

D. Rose Elder, *Why the Amish Sing: Songs of Solidarity and Identity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. 216. Hardcover, \$39.95.

Why the Amish Sing is an ethnomusicological foray into the life, worship, and ritual of the Old and New Order Amish communities in Wayne and Holmes Counties, Ohio. The author, D. Rose Elder, ethnomusicologist and professor of humanities and social sciences (rural sociology), explores the work of music in the preservation

and progression of Amish life and faith. Elder takes the reader on a journey through a series of “day in the life” scenarios that serve to illuminate and illustrate a way of life and being that many of us can only imagine or customarily access through media, dry historical accounts, or sensationalized Hollywood storylines and “best-selling” fiction (i.e., Amish romance novels). Elder’s honest and objective account of singing practices among the Amish leaves the reader with a refreshingly truthful and unbiased reflection of Amish music.

Acknowledging that music is central to the way of life for the Amish, Elder’s central thesis is to explore and document Amish singing practices in worship and social settings as a means to explaining the “role and purpose of singing in nourishing and nurturing Amish children to be Amish” (xii). In particular, Elder examines Amish life and song, singing in worship settings, and singing for special occasions. Throughout these, Elder emphasizes the distinct role that music plays in nurturing the lives of Amish children to be active and faithful in Amish life. The insertion of three separate case studies on particular musical works highlights regional distinctions as well as commonalities in the goal to uphold the current generation and safeguard the values and traditions for future generations and musical practice.

Among its many strengths, *Why the Amish Sing* offers the reader interesting and helpful historical, sociological, and theological commentary to locate the specific culture and community to which this study refers. Organized clearly around the three main areas of topic (singing in childhood and adolescence; singing for worship; and, singing for special occasions), Elder intensifies her ethnographic study of Amish singing with analytical case studies on particular musical works. Each chosen work is exemplary of the related topic and Elder provides multiple entry points (text, melody, expression, sociological context, performance practice, etc.) for the reader to grasp a deeper, more profound meaning into the work’s significant place in Amish culture. Elder highlights contrasts and commonalities among the various renditions of a particular work in her collected recordings and data. The contrasts are indicative of particularities of region while the commonalities point to the strength of commitment to ongoing development and preservation of Amish singing. Unfortunately, these musical analytical examples are not available in audio format for the reader to hear the comparisons and gain access to the unique singing style. While the publisher does offer three examples of Amish singing on the book’s website, it is not clear whether these examples belong to the current study. Elder acknowledges that

many of the interviewees did not want their singing recorded; therefore, the reader is left to imagine the sound and complete the musical context for themselves.

Elder's musical analysis wisely focuses on elements of text with brief commentary on musical line and melodic shape, offering explanations and definitions of musical terms when necessary. In this manner, the readership expands and the material becomes accessible to those beyond the field of music in general, and ethnomusicology in particular. In my opinion, the field of music education research would find this study exemplary in exploring music education practices outside mainstream school music education. As Elder aptly recognizes, the Amish school is a primary venue for music teaching and learning; the Amish school transmits singing practices to its children and adolescents. As music (singing) education was once a major goal for public education in North America, music educators and education policy makers would benefit from reading Elder's account. The application of some of the Amish singing principles to mainstream school music education would serve well the purpose of nourishing and nurturing our children to be active contributors to contemporary North American society.

Why the Amish Sing is a worthy contribution to the field of ethnomusicology. Drawing on the rationales and practices of studying music cultures from well-known ethnomusicologists (i.e., Jeff Todd Titon and John Blacking among others), Elder takes us further into the particular time and place of Amish singing with a methodology grounded in participant observation as well as formal and informal interview research techniques. Ethnomusicology in North America is largely the focus of study for the music of indigenous peoples (Inuit of northern Canada as well as indigenous peoples of north Eastern North America), the music of early French Canada settlers, and the black gospel and spiritual traditions of the southern United States. Clearly, Elder is filling a void in the traditional practice of ethnomusicology. The focus on Amish singing practices provides a deep and rare examination of Amish faith, values, and cultural norms of daily life.

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