



# **Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music (American Musicspheres Series)**

*James Leary*

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A freewheeling blend of continental European folk music and the songs, tunes, and dances of Anglo and Celtic immigrants, polkabilly has enthralled American musicians and dancers since the mid-19th century. From West Virginia coal camps and east Texas farms to the Canadian prairies and America's Upper Midwest, scores of groups have wed squeezeboxes with string bands, hoe downs with hambos, and sentimental Southern balladry with comic "up north" broken-English comedy, to create a new and uniquely American sound.

The Goose Island Ramblers played as a house band for a local tavern in Madison, Wisconsin from the early 1960s through the mid-1970s. The group epitomized the polkabilly sound with their wild mixture of Norwegian fiddle tunes, Irish jigs, Slovenian polkas, Swiss yodels, old time hillbilly songs, "Scandihoovian" and "Dutchman" dialect ditties, frost-bitten Hawaiian marches, and novelty numbers on the electric toilet plunger. In this original study, James P. Leary illustrates how the Ramblers' multiethnic music combined both local and popular traditions, and how their eclectic repertoire challenges prevailing definitions of American folk music. He thus offers the first comprehensive examination of the Upper Midwest's folk musical traditions within the larger context of American life and culture.

Impeccably researched, richly detailed and illustrated, and accompanied by a compact disc of interviews and performances, James P. Leary's *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* creates an unforgettable portrait of a polkabilly band and its world.

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