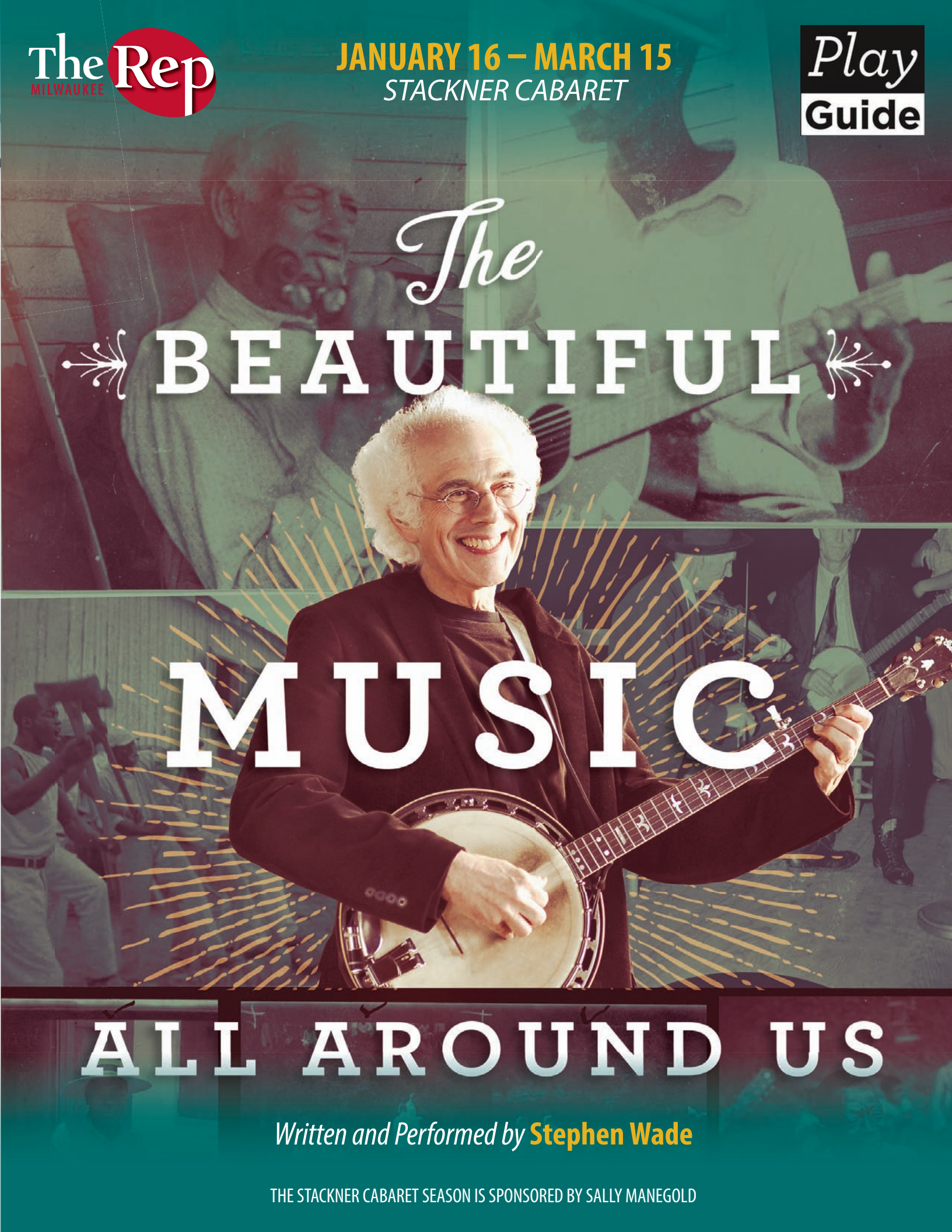
The Rep
MILWAUKEE

JANUARY 16 – MARCH 15
STACKNER CABARET

Play Guide

The BEAUTIFUL MUSIC ALL AROUND US



Written and Performed by **Stephen Wade**

THE STACKNER CABARET SEASON IS SPONSORED BY SALLY MANEGOLD

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Presents

JANUARY 16 – MARCH 15

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The BEAUTIFUL MUSIC ALL AROUND US

