



Work Songs

By Ted Gioia

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Work Songs By Ted Gioia

All societies have relied on music to transform the experience of work. Song accompanied the farmer's labors, calmed the herder's flock, and set in motion the spinner's wheel. Today this tradition continues. Music blares on the shop floor; song accompanies transactions in the retail store; the radio keeps the trucker going on the long-distance haul.

Now Ted Gioia, author of several acclaimed books on the history of jazz, tells the story of work songs from prehistoric times to the present. Vocation by vocation, Gioia focuses attention on the rhythms and melodies that have attended tasks such as the cultivation of crops, the raising and lowering of sails, the swinging of hammers, the felling of trees. In an engaging, conversational writing style, he synthesizes a breathtaking amount of material, not only from songbooks and recordings but also from travel literature, historical accounts, slave narratives, folklore, labor union writings, and more. He draws on all of these to describe how workers in societies around the world have used music to increase efficiency, measure time, relay commands, maintain focus, and alleviate drudgery.

At the same time, Gioia emphasizes how work songs often soar beyond utilitarian functions. The heart-wringing laments of the prison chain gang, the sailor's shanties, the lumberjack's ballads, the field hollers and corn-shucking songs of the American South, the pearl-diving songs of the Persian Gulf, the rich *mbube* a cappella singing of South African miners: Who can listen to these and other songs borne of toil and hard labor without feeling their sweep and power? Ultimately, *Work Songs*, like its companion volume *Healing Songs*, is an impassioned tribute to the extraordinary capacity of music to enter into day-to-day lives, to address humanity's deepest concerns and most heartfelt needs.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In previous books, Ted Gioia proved himself one of our most incisive thinkers about jazz. Now he has integrated vast expanses of knowledge and recordings from cultures across the globe to shed valuable new light on work songs. A dazzling accomplishment."—John Edward Hasse, Curator of American Music, National Museum of American History

"Ted Gioia enriches and makes real the powerful message that music is, and has always been, an integral part of the toolkit that ordinary humans have used to navigate life. He shows that, far from being a pastime to fill idle moments or a distraction from everyday preoccupations, music addresses fundamental issues of human existence, survival, and liberation. Gioia's work offers hope to those who fear that the corporate mass media may have suffocated the age-old impulse of ordinary people to make music their own."—John Sloboda, author of *Exploring the Musical Mind*

"This is a wonderful book. *Work Songs* invites the reader into the best of two worlds—serious theory and fun content. It is written in a clear and easy style, sprinkled here and there with verbal wit and passionate eloquence."

(Maura Kealey *Journal of Folklore Research*)

"[A] stimulating and well researched journey right back to the dawn of music. . . . Gioia's handling of the material is exemplary, and although he has undertaken an impressive amount of research and condenses a tremendous amount of information, his writing moves along with a briskness and vitality. . . . The musical history *Work Songs* powerfully details offers a glimpse of how we can re-establish a vital link between music and our everyday lives. . . ."

(Mike Barnes *The Wire*)

"[A] volume to cherish for its documentary insights. . . . *Work Songs* is alive with feeling and sensitivity. Though the subject may sound academic, this material is by no means dry. The pages burst with intensity and emotion. Many thanks to Gioia for a fine book, one that is both a scholar's delight and a reader's sweet dessert! Highly recommended."

(Lee Prosser *JazzReview.com*)

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Ted Gioia, pianist, composer, and one of the founders of Stanford University's Jazz Studies program, is the author of *Healing Songs*, also published by Duke University Press, as well as several celebrated books, including *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California, 1945–1960*. His book *The History of Jazz* was selected as one of the best books of the year by Jonathan Yardley in the *Washington Post*, chosen as a notable book of the year by the *New York Times*, and honored with the Bay Area Book Reviewers' award for best nonfiction work of the year. His book *The Imperfect Art* won the ASCAP–Deems Taylor Award and was named a Jazz Book of the Century by the *Jazz Educators Journal*. He has recorded several compact discs as a leader, including *The End of the Open Road* and *Tango Cool*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathryn Bowen:

This Work Songs book is not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is actually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper an individual read a lot of information you will get. This Work Songs without we recognize teach the one who examining it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't become worry Work Songs can bring any time you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even phone. This Work Songs having excellent arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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