

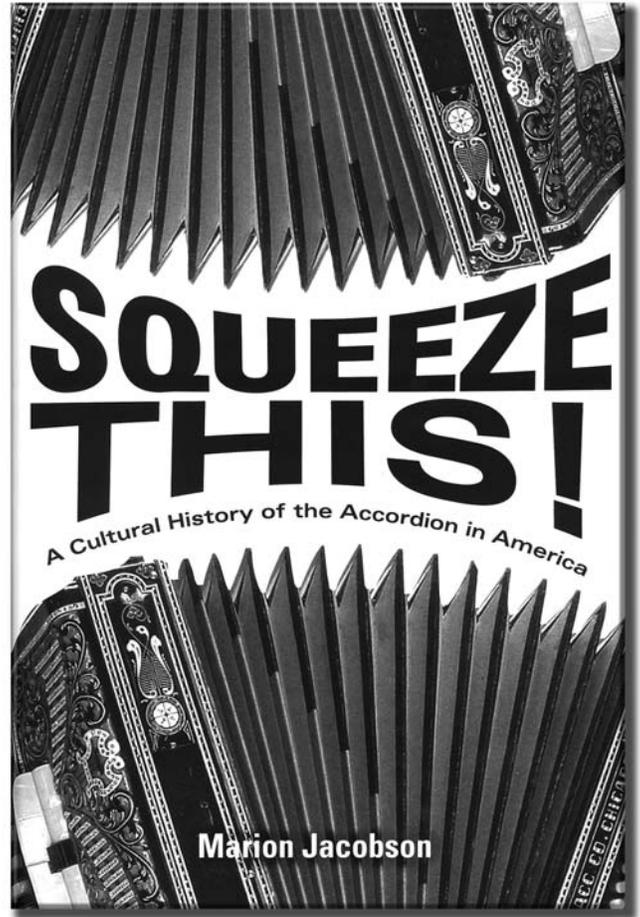
The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress
presents
the Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture Series
AN ACQUISITIONS & PRESENTATION PROJECT

Squeeze This!

A Cultural History of the Accordion in America

LECTURE AND
BOOK SIGNING

Marion Jacobson
ethnomusicologist,
author, and educator



THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2012

12:00 NOON - 1:00 PM

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Squeeze This!

A Cultural History of the Accordion in America

No other instrument has witnessed such a dramatic rise to popularity—and precipitous decline and renaissance—as the accordion. *Squeeze This!* is the first history of the piano accordion and the first book-length study of the accordion as a uniquely American musical and cultural phenomenon.

Ethnomusicologist and accordion enthusiast Marion Jacobson traces the changing idea of the accordion in the United States and its cultural significance over the course of the twentieth century. From the introduction of elaborately decorated European models imported onto the American vaudeville stage and the instrument's celebration by ethnic musical communities and mainstream audiences alike, to the accordion-infused pop parodies by “Weird Al” Yankovic, Jacobson considers the accordion's contradictory status as both an “outsider” instrument and as a major force in popular music in the twentieth century.

Drawing on interviews and archival investigations with instrument builders and retailers, artists and audiences, professionals and amateurs, *Squeeze This!* explores the piano accordion's role as an instrument of community identity and its varied musical and cultural environments. Jacobson concentrates on six key moments of transition: the Americanization of the piano accordion, originally produced and marketed by sales-savvy Italian immigrants; the transformation of the accordion in the 1920s from an exotic, expensive vaudeville instrument to a mass-marketable product; the emergence of the accordion craze in the 1930s and 1940s, when a highly organized “accordion industrial complex” cultivated a white, middle-class

market; the peak of its popularity in the 1950s, exemplified by Lawrence Welk and Dick Contino; the instrument's marginalization in the 1960s and a brief, ill-fated effort to promote the accordion to teen rock 'n' roll musicians; and the revival beginning in the 1980s of the accordion as a “world music instrument” and a key component of cabaret and burlesque revivals and pop groups such as alternative experimenters They Might Be Giants and polka rockers Brave Combo.

“Using meticulous research, Jacobson not only touches on how topics as diverse as immigration, movies, war, and feminism have influenced the accordion's popularity, but she also finds time to drop in countless little known pop culture nuggets about great accordionists.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A fascinating cultural history of the most underestimated of instruments.”—*Booklist*

Marion Jacobson holds a Ph.D. in music and ethnomusicology from New York University. An accordionist herself, she has performed with klezmer bands and accordion bands, and in old-timey jam sessions, but her favorite spot for gigs is the New York City subway.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to “preserve and present American Folklife” through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Center includes the American Folklife Center Archive of folk culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Please visit our web site: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>.

