

## The Market Lass, the Activist, and the Queen of the Banjo:

### Three American Musical Lives

by Jim Dalton and Maggi Smith Dalton

We take as our historical subjects three women musicians who are, simultaneously, "representative and unique" to their times. Through the lens of the lives and works of these Americans, we hope to facilitate an understanding of how music functioned historically, culturally, and artistically -- not only for these women, but, by extension, understanding how music affected, and was affected by, the historical development of music, art, and culture. Without delving too far into the minutiae of historical methodology and the demands of systematic research, we will share with you from our research some of the ideas we have formed about the significance of these women's lives as working artists.

The women we will introduce to you include Elizabeth Poe (1787?- 1811) a singing actress active in the young United States between 1790-1811; Louisa Dewhurst, a touring instrumentalist who flourished in the 1880s; and Eleanor Smith (1893-1935), the music director and founder of the Music School at Chicago's social settlement house extraordinaire, Hull House.

#### Eliza Poe

In 1797, little Elizabeth Arnold, (future mother of Edgar [Allan] Poe) stood on a stage in Charleston, South Carolina, singing "The Market Lass," a popular song of the day, drawn from the repertory of English pleasure garden and opera house. The child was already a theatrical trouper, apprenticed to the family business.

During her brief life, Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins Poe married twice, endured exhausting travel, overwork, artistic and personal anxieties, poverty, possible abandonment, and bore three children in the midst of a challenging professional career (and, one wonders, under what childbirthing conditions!). All of this closed her life at twenty-four.

She forged no stunning innovations in theatre-craft, nor did she achieve great fame

or fortune. Her story is that of an industrious, creative craftswoman. Hard-working and determined, she truly was a "Market Lass" to the end, concerned with pleasing the public.

Yet she left a legacy to her profession and to her son, Edgar Allan Poe, as a creative artist concerned with imaginative portrayals. Her influence, especially as filtered through her son, continued in American culture past her last curtain call. Her sweet voice echoed in Edgar's soul like a bell, though (or perhaps, because) that voice was imagined or romanticized.

#### Louisa Dewhurst

On one of our many research trips -- this one to Pennsylvania -- we came into possession of an intriguing volume. The cover of this 1884 book has an engraving of a rather Victorian-looking lady playing a banjo and bears the title "Louisa Dewhurst's Banjo School."

We knew that this was a find for several reasons, not the least of which is the relative rarity of instrumental tutors authored by women in the 19th century. The clincher, though, was a sentence from the biography in the back of the book:

"Miss Louisa Dewhurst, while in Australia, received the title of the Banjo Queen, at the same time receiving the largest and finest gold medal ever presented, for her proficiency as a Banjoist, awarded her at Melbourne, Jan. 8, 1880."

Miss Dewhurst flourished in the 1880s -- in fact, all five of the publications that we have in our collection bear the copyright date of 1884. She toured the US, Great Britain and Australia, sometimes on the same bill as Edward Dobson -- another, though more well-known, banjo virtuoso. She was praised in the press for her tone, execution, and for her compositions. Typically for the times, the review usually featured phrases such as "never heard such handling of a banjo by a lady."

#### Eleanor Smith

Eleanor Smith's musical endeavors were

held in high esteem, none the least by Jane Addams, founder of Hull House. The import attached to music was referred to publicly by Addams, who wrote that Smith considered it "a legitimate function of the settlement to phrase in music the wide spread social compunctions of our day."

Smith also authored public school music texts published by Silver Burdett (1898-1910) and American Book Company (1909). Interesting among these is a volume that was intended for the use in one-room schoolhouses called "The Common School Book of Vocal Music." The book addressed the problems of teaching music to a class with many different ages, levels and abilities, all working together.

Her compositions were published as early as 1885. She published art songs, piano pieces, and songs to promote and support a variety of social causes. Her best-know song, entitled, "The Sweat Shop," illustrates this.

#### Multiple Facets

Through the lens of these women's lives and work we can examine such diverse experiences as: working as a new immigrant in a marginally-accepted profession; as an apprentice to a family business; working and teaching new citizens from many countries; working for social causes of diverse types; and touring internationally -- representing not only a country, but a gender, in an unusual field.