Written and Performed by **Stephen Wade**

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The Rep MILWAUKEE

Mark Clements
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Chad Bauman
MANAGING DIRECTOR

* * *

PLAY GUIDE WRITTEN BY
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Writer and Performer

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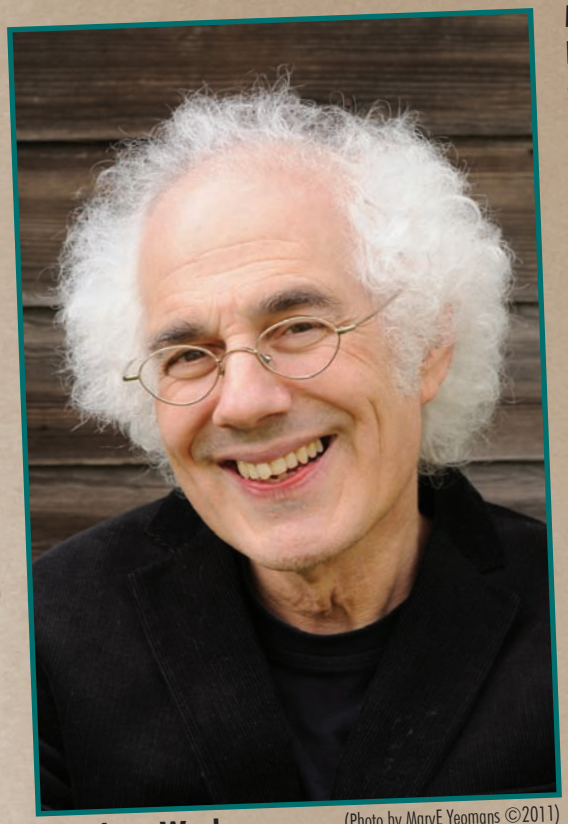
PROFILE OF **STEPHEN WADE** WRITER AND PERFORMER



Stephen Wade (Photo by MaryE Yeomans ©2011)

Musician and author Stephen Wade has spent nearly his entire life in study of American folklife, uniting the twin strands of scholarship and the creative arts.

Growing up in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, Wade was exposed to a number of vernacular musicians who had moved north to the city from the Mississippi Delta and the Southern Appalachians. His models included Fleming Brown of the Old Town School of Folk Music, and Brown's teacher, Doc Hopkins, an old-time, Kentucky-bred performer on the WLS *National Barn Dance*. Benefitting from their encouragement, Wade developed *Banjo Dancing*, a theatrical performance that combined storytelling, traditional music, and percussive dance. The show opened in Chicago in May 1979, a thirteen-month run that included an invited performance at the White House. In January 1981, Wade brought *Banjo Dancing* to Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage for a three-week engagement that stretched to ten years, making it one of the longest-running, off-Broadway shows in the United States. Wade's second theatre piece, *On the Way Home*, garnered the Joseph Jefferson award in 1993. In 2003, Wade received the Helen Hayes/Charles MacArthur award for his work as composer, adapter, and musical director for the world premiere of Zora Neale Hurston's *Polk County*.

The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience, was published in 2012 by the University of Illinois Press. This 504-page study showcases nearly two decades of research during which Wade tracked down the communities, families, and performers connected with early Library of Congress field recordings across the American South. These recordings, which Wade first gathered in *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings* (Rounder Records, 1997), gave rise to his folksong commentaries that have aired on National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. In 2013, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us* received the ASCAP Deems Taylor award and the Association of Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) award for Best History.

In fall 2012, Wade also released *Banjo Diary: Lessons from Tradition* on Smithsonian Folkways. This Grammy-nominated album explores musical knowledge passed across the generations. He has recorded and/or produced more than a dozen albums.

