

Mp3 The Free Staters - Ho! For The Kansas Plains



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The kind of music you would have heard coming from the front porch of an 1850s American home, complete with a plunkety fretless gut-string banjo, fiddle, donkey jawbone, buffalo rib bones and parlor guitar. 14 MP3 Songs FOLK: Traditional Folk Details: Imagine sitting on a front porch on a warm, summer Kansas evening listening to a spirited fiddle, a plunkety old fretless gut-string banjo, a pair of sun-dried buffalo bones and a skin-head tambourine. Put all those unique sounds together and you have.... The Free Staters. The Free Staters play fun, fast-paced, popular music from 1850s America. The greatest musical melting pot in our history was brewed from Irish jigs, English ballads, Italian mandolin orchestras and the new American popular music by such composers as Stephen Foster, Daniel Emmett and Thomas Daddy Rice, all overlaid with the unique syncopation of African rhythms. These and other pieces of the American musical puzzle are performed by The Free Staters on period instruments, often from original sheet music or nineteenth century folk sources. Songs like "Old Dan Tucker" and "Oh Susanna," are ingrained in the American consciousness, but countless others, like "Angelina Baker" and "Old King Crow" are being kept alive by a dedicated few. The music recreates a time in our nation's history when life was far less complex. Families spent time together gathered around the piano singing songs and neighbors gathered on their front porches to tap their feet and clap their hands to the spirited sounds of a fiddle, banjo or bones. And that's what you'll discover in The Free Staters new release "Ho! For the Kansas Plains." The songs sound like they would have 150 years ago. Most of the songs chosen for this unique album could have been heard on the vast stretches of Kansas Territory from 1854-1861. The Free Staters consist of four musicians who live in or near Wichita, KS. Betsey Goering plays the fiddle and began playing the instrument at age 3. Her violin is a Stradivarius copy made about the turn of the 20th century. She was classically trained for 14 years and has since learned to fiddle and play minstrel tunes.

Jonathon Goering plays the guitar and minstrel five-string banjo, and sings. The guitar's roots can be traced to 15th century Spain. The origins of the banjo or "banjar" can be traced to Africa. Slaves first played the instrument in this country in the 17th century. He plays the fretless banjo "stroke" style - a method used by early minstrel players that predates the bluegrass style. Ryan Mackey plays the guitar, upright bass, dumbek, and sings. He has been playing bass for nearly 10 years and has played in a wide variety of groups. Ryan's bass is a refurbished, custom "half size." Tom James plays the bones, spoons, tambourine, dumbek, jews harp, guitar, and sings. The bones can be traced to the beginning of civilized history and are made out of real bone or wood. Spoons are made of metal, wood and other materials and likely made their way from the kitchen to the concert hall. Here's a description of the songs included in this album and where they originated: 1. Sailor's Hornpipe We've seen this song dated as early as 1795. Some music historians believe this tune likely was played on Lewis Clark's expedition. The lively hornpipe is characteristic of the English in nature and is a very old Celtic solo dance that is based on the sailor's abilities during the dancing with the sailors originally performing it with folded arms. The steps are similar to those daily tasks performed by sailors including hauling in the anchor, climbing, rigging ropes, etc. The Sailor's Hornpipe was most popular from 16th to 18th centuries but the original Hornpipe goes much farther back and was originally done by men only. It is said that the 18th century English sailing ship and Royal Navy Captain James Cook thought dancing was useful to keep his men in good health during a voyage. When it was calm, and the sailors had nothing to do, he often made them dance the hornpipe to the sound of the fiddle, and to this he attributed much freedom from illness on his ship. It is likely that the Sailor's Hornpipe was originally performed in barefeet on the wet deck of a ship. 2. Mrs. McGrath According to John Anthony Scott's *The Ballad of America*, Mrs. McGrath appeared on a broadside published in Dublin as early as 1815. Words to popular songs were printed on sheets of varying lengths that came to be known as broadsides. Broadside originally had no music but a note that the words were sung to a well-known tune. Folk music is viewed primarily as a rural tradition where songs are passed down by word of mouth. In fact, printed folk music was extremely popular for more than four hundred years, beginning in the sixteenth century. This song is recorded here without lyrics. The song is tragic in nature because it tells the tale of a mother's concerns about her son who has joined the army and their emotional reunion. Mrs. McGrath is pronounced "Mrs. McGraw." 3. Camptown Races Composed by Stephen Collins Foster probably in 1849 in Cincinnati, and published by F. D. Benteen of

Baltimore in February 1850. The phrase "camptown races" rapidly caught the public's imagination and became the popular title. The physical setting of the horse races detailed in the song is the kind of community that sprang up on the outskirts of frontier cities in the mid-19th century. Here the Negro laborers and transients lived in shanties and tents -- a camptown.

