



# **Sounds of the New Deal: The Federal Music Project in the West (Music in American Life)**

*Peter Gough*

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At its peak the Federal Music Project (FMP) employed nearly 16,000 people who reached millions of Americans through performances, composing, teaching, and folksong collection and transcription. In *Sounds of the New Deal*, Peter Gough explores how the FMP's activities in the West shaped a new national appreciation for the diversity of American musical expression.

From the onset, administrators and artists debated whether to represent highbrow, popular, or folk music in FMP activities. Though the administration privileged using "good" music to educate the public, in the West local preferences regularly trumped national priorities and allowed diverse vernacular musics to be heard. African American and Hispanic music found unprecedented popularity while the cultural mosaic illuminated by American folksong exemplified the spirit of the Popular Front movement. These new musical expressions combined the radical sensibilities of an invigorated Left with nationalistic impulses. At the same time, they blended traditional patriotic themes with an awareness of the country's varied ethnic musical heritage and vast--but endangered--store of grassroots music.

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