He recently served as 2013-2014 artist/scholar in residence at George Washington University (Department of Music) and 2013 George A. Miller Visiting Scholar, Center for Advanced Study, University of Illinois. He currently directs the American Roots Music Program at the Rocky Ridge Music Center in Estes Park, Colorado.

Bringing the Book Back Home

From the first images that open *Look Homeward, Angel*, author Thomas Wolfe details an endless tide of fortune and fate that ripples through his autobiographical tale centered in the North Carolina mountains. "A destiny," he writes, "that leads the English to the Dutch . . . and thence into the hills that shut in Altamont . . . is touched by that dark miracle of chance which makes new magic in a dusty world." Over the years I've taken refuge in his words. Now, on the eve of coming to Milwaukee Rep, his thoughts come back again. "Every moment," he adds a few lines later, "is a window on all time." Yes, even in the landscape of my own life, kind-hearted persons and earlier deeds have led to this moment.

This story begins with an individual from Milwaukee. Her name was Dena Polacheck Epstein, born here in 1916, she died in Chicago in 2013, only days short of her 97th birthday. For twenty-two years, Dena worked as a music librarian at the University of Chicago. During that tenure she became the nation's leading scholar on early banjo history. An impassioned and informed sense of social justice—inspired by her family's beliefs and nourished by Milwaukee's history of progressivism—prompted her studies of black music in America. She found that the formative black role behind the spirituals and their creation, too often disputed, needed forceful assertion just as these works merited careful examination. Her research of the earliest published slave songs and of the abolitionist musicians responsible for that documenting—their findings include, for instance, the earliest notation of "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore"—led her quite unintentionally to document another body of song and its first practitioners: the banjo and its slave-era players. It arrived in North America on the Middle Passage, an instrument brought here via cultural memory, if not actual physical form from west Africa.

Long before machine–assisted word searches, and using only her eyes as optical scanners, Dena relied on her training as a research librarian, employing the bulky microfilm reader her husband brought home for her to pursue this calling she now found. She sifted and searched a staggering array of eighteenth and nineteenth century writings—ephemeral journals, letters, diaries, and newspapers—as no one else had done. Dena found accounts of this instrument long before manufacturers began to refit it with metal and weight it down with hoops and flanges. Instead, she illuminated an earlier era, when players carved banjos out from hollowed gourds and strung them up with catgut. She found colonial-era travelers accounts that recalled its "low grumbling sound," and others who witnessed the swinging motions needed to play it rolling like a "handsaw." From these long-submerged resources she wrote *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, a groundbreaking work published in 1977 in the celebrated Music in American Life series for the University of Illinois Press. In 1983, Dena and I met on a crowded elevator during an academic conference just outside Washington, D.C. We soon became friends.

Unbeknownst to me, Dena alerted her editor, Judith McCulloh at the University of Illinois Press, about my own work. During the mid-1980s Judy came to Arena Stage where I was performing my one-man show, *Banjo Dancing*, and then wrote me, asking if I were interested in writing a book for the same music series in which Dena's book had appeared. Judy, who died this past July, was herself an eminent folklorist and a great scholar. Like Dena, she let the evidence—lived experience—dictate the course she followed.

Maybe their scholarly agreement let alone their mutual affection marks another of Thomas Wolfe's trajectories. The last time I ever spoke with Judy—Mother's Day 2014—occurred immediately after Dena's memorial service at the University of Chicago. Judy, too ill by then to attend, had asked me to speak on her behalf. While driving back to the north side, and soon to leave for the airport, I told her about the event and how well the people there received her words about her old friend Dena. She was pleased, and she also told me to keep on writing. Near the end of our conversation we spoke warmly of this engagement in Milwaukee.

* * *

Still more threads tie *The Beautiful Music All Around Us* to Milwaukee Rep. The process behind the book, an effort launched in June 1994, echoed the model I had previously followed in learning the banjo. That is, learning from people in their homes. In turn, that model based itself on the very recordings profiled in the book, some of them also recorded in homes, but some in churches, playgrounds, or even prisons. As a result, along with library, audio, and archival research, I interviewed nearabout two hundred individuals. In a few cases this included surviving performers, as well as their family members who recalled moments from a half-century before, and recordings nearly, if not wholly forgotten. My travels spanned the Great Plains to the Blue Ridge, the Mississippi Delta to Chicago's Bronzeville.

