

Stranded in the USA: Early Songs of Emigration

An outstanding encapsulation of the immigrant experience

Raise a glass to the obsessive compulsive, music lover. On a trip to Rockford, Illinois, archivist Christoph Wagner was led to room after room of teetering boxes, stacks and sheer mountains of old 78s. 'Here in these catacombs', he writes, 'the whole ethnic underground of America was deposited.' From them came **STRANDED IN THE USA**, an indispensable, broad-ranging, exhaustively researched view of the immigrant experience.

Recorded between 1922 and 1959, the songs are sung in the languages of virtually every major national group that arrived in the New World. At turns playful and plaintive, they bemoan the sorrows of leaving home, of lost hopes and tenacious dreams, of despair and optimism, and they tell of discrimination and opportunity, city slickers and country bumpkins, romantic conquests and the inevitable clash of cultures. This is social history from the ground up: two- and three-minute distillations of the human spirit served up by the likes of Irish orchestras, fado musicians, Scandinavian folk groups, Puerto Rican conjuntos, calypso singers, Greek bouzoukis and Balkan strings - to name but a few examples.

A labour of love-cum-audio documentary, **STRANDED** is enhanced by extensive notes containing biographical data, musician rosters, photos, illustrations and partial song translations - plus two substantial essays by Wagner that place the music and the time into crystalline perspective. Librarians, ethnomusicologists, archivists, music lovers - take note. **STRANDED** is a goldmine that provides education and entertainment in equal measure. It deserves an award.