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The Social Harp



Synopsis

Ballads and other kinds of American folksongs have been widely collected and studied, but most Americans are unaware that in the time between the Revolution and the Civil War the singing of folk spirituals was as common among rural whites as among blacks. This was the music of the Methodist camp meeting and the Baptist revival, and white spirituals in fact are known chiefly because homebred composers sometimes wrote them down, gave them harmonic settings, and published them in songbooks. One of the rarest of these country songbooks, John McCurry's *The Social Harp* (1855) contains 222 pieces, mostly folktune settings, half of which were composed by McCurry and others in Hart County, Georgia. This facsimile reprinting is provided with appendices useful for the study of its sources and with an introduction containing information that throws light on the men who wrote for nineteenth-century American songsters and the reasons for the eventual neglect of their music.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Patterson's introduction to this facsimile is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of McCurry and other contributors to *The Social Harp*, adding considerable biographical and local historical data to the information given by Jackson in his "White Spirituals." . . . A valuable addition to available primary sources of pre-Civil War music. Its editorial contributions set a high standard for future facsimile editions of this kind. (*Journal of the American Musicological Society*) Patterson and Garst . . . have given us a valuable aid in understanding life in the rural South—*not* the life on

Margaret Mitchell plantations, but that of the simple, industrious, Scotch Irish folks who are too often lost in the turbulent events of their time. (Ethnomusicology)

Daniel W. Patterson is Kenan Professor Emeritus of English at the University of North Carolina and former director of the curriculum in folklore. John F. Garst is emeritus professor of chemistry at the University of Georgia.

This book has long been out-of-print and I was delighted to see this reprint appear on the scene. Even though The Social Harp was only a small part of the shape note music scene, it was an important part nonetheless of the historical fabric of shape note singing. This is great that it is now available again and this reprint is very good as it is clear, easy to read, and done very well. I highly recommend it.

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