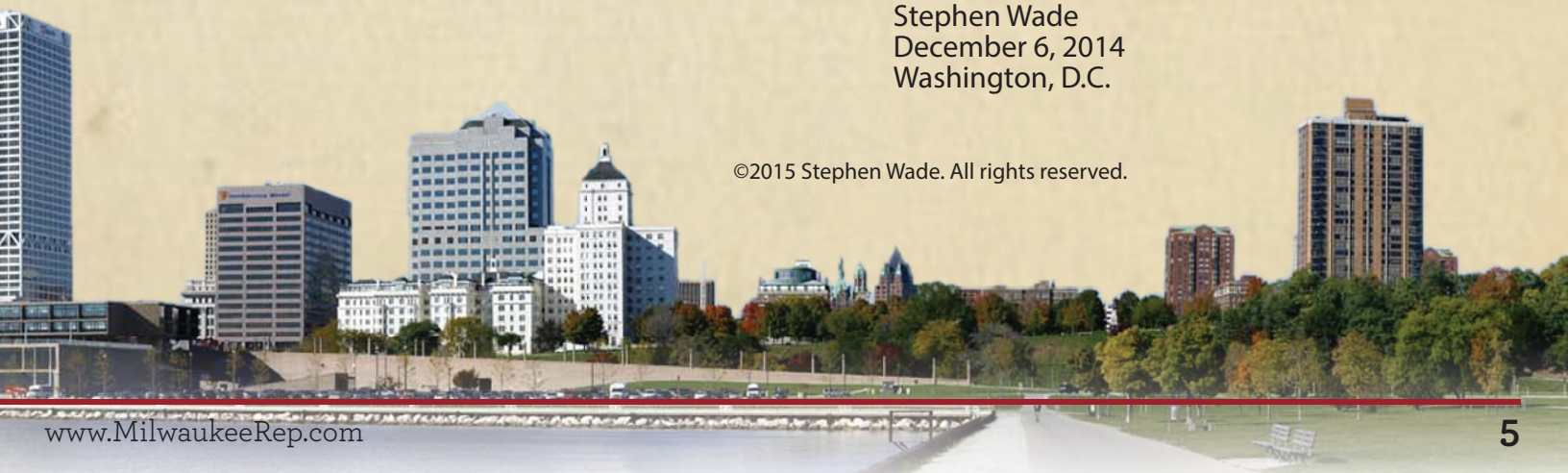
Following the book's publication in September 2012, I felt it needful to return to these persons and places. At each stop I gave localized programs, playing music and speaking, all the while framing these largely improvised and still unscripted presentations within slide shows I assembled for the occasion. Over the course of these appearances, I developed this evening's performance.

Yet theatrical lessons had already figured in the book's pages. Even though I essentially left the stage to pursue this work, I realized over the course of its writing that a book itself constitutes a performance. Its voice needed to appeal to a solitary reader, an audience of one. While the tools of a performer and that of a folksong researcher surely differ, their burdens as well as their goals hold essential elements in common. I realized that an expressive gesture on a stage finds its written equivalent in a telling detail. Likewise, the actor's dictum to "show, don't tell," equally applies to effective narration. As a musician I found the basic priority to play tunefully provided a crucial gauge in editing the book, let alone in crafting its sentences. In all honesty, I took my initial 900-page manuscript down to a more manageable length by simply asking myself, "What is the melody of this chapter; what story is it trying to tell?" Once I had that tune in mind, then I knew what to cut and what work still remained.