*Jim and Maggi Dalton perform music of popular/vernacular, folk and cultivated traditions, covering periods from the Middle Ages to the present, focusing largely on American, Celtic, and British Isles repertoires. Previous audiences have found the duo to be "engaging, scholarly, delightful, warm, intelligent, flexible, humorous, talented, versatile, enthusiastic, personable, joyful..." "Simply put, Jim and Maggi Dalton are a national treasure." They can be contacted at: [www.singingstring.org](http://www.singingstring.org). Jim Dalton and Maggi Smith Dalton will be presenting at the 2005 All State Conference.*

# Jim and Maggi Dalton

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## ABOUT JIM & MAGGI

Jim and Maggi Dalton perform music of popular/vernacular, folk and cultivated traditions, covering time periods from the Middle Ages to the present, focusing largely on American, Celtic and British Isles repertoire. They specialize in music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Instrumentation: mostly plucked strings and voices.

Concerts and programs contain commentary designed to place the music performed in historical context for the audience. Programs reflect the continual and ongoing research in which the two delight. They also perform original songs and compositions.

Jim and Maggi have released two recordings to date, and have designed a full spectrum of programs which they present nationwide. They have been featured often on radio and television. (PBS, ABC, NBC, CBS affiliates, Cable Networks; NPR stations, NewsRadio, interview programs across the USA; feature stories in newspapers and magazines, i.e., *The Philadelphia Inquirer & Courier-Post*) They have performed at nationally-known venues (i.e., Colonial Williamsburg, Seneca Falls, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House) and countless local and regional venues nationwide.

They have served as artists-in-residence at various colleges, public history sites, community and educational centers, presenting series addressing American history and other topics in the humanities, using music as the core of each session.

*Previous audiences and sponsors have said:*

"engaging, scholarly, delightful, warm, intelligent, flexible, humorous, talented, versatile, enthusiastic, personable, joyful ..."



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in our "sunny yellow folder" for  
descriptions of our programs, classes,  
and concerts ~

Multi-instrumentalist *Jim Dalton* is an educator, conductor and award-winning composer and arranger.

As a performer, he specializes in historical and ethnic playing styles on a variety of plucked string instruments including guitar, mandolin, banjo, mandocello, Renaissance lute, bouzouki etc.

He also plays piano, organ, recorder and tin whistle.

In addition to duo performances with his wife, soprano and guitarist Maggi Smith-Dalton he maintains an active career as a freelance musician -- playing in chamber music ensembles, jazz and world music groups and in opera/theater and symphony orchestras.

He is a member of the New England Mandolin Ensemble.

His compositions have been performed across the U.S. and Canada and in Europe.

His choral composition, "The Rocky Road to Dublin," won first prize in the 1997 Toronto Camerata Competition. Two of his pieces for carillon have been published in anthologies by Fenwick Parva and the Friends of the Albany Carillon.

His composition for solo mandolin, "Gifts of the Bard," is published by Wolfhead Music.

His works are available through these publishers and Singing String Music Publications.

Jim is on the faculty of The Boston Conservatory, teaching music theory, ear training and world music courses for both the Music Theory and Music Education Departments. He has written articles for Blues Revue Magazine and is the author of *Mandolin for Beginners*, published by Workshop Arts, Inc./Alfred Publishing.

He is a frequent guest lecturer on topics such as composition, choral arranging and Irish traditional music. In the 2004-2005 year Jim received a MACRO research grant (Univ. of Wisconsin) to study and analyze palindromic compositions in concert music repertoire and presented this work at the 2005 Macro Musician's Workshop in Madison, WI.

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Singer and musician, independent scholar, author and educator, *Maggi Smith-Dalton* has sung as a soloist with choirs and choruses both here and abroad, acted and sung in professional theater productions and produced/participated/performed in radio and television projects and programs.

She is a frequent guest lecturer -- on the integration of humanities and the arts, on folklore, and on American music and history, to name a few topics.

She has given lecture/demonstration programs at the college level (i.e., The New England Conservatory, The Boston Conservatory) and in numerous professional-development courses for educators and teachers at all grade levels.

Maggi enjoys an active performing career, which, after eleven years of work in cabaret, musical theater, and nightclub singing, has included more than two decades of concert performance nationwide and abroad, in partnership with her husband and as a soloist with choirs and in concert.

In addition, she authored a prize-winning short story and writes often for newspapers and magazines (including history and cultural/arts/educational feature articles, and a regular history column for the *Salem Gazette*).

Maggi's work in mainstream media included producing a cable TV series and programming and hosting musical theater, arts interview, and classical music shows for NPR public radio, commercial, and community stations.

A former Chairperson of the Haverhill Cultural Council, Maggi served as Musical Theater Director at Hill House (a community Arts Center) in Boston's Beacon Hill; as Director of "Adventures in Art," a summer arts program; and as a director of children's choirs.

With a background in teaching multiply-handicapped children, Maggi continues interest in and study of music therapy. She is working on a children's book; and is always working on a variety of writing projects.