



Singing Our Way to Victory: French Cultural Politics and Music during the Great War (Music/Culture)

Regina M. Sweeney

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The practice of singing and songwriting in France during the Great War provides an intriguing tool for the exploration of the French cultural politics of the epoch. Responding to the dearth of cultural studies of the First World War, Regina Sweeney's unique cross-disciplinary study illuminates many of the hitherto unexplored corners of an era that many historians consider to exhibit a break with recognizable trends.

In early twentieth century Europe, singing was considered a part of education integral to the formation of good citizens. Singing was especially important to the French, for whom it was historically associated with authenticity of feeling and purity of character, and thereby with the very roots of French democracy; it was particularly associated with the image of France as a victorious nation. But as Sweeney shows, different performances of the same patriotic song could carry vastly different meanings. By focusing on singing, Sweeney is able to provide a more nuanced reading of French Great War cultures than ever before, and to show that cultures previously held to be exclusive -- those of the home front and the Western front, for example -- existed in dialectical tension and were themselves far from homogenous.

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