

Music Along the Rapidan: Civil War Soldiers, Music, and Community During Winter Quarters, Virginia

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Review

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Davis, James *Music Along The Rapidan: Civil War Soldiers, Music, and Community during Winter Quarters, Virginia*. University of Nebraska Press, \$45.00 ISBN 9780803245099

Considering the Historical Context of American's Musical Experience

Books on Civil War music and related topics occupy a substantial percentage of the retail market on American music of the nineteenth century, as the more general "Civil War" looms large. Indeed, the existence of this journal, *Civil War Book Review* is a testament to the popularity of the Civil War as a subject, and the subset "music" follows suit. Many of the music studies of this area cover a broad range, such as Richard Harwell's landmark *Confederate Music* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1950). More recent studies have continued this trend, for better or worse, and as such it is refreshing to find a more intimate and concentrated examination of music in a very specific time and place. James A. Davis's *Music Along the Rapidan: Civil War Soldiers, Music, and Community during Winter Quarters, Virginia* does just this.

By limiting himself to the winter of 1863-64 and encampments in Culpeper and Orange Counties in Northern Virginia, Davis is able to establish the cultural relevance of music in terms other than the typical "Union – Confederate" divide. Such a nuanced approach allows for an understanding contextualizes the commonalities of musical experience in the United States during antebellum period: many Americans experienced music in similar ways during the 1850s, yet so often the distinction between music from the North or the South is the beginning of enquiry. This is not to say regional differences did not exist—they most certainly did. Davis acknowledges both possibilities in his narrative, which is part of what makes this a compelling contribution to the literature.

Another way in which Davis does not attempt too much in *Music Along the Rapidan* is revealed in the chapter titles. He eschews the all-encompassing approach that tries to examine musical cultures among dissimilar groups, opting

instead for music's role in establishing community. He lays out his intentions in the Introduction, subtitled "Civil War Music and Community." Chapter 1 sets the scene of "Winter Quarters in Virginia, 1863-1864," and the remaining chapters each relate the idea of community to music among different groups: soldiers, officers, military (including balls and their relevance to the communities in question), civilians, brass bands, and religious communities. Davis notes in the Conclusion that "the extended period without combat nurtured an empathetic attachment between veterans from both sides" (237). Moreover, the experiences of these winter quarters resulted in soldiers and civilians, Union and Confederate, contributing "their unique song to the musical environment" (239). He draws the subject matter outward, from impact on the soldiers to impact on the war, but notes finally the transformation of these soldiers and their music in 1863-1864, highlighting the transformative power of music and its uses in trying times.

In his interest in music as part of the soundscape of the Civil War, James Davis has produced a book that simultaneously picks up a familiar topic, music and the Civil War, but addresses it in light of some of the latest discussions in musicology today. His research is sound, incorporating a wide variety of sources materials to support his conclusions and engaging disparate research subjects to provide a full account of how the participants' experiences during winter quarters 1863-1864 altered both the men and their music. His *Music Along the Rapidan* provides a model for how we might consider music in this difficult period of American history—one that looks beyond who published what where and seeks rather to understand how, when, why, and under what circumstances Americans experienced music.

Candace Bailey, PhD, is Professor of Musicology at NC Central University. She has published several articles and books on English keyboard music of the 17th century, and women and music in the antebellum US South, including Music and the Southern Belle: From Accomplished Lady to Confederate Composer (SIU Press, 2010). She is currently President of the North American British Music Studies Association and serves on several boards and committees for the College Music Society, the Society for 17th-Century Music, and the Society for American Music.