

Museum on Main Street
EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION
New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music

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Listen to America's music and hear the story of freedom. It's the story of people in a New World, places they have left behind, and ideas they have brought with them. It is the story of people who were already here, but whose world is remade. The distinct cultural identities of all of these people are carried in song—both sacred and secular. Their music tracks the unique history of many peoples reshaping each other into one incredibly diverse and complex people—Americans. Their music is the roots of American music.

The music that emerges is known by names like blues, country and western, folk, and gospel. The sounds are as sweet as mountain air and as sultry as a summer night in Mississippi delta country. The instruments vary from fiddle to banjo to accordion to guitar. Yet all the instruments merge, as do the rhythms, melodies and harmonies, producing completely new sounds—new music. The musics merge because this is America. New waves of music ride ashore in the hearts and heads of new immigrants and they create still new sounds from what they have brought with them and what they find here. And nothing expresses the tensions—or the triumphs—of this journey into democracy quite like the music that it spawns.

The main beat of the exhibition is the on-going cultural process that has made America the birthplace of more music than any place on earth. The exhibition provides a fascinating, inspiring, and toe-tapping listen to the American story of multi-cultural exchange.

New Harmonies offers opportunities for communities to collect and celebrate their music traditions. As museums showcase local music they will no doubt collect antique instruments, sheet music, program bills, and oral histories or photo essays of area musicians and family musical traditions. The exhibition inspires concerts and sing-a-longs, radio programs featuring music and interviews with musicians, film and reading discussion programs, and even music writing contests.