

Songs Of War: The Battle Hymns Of The Confederacy

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Review

SONGS OF WAR

The battle hymns of the Confederacy

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Abel, E. Lawrence *Singing the New Nation: How Music Shaped the Confederacy, 1861-1865*. Stackpole, ISBN 811702286

You cannot have an army without music," Robert E. Lee once observed. Music was inextricably linked to every aspect of a soldier's life, whether he was involved in military duties or at leisure. It connected the soldier to his home and those at home to his victory, his complaints, and his travails. Music rallied the common citizen to acts of patriotism and personal sacrifice, whether on the field of battle or on the home front. In **Singing the New Nation**, E. Lawrence Abel examines the South's social history through its often overlooked and seldom discussed musical heritage. In his clear, crisp narrative style, Abel introduces an area ripe for renewed study.

Unlike many of the other volumes on music of the Civil War, Abel eschews the more common format of simply printing the music and lyrics of songs from the period without background. Instead he chooses several songs dear to the hearts of Southern ancestors and artfully places them in a historical context that expands our appreciation for the lyrics, the times, and the people who sang them.

Music provided a constant in the uncertain life of the common soldier. The presence of the fifer and the drummer provided soldiers with a routine that defined their day. The brass band entertained and provided a boost to patriotism and emotion. Some regiments even had their own glee clubs. And the common soldier and the officer alike sang on the march and in camp. Songs, whether patriotic or melancholy lyrics of home, lifted the spirits of the men and helped them remember why they risked their lives for "The Cause."

Music as a measure of social history

Abel introduces readers to the songwriters and the song-publishing business in the South. But the strength of the volume is in its treatment of music as a measure of social history. **Singing the New Nation** conveys the important role that music played in the collective lives of those who sacrificed so much. We understand that song can be a change agent.

We understand that song can elevate the spirits. We understand that song can soothe and challenge and electrify. And we can, if we listen very closely, hear the few, the happy few, "the band of brothers" singing their way through the elation and victory, the boredom and melancholy, and the despair and defeat of those tumultuous years.

Meg Galante-DeAngelis teaches at the University of Connecticut. Having studied and enjoyed the music of the Civil War period for many years, she is now working with her husband, Mark, researching the images of women and families in Civil War music.