4. *Lucy of the Tallgrass or The Kansas Quickstep* This lively tune is recorded here without lyrics. The Free Staters wrote the piece in 2004 after listening to countless minstrel tunes. This simple song is done in a manner much like minstrel songs of the day. Comic in nature, the lyrics talk about a hard, tough, determined gal from the Northeast named Lucy who, like thousands of others cut from the same mold, immigrated to Kansas Territory beginning in 1854.

5. *The Irish Jaunting Car* Thousands of Irishmen and women immigrated to the United States in the 1840's and 50's, bringing with them a new and different culture to the American bloodstream. Their music was often bright and infectious. Irishman Valentine Vousden wrote this tune in the 1850's. The original lyrics celebrated Queen Victoria's 1849 visit to Ireland and dealt with domestic issues arising from the British Empire's involvement in the Crimean War. During her visit, the Queen rode in a "Jaunting Car," an open, horse-drawn, site-seeing carriage with the seats arranged so that they faced to the side in order to assist the riders in viewing the scenery. Harry Macarthy borrowed the tune in fashioning what would become one of the most popular songs in the Confederate States of America, "The Bonnie Blue Flag." Another popular song was "Dixie."

6. *Dandy Jim ob Caroline* Composed and arranged for the Piano Forte by J. W. Turner. Written by S. S. Steele of Philadelphia, expressively for Cool White. Music by Dan Meyers. The *The Virginia Serenades* sang it in 1844. This comic minstrel song talks of dancing, courtship love, family and children. There are a variety of versions of this song. The song we sing here tells the story of a "dandy" Jim who goes to a dance one evening and sweeps the ladies off their feet. The other speaks of a "dandy" gentleman from the Carolinas who is courting a pretty young lady.

7. *Arkansas Traveler* Printed in New York, circa 1850, with words credited to David Stevens. It was later reprinted in *The Arkansas Traveler's Songster* (1864) with credit given to Mose Case as author and composer. The *Arkansas Traveler* was a hit play in the mid 1850s in the taverns of Salem, Ohio, where travelers stayed. In the play a traveler finds a squatter at a cabin playing this tune. The squatter is having trouble remembering the end of the tune, which he learned in New Orleans. The entire play revolves around the squatter's efforts to remember the end of the tune.

8. *Old Joe* Composed and written by F. M. Bower, Boston, C. H. Keith, 1844. This comic minstrel song tells the tale of a slave's hard work and untimely end

at the hand of "hard liquor." 9. Keemo Kimo Author and composer are unknown today, but among the first performers of the tune Geo. Christy and Wood's Minstrels in 1854. This classic nonsense song was popular on the minstrel stage in the mid-19th century. 10. John Brown's March We have not been able to trace the author and date of this tune. John Brown was a leader in the free-state cause and made his name known in Kansas four years before his raid on Harper's Ferry. Following his death in 1859, many songs were written about John Brown and his efforts to destroy slavery. One of those tunes is "John Brown's Body." Union troops once sang it on the march. 11. Sweet Betsy From Pike Author unknown. Some place the ballad's birth in 1849 and sung to the tune of the tragic English ballad "Villikens and his Dinah," "Sweet Betsy From Pike" grew up along the overland trail to California and became the classic ballad expression of the overland trail experience. The ballad is unique in its historical content as it talks about the overland trail experience and gender roles at the time. 12. Old King Crow The composer, arranger and lyricist of this comic minstrel song is A. F. Winnemore. It was adapted for the Piano Forte by Thomas Comer, Thomas Comer Publication, Boston, 1843. It is by far the most popular and most requested song we play. After listening to it, I think you'll understand why. 13. Ho! For the Kansas Plains This song and chorus were written by James G. Clark and published by Oliver Dotson, Boston, 1856. The sheet music cover - also our album cover - says the song is "To Henry Ward Beecher." Beecher was a nationally known orator and minister who strongly opposed slavery. He sent a shipment of Sharps rifles to Kansas to help the free-state cause. The rifles became known as "Beecher's Bibles." Beecher's sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote the famous book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." 14. Ashokan Farewell We choose to include this tune even though it isn't "period" because so many nice folks request it at our performances. Written by Jay Ungar, Ashokan Farewell was named for the Ashokan Field Campus of the State University of New York and became famous as the theme song of Ken Burns' PBS series "The Civil War." Ashokan is the name of a town, and the name "Ashokan" first appears in print as a place name in 17th century Dutch records. The name may be the corruption of an Indian word. According to Jay Ungar, he composed the song in 1982 "shortly after the summer programs had come to an end. I was experiencing a great feeling of loss and longing for the lifestyle and the community of people that had developed at Ashokan that summer. The transition from living in the woods with a small group of people who needed little excuse to celebrate the joy of living through music and dancing, back to life as usual, with traffic, disturbing newscasts, "important" telephone calls and impersonal relationships had been

difficult. I was in tears when I wrote Ashokan Farewell . I kept the tune to myself for months, slightly embarrassed by the emotions that welled up whenever I played it." Ashokan Farewell is written in the style of a Scottish lament or Irish Air. This information can be found on the Ungar's website.

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