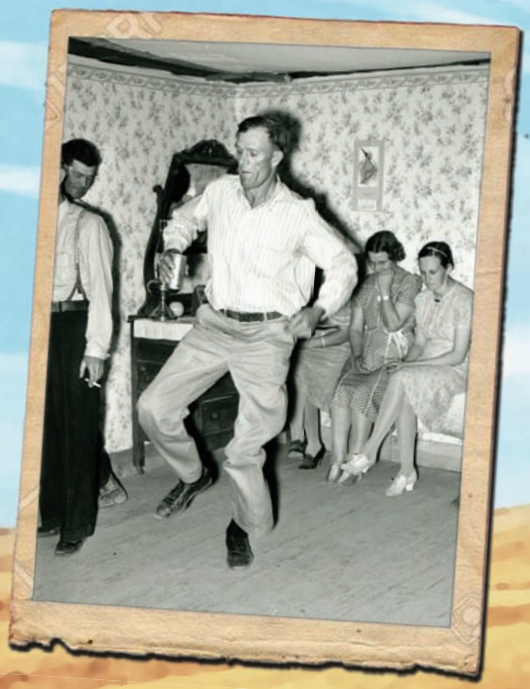
Indeed, a measurement I relied upon repeatedly came from a public performer and noted actor: none other than Oprah Winfrey. More than once, Judy McCulloh remarked after reading some opaque passage I'd ventured, "Do you think Oprah would read *that* aloud to her book club?" While my book surely has not risen to Oprah's attention, it has benefitted time and again from her stress test. The actor's obligation to serve the audience, "to dance out of your debt," as the dancer says in the epilogue of *Henry IV, Part Two*, instilled my written efforts. Now that task turns another step at Milwaukee Rep.

I come to your city, mindful that someone born here nearly a century ago set in motion certain circumstances that led to this production. In dedicating this performance to Dena Epstein with her quenchless warmth and tireless integrity, I cannot help but think of Thomas Wolfe again: those dark miracles of chance that bring us together in a dusty world.

Stephen Wade
December 6, 2014
Washington, D.C.



The Library of Congress Field Recordings



The Library of Congress has long made available a multiplicity of songs, tunes, and stories drawn from its folklore collections. The first of these items appeared in 1941 on two ten-inch 78-rpm phonograph albums. Issued by the Library's Recording Laboratory, they made accessible what officials there termed "documents basic to the history and culture of America." That sampler proved successful and initiated a series called "Folk Music of the United States." Over time more than seventy such albums appeared, a process now greatly expanded via Web-based collections. All this publication fulfills a goal articulated by Carl Engel, who in 1928 as chief of the Music Division, established the folk music archive at the Library:

> *There is a pressing need for the formation of a great centralized collection of American folk songs. The logical place for such a collection is the national library of the United States. The collection should comprise all the poems and melodies that have sprung from our soil or have been transplanted here, and have been handed down, often with manifold changes, from generation to generation, as a precious possession of our folk.*

From Top: Members of the Musgrove family, Westmoreland County, Alabama, September 1935. Photograph by Ben Shahn; Square dancing at home, Pie Town, New Mexico, June 1940. Photograph by Russell Lee; Sunday singing, Frank Tengle's family, Hale County, Alabama, summer 1936. Photograph by Walker Evans; Blind street musician, West Memphis, Arkansas, September 1935. Photograph by Ben Shahn. All photos courtesy of the Library of Congress.

