chord completely, moving it from D-minor to D-major; in other words, it's position as the mediant essentially establishes the key. So we land here, in a place of tremendous transformative capacity, within the home of the tonic-chord, D-minor, but a breath away from change. Unsettledness that is answered with resolution.