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Review of "The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing" and Other Songs Cowboys Sing

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"The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing" and Other Songs Cowboys Sing. Collected and edited by Guy Logsdon. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. Preface, photographs, bibliography, index. xxii + 388 pp. \$24.95.

Readers whose sensibilities allow them to get beyond this book title and songs like "Peter Pullin' Blues" and "Honky-Tonk Asshole" (two of my favorites) will recognize what a valuable contribution Logsdon has made to the fields of folklore, history, and sociolinguistics. As he suggests in the preface, part of his purpose in this book is to place the romanticized image of the cowboy in its proper perspective. And despite the appeal of B-grade Western characters, as Logsdon says, there is a difference between what he calls "fake-lore" and "folklore."

Readers can dismiss any questions they might have concerning the author's credibility after reading the preface and first section, "The Singers." In reminiscing about his childhood in an Oklahoma western-wear store engaging the customers in conversation and in introducing us to a host of cowboy singers from various western states, Logsdon shows a life-long attraction to the music he has catalogued.

In a final section of the book, "A Singing Cowboy Roundup," Logsdon provides a historical overview of the contributions (and detractions) of other scholars who have documented or analyzed cowboy music. He comments, for example, on the animosity that Louise Pound drew in her 1913 essay (which appeared in *Modern Philology*) illustrating the literary superiority of English and Scottish popular ballads over cowboy songs. In another section Logsdon tells how Harvard-educated John Lomax went about collecting cowboy songs "through the influence of generous amounts of whiskey, rye, and straight from the bottle or jug" (300) in the early part of the century. Lomax, unlike Logsdon, however, bowdlerized the few bawdy songs that the cowboys shared with him.

It is the material within the opening and closing chapters of the book, however, that enables readers to experience the distinctive cowboy humor in songs like "School Ma'am on the Flat," "Root, Hog, or Die," and "The Stinkin' Cow." Within individual chapters, Logsdon has interspersed a series of photographs and artwork to complement the melodies and lyrics themselves. When a song was known by several titles, Logsdon has identified them; when the chorus or a particular stanza has alternate lyrics, he has included all of them. Also helpful are the bibliographical and recording citations (often quite extensive) included at the end of each chapter.

This book, while valuable in scholarly circles, will no doubt provide hours of entertainment for those who add it to their personal libraries.

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