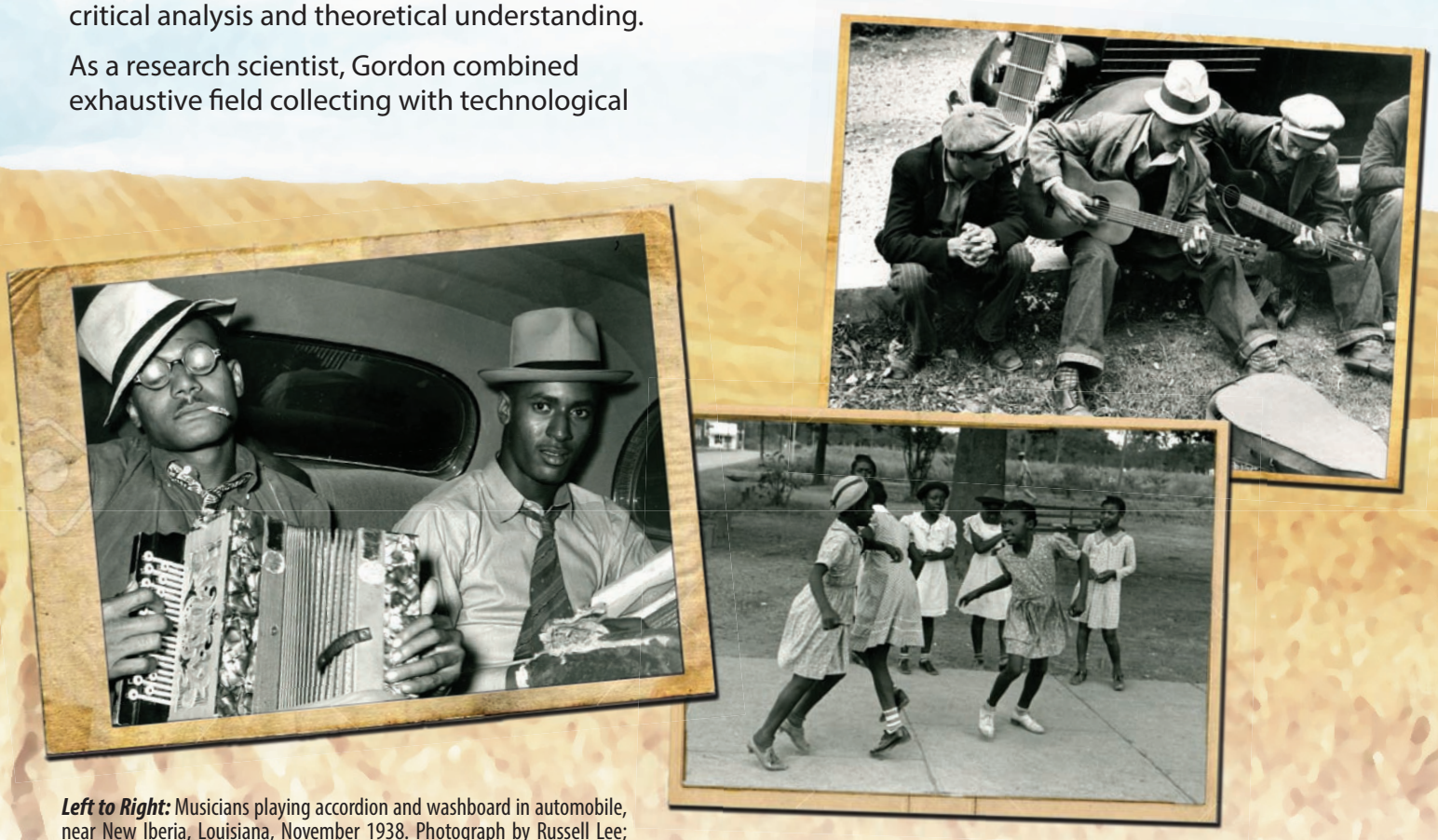
The Library's establishment of its folk music archive emerged in the context of the European Romantic movement. Indeed, initial funding for the Archive came from supporters of the Philadelphia Symphony. Those patrons knew that many highly regarded operas and symphonies had borrowed from the melodic resources of European folk tradition. In seeking their financial assistance, Engel relied on the idea that no nation can have a great classical music without incorporating in it examples of its own folk music.

Engel's appeal to the Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra led them to underwrite the Archive of American Folk-Song (later, Archive of Folk Song, and now Archive of Folk Culture). Operations began officially on July 1, 1928.

His choice to direct this new agency was an unconventional, but visionary, Harvard-trained folklorist, Robert Winslow Gordon (1888-1961), who shared with Engel an abiding interest in critical analysis and theoretical understanding.

