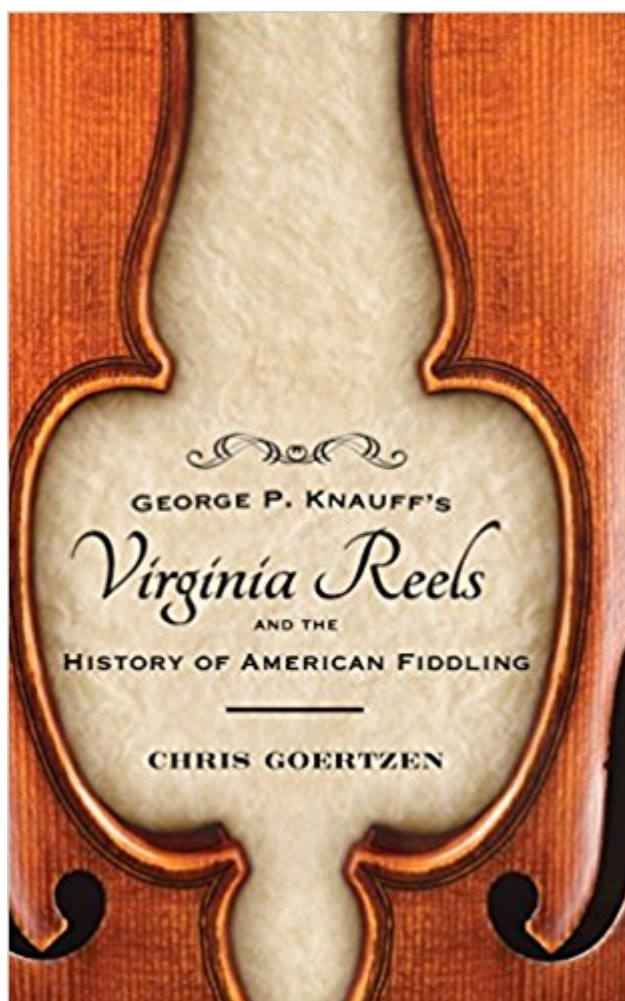


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# George P. Knauff's Virginia Reels And The History Of American Fiddling (American Made Music Series)



## Synopsis

George P. Knauff's *Virginia Reels* (1839) was the first collection of southern fiddle tunes and the only substantial one published in the nineteenth century. Knauff's activity could not anticipate our modern contest-driven fiddle subcultures. But the fate of the *Virginia Reels* pointed in that direction, suggesting that southern fiddling, after his time, would happen outside of commercial popular culture even though it would sporadically engage that culture. Chris Goertzen uses this seminal collection as the springboard for a fresh exploration of fiddling in America, past and present. He first discusses the life of the arranger. Then he explains how this collection was meant to fit into the broad stream of early nineteenth-century music publishing. Goertzen describes the character of these fiddle tunes' names (and such titles in general), what we can learn about antebellum oral tradition from this collection, and how fiddling relates to blackface minstrelsy. Throughout the book, the author connects the evidence concerning both repertoire and practice found in the *Virginia Reels* with current southern fiddling, encompassing styles ranging from straightforward to fancy—old-time styles of the Upper South, exuberant West Virginia styles, and the melodic improvisations of modern contest fiddling. Twenty-six song sheets assist in this discovery. Goertzen incorporates performance descriptions and music terminology into his accessible, engaging prose. Unlike the vast majority of books on American fiddling—regional tune collections or histories—this book presents an extended look at the history of southern fiddling and a close examination of current practices.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Goertzen has done an important service in bringing to wide accessibility Knauff's famed 1839 Virginia Reels pamphlet, the oldest available transcriptions of southern dance music catering to the violin. The volume will become a cornerstone of studies across many disciplines in study of the complex nature of traditional fiddle music and culture. Goertzen provides marvelous documentation and discussion of many elements in the alchemy of American fiddle music; he gives us much to enjoy and contemplate, such as his helping us know and appreciate George Knauff's life, family, and times as well as his invaluable tune transcriptions. In his fascinating epilogue, Goertzen plumbs aspects of the ironclad tune "Forked Deer" the most familiar tune discussed in detail and this is a model of explication that will be appreciated not only by scholars and fans but by the vast numbers of fiddlers around the world who play this great melody in countless styles and variations. This and much more make George P. Knauff's Virginia Reels and the History of American Fiddling a significant contribution in musical analysis and an exciting journey into the cultural and social scenes in which fiddle music flourishes. Howard Marshall, professor emeritus of art history and archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia and author of Play Me Something Quick and Devilish: Old-Time Fiddlers in Missouri and Fiddler's Dream: Old-Time, Swing, and Bluegrass Fiddling in Twentieth-Century Missouri "This is a delightful book. The history is carefully researched and brings much that is new to light. The inclusion of early accounts of fiddling is fascinating, as is the speculation related to tune titles and their persistence and change. All in all it is a great tour through our earliest glimpse into the origins of southern fiddling. Chris Goertzen has an inviting, accessible, and often amusing way of presenting the history, analysis, and his speculations on the content of Knauff's Virginia Reels. While delightful in book form, it's easy to picture him sharing his passion for this project over a slowly warming beer in a dark and cozy pub." Harry Bolick, coauthor of Mississippi Fiddle Tunes and Songs from the 1930s, published by University Press of Mississippi

Chris Goertzen, Slidell, Louisiana, is professor of music history at the University of Southern Mississippi. His earlier books are Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity; Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests; and Made in Mexico: Tradition, Tourism, and Political Ferment in Oaxaca, the latter two published by University Press of Mississippi.

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