

*The Songs That Fought the War*  
*Popular Music and the Homefront, 1939-1945*

By John Bush Jones

(Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv, 338. Bibliography, index of song titles, general index. \$29.95.)

When John Bush Jones heard the opening strains of a song he had not heard for over sixty years, memories flooded his consciousness. His experience demonstrates that music can play a very important role in our lives and can be used as a roadmap of sorts to gain a view into the past. *The Songs That Fought the War* serves as a way to comprehend the immensity and impact of World War II on the American people, and, even though many of the songs that Jones examines were neither hits nor of high quality, they do reveal the multivariate ways in which the people came to see and understand this seminal conflict. Jones does not undertake this mission out of sentiment though, but “to fill a void” (p. ix). Jones compiled a listing of 1,700 songs, some recorded, some only published, some never published or recorded, to better document how popular music tried to define and understand the global conflict. The result is a comprehensive thematic overview of the mindset of the American people and how writers of popular music tried to document the collective understanding of their generation.

The songs are broken into ten categories, ranging from isolationist to wartime romance songs. The song database gives Jones a lot of fodder to

work with, and each chapter is littered with song titles, authors, singers, and a brief overview of the songs’ contents and meanings. The reader will come away from this work convinced that World War II produced enough war songs, thanks to Jones’s broad definition of war-related songs. His chapter on methodology discusses the complexity of the music industry, from publishing through recording and jobbing, and the often contradictory nature of popularity and sales charts. Through this Jones reveals that popular music did indeed respond to the war in numbers that rivaled other popular media, but because no one song became *the* song of the war like “Over There” for World War I, it seemed as though popular music had fallen short.

Even before America entered the war, songsmiths and singers tried to tap into pro-Allied sentiment with songs like “The Last Time I Saw Paris,” or “The White Cliffs of Dover.” Once involved in the conflict, the range and number of American songs grew rapidly, from draft/service comic songs like “I’ve Got Those Peelin’ Those Potatoes, Slicin’ Those Tomatoes, Liftin’ Up Those Garbage Can Blues,” through the variety of songs dealing with homefront-related issues. Those not overseas found

themselves with a wide range of entertainment options and a variety of ways in which to do their part for the war. Songwriters, both professional and amateur, wrote “hundreds of songs advocating everything from national unity to scrap metal drives” (p. 181). Yet, of all the songs examined by Jones those concerning the heartbreak of leaving constituted the largest number—over 370 songs—which suggests that most writers and consumers of music saw the conflict in very personal terms. “White Christmas” and “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” were the most famous of these.

Jones has produced an interesting survey of World War II-era popular music and has left few stones unturned in order to document the plethora of popular sentiment. If one were looking for a song written, published, or sung from 1940 through 1945 that dealt in any way with the war, *The Songs That Fought the War* certainly would have a listing.

The book has some drawbacks, however. Foremost is the lack of a

conclusion which contextualizes all the songs examined and suggests some meaning. Perhaps Jones wanted readers to draw their own conclusions, but this has the potential to lead in a direction he did not intend. For example, Jones admits in several places in the book that many of the songs were not popular or had very limited exposure. One can argue then that the war did not produce any definitive war song(s), a position taken by others before him. Jones, of course, argues the other way in the beginning of the book, but after I waded through the thousands of song titles on all sorts of topics, I lost track of the main point.

Overall though, *The Songs That Fought the War* is a worthy read, as it places popular music at the center of the burgeoning entertainment industry and outlines just how prolific Americans were in their understanding and support of World War II.

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*The Politics of Zoos*  
*Exotic Animals and Their Protectors*  
 By Jesse Donahue and Erik Trump

(De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006. Pp. xii, 224. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$40.00; paperbound, \$24.00.)

Several years ago a focus-group participant, asked to comment on a proposed new zoo exhibit, wryly noted: “When you’ve seen one zoo, you’ve

seen them all.” On the surface this observation would seem to contain some truth, but in reality the nation’s zoos, aquariums, and marine parks