As a research scientist, Gordon combined exhaustive field collecting with technological acumen. A tireless experimenter not unlike his friend Thomas Edison, Gordon brought the technology of the cylinder recorder to San Francisco wharves and Georgia prayer meetings. These ventures were, he said, steps leading to the creation of "a great history of national folksong." He made nearly a thousand field recordings. Among them are the songs of North Carolina mountain banjoists, Georgia ring shouters, and old-time windjammers adrift on the San Francisco waterfront. As the Library of Congress's first professional folklorist, Gordon wanted to be "in intimate touch with every section of the country and with every class of the American people."

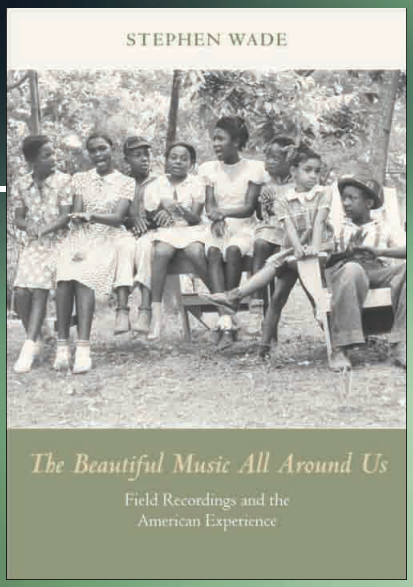
Gordon's efforts foreshadowed the legendary field recording expeditions of the 1930s and early 1940s. In turn, representative examples of that work appeared in the Library's folk music recordings series. Those sources form the substance of tonight's program.



Left to Right: Musicians playing accordion and washboard in automobile, near New Iberia, Louisiana, November 1938. Photograph by Russell Lee; Children's ring games, Lafayette, Louisiana, October 1938. Photograph by Russell Lee; Street musicians, Maynardville, Tennessee, October 1935. Photograph by Ben Shahn. All photos courtesy of the Library of Congress.

EXCERPTS FROM
The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience

The book from which tonight's performance derives is a labor of love, a passion project, that Stephen Wade spent years crafting from historical records and recordings, oral histories, interviews, and in-depth research. This beautiful study of American folk music expands upon the themes, stories, and songs you will experience tonight.



Excerpt from **"Bill Stepp: Retreat Across America"**

John and Becky Arnett of West Liberty, Kentucky, made their way through Orlando International Airport and boarded the monorail that would ferry them to the departure lounges. Like a futuristic ride at nearby Disney World, the train glided past postcard views of manmade lakes and landscaped palm trees. It coasted to a stop, and a warning tone signaled the vehicle's computer-driven arrival. They began their trek down the long, carpeted corridor to the plane. Gate announcements, prefaced by the bleating of an electronic whistle, barked from the public address system. Between the clatter of messages and noises, a crescendo of forty concert violins and a xylophone streamed from the loudspeakers. For many of Orlando's air travelers, the melody recalled a well-known television commercial in which images of sizzling steaks and high-spirited fun flash across the screen. Throughout the spot, this musical arrangement plays beneath the gunmetal voice of Robert Mitchum telling a nation, "Beef. It's what's for dinner." Becky listened to a few notes, pointed to the speakers overhead, and said, "John, can't you hear it? That's Grandpa! That's Grandpa!"

Excerpt from **"Luther Strong: Way behind His Time"**

A few feet from Faye Sandlin's door, at the next house trailer over, a nine- or ten-year-old girl stands outside playing a violin. Coming closer up the walkway, we make out "Old Joe Clark." I can't help but smile at Faye, conscious that her father, mountain fiddler Luther Strong, once knew this piece himself. It's hard to imagine a more appropriate, if unintentional, greeting. Faye thinks so too. When she was younger than this girl, she used to dance as he played the tune outside their home in rural Kentucky.

