



I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!: Community, Spirituality, and Tradition among Sacred Harp Singers

Laura Clawson

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The Sacred Harp choral singing tradition originated in the American South in the mid-nineteenth century, spread widely across the country, and continues to thrive today. Sacred Harp isn't performed but participated in, ideally in large gatherings where, as the a cappella singers face each other around a hollow square, the massed voices take on a moving and almost physical power. *I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!* is a vivid portrait of several Sacred Harp groups and an insightful exploration of how they manage to maintain a sense of community despite their members' often profound differences.

Laura Clawson's research took her to Alabama and Georgia, to Chicago and Minneapolis, and to Hollywood for a Sacred Harp performance at the Academy Awards, a potent symbol of the conflicting forces at play in the twenty-first-century incarnation of this old genre. Clawson finds that in order for Sacred Harp singers to maintain the bond forged by their love of music, they must grapple with a host of difficult issues, including how to maintain the authenticity of their tradition and how to carefully negotiate the tensions created by their disparate cultural, religious, and political beliefs.

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