



# **SINGING IN ZION: Music and Song in the Life of One Arkansas Family**

*COCHRAN ROBERT, Robert Cochran*

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This book is a lyrical, scholarly exploration of the connection between one family's musical traditions and its rural community of Zion, Arkansas. In 1959, three Gilbert sisters—Alma, Helen, and Phydella—began compiling songs they remembered as their own and sending them to one another in letters. Their tendency to center memory in sound rather than sight reveals an unusual musical birthright. Robert Cochran has constructed a composite portrait of this family for whom music is the center of life. He examines their lived experience as they anchor their history through song, singing, and the playing of musical instruments. The Gilberts are wonderful exemplars of the "mediation of oral tradition," and when approached through their music, they reveal themselves as remarkable individuals with an elaborate and firmly held sense of their unique identities. A decade in the making, *Singing in Zion* is written with a memoirist's sense of family history and an ethnographer's sense of the rich encounter of worlds. This narrative has a seductive simplicity that conveys much of the Gilbert family's charm while at the same time establishing a broader framework that is firmly academic. It will be enjoyed by all readers.

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