To read more, pick up a copy of Stephen's book, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience*. **Books are available for purchase and signing after the show!**

Available online at www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/55qpr7zm9780252036880.html

Excerpt from **"Christine and Katherine Shipp: In A Chromatic Light"**

"Do I remember when Christine and Katherine made those records?" Luella Shipp's voice, already coursing with a vitality that defied her age, now leaped in volume. "Honey, I was *there*." Her radiance matched the front room where we sat, a room ablaze with dozens of Christmas cards propped up among smiling snapshots of nieces and nephews and surrounded by gift boxes still encased in holiday ribbons and bows. Together they formed a glittering, glowing domestic shrine. By contrast, a damp February cold pierced the house. We huddled around a small electric heater. Between us lay a cassette machine, and as it played the Shipp family's 1939 recording session, Luella sang along to each number. Throughout the morning, the phone rang as friends, aware of this visit, checked in to see if all was OK with her. Later someone stopped over, peering hard through the doorway for signs of danger. Though Luella lived on a near-empty street with just a few shuttered houses, her Byhalia, Mississippi, neighborhood stayed watchful on her behalf.

ABOUT OUR PRODUCTION:
Cast and Creative Team

Photo: MaryE Yeomans ©2011

STEPHEN WADE Writer and Performer

BRENT HAZELTON Production Coordinator

Lighting Designer
NOELE STOLLMACK

Sound Designer
BARRY G. FUNDERBURG

Assistant Production Coordinator
PHILIP MUEHE

Stage Manager
RICHELLE HARRINGTON CALIN

Stage Manager
ANNE M. JUDE

Stage Management Apprentice
KIMBERLY CAROLUS

Production Manager
JARED CLARKIN

Lighting & Video Director
SEAN NICHOLL

Sound Director
ERIN PAIGE

Technical Director & Scenic Coordinator
TYLER SMITH

Properties Director & Props Coordinator
JAMES GUY

Charge Scenic Artist
JIM MEDVED

FEATURED ARTIST:
Richelle Harrington Calin

Stage Manager Richelle Harrington Calin caught the stage management bug in high school when she worked on an adaptation of George Orwell's *1984*. After college and an internship at BoarsHead Theater, she started stage managing professionally at Playhouse on the Square in Memphis, Tennessee. Richelle later moved to Florida to work for Alhambra Dinner Theater and Florida Repertory Theater before joining Milwaukee Rep in 2004. To date, Richelle has stage managed over 150 productions at theaters around the country!

Richelle enjoys the excitement and variety that being a stage manager brings. From the diversity of shows presented in our three unique spaces, to the challenges each production presents, she loves it all. She characterizes the job of the stage manager as being akin to "an air traffic controller or symphony conductor. It is mostly about coordinating and communicating regarding almost every aspect of a production from before rehearsals begin through the closing performance. We run the rehearsals and performances; we also generate a massive amount of paperwork to communicate to our colleagues how those rehearsals and performances are going and what the current needs of the production are. The stage manager is the one person who stays with the show every step of the way."

In preparing for *The Beautiful Music All Around Us*, Richelle says she is most excited to be a part of bringing a new experience to the Stackner Cabaret for Milwaukee Rep audiences. She is also looking forward to the learning opportunity the production will afford her, as her husband is a folk singer in the group Bounding Main, and she is interested to learn more about the rich history of the music presented in the show.

Be on the lookout for Richelle and her team before or after the show, as they juggle the many responsibilities of stage managing and make sure that audiences can truly experience *The Beautiful Music All Around Us*!

Visiting The Rep

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The Stackner Cabaret is located on the second level and can be accessed via the escalator or elevator.

The Rep Values Your Support

Financial support enables The Rep to:

- Advance the art of theater with productions that inspire individuals and create community dialogue;
- Provide a richer theater experience by hosting Rep In Depth, Talkbacks, and creating Play Guides to better inform our audiences about our productions;
- Educate over 20,000 students at 200+ schools in the greater Milwaukee area with Rep Immersion Day experiences, student matinees, workshops, tours and by making connections with their school curriculum through classroom teaching programs such as Reading Residencies and Scriptworks;
- Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems and script synopses to ensure that theater at The Rep is accessible to all;
- Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Artistic Intern Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

We value our supporters and partnerships and hope that you will help us to expand the ways Milwaukee Rep has a positive impact on theater and on our Milwaukee community.

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