

For Immediate Release

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**Exhibit *Singing the Golden State* Opens Jan. 25, 2012  
At The Society of California Pioneers in San Francisco**

**Museum Show Draws on Exceptional Collections of Sheet Music,  
Recordings, and Music Memorabilia to Celebrate  
Golden-Age Popular Songs in Praise of California**

November 30, 2011 — Popular songs about the State of California, dating from the Gold Rush through the vaudeville era, are celebrated in the new exhibit *Singing the Golden State*, which opens on Wednesday, January 25, 2012 at The Society of California Pioneers, 300 Fourth Street, San Francisco. The show spotlights graphically striking sheet-music covers published from 1849 through the 1930s, along with other printed materials, sound recordings, instruments, and memorabilia relating to California and its early musical life.

“In the 19th and early-20th centuries, publishers understood that potential sheet-music buyers judged pieces of music—like books—by their covers,” says James M. Keller, curator of the exhibit. “And so, they accordingly lavished care on the creation of vivid, original art and design for the sheet music they issued.” These images are sometimes by notable illustrators and artists, who often provided ingenious depictions of the song’s subject. In *Singing the Golden State*, the subject is California—its history, its geography, its people.

All the music in the show is about California, rather than merely being music that was performed in California or even published in California. The exhibit includes approximately 150 pieces of sheet music organized to illuminate such topics as the Gold Rush, fairs and exhibitions, commerce and advertising, clubs and organizations, sports and amusements, children, minorities, transportation, and a tour of the Golden State, in addition to a section on the state song, “I Love You, California,” composed in 1913. Although the prominence of sheet music declined around 1930, when the dissemination of popular music shifted to radio, it served as a form of media during the period covered by this show. “If something happened,” says Keller, “there’s a fair chance someone wrote a song about it.”

The examples on display accordingly serve as an entertaining and surprising reflection of the state’s rich cultural history, including sheet music for the “Montgomery Street March” and “Hayes Valley Mazurka” (celebrating a San Francisco street and neighborhood, respectively), several songs relating to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915, at the current Palace of Fine Arts location), the “California Flood Mazurka” (memorializing the 1862 Sacramento flood, the largest in California’s recorded history, when approximately 19.5 inches of rain fell during 69 consecutive days), “California Nights” (with a cover photo of Karyl Norman, “The Creole Fashion Plate,” a

star female impersonator of the flapper era), and vintage advertising songs for such California products as Zee-Nut candy bars (from Los Angeles) and Hopsburger Beer (from San Francisco).

### Two Notable Collections United for this Show

The decorative sheet music in the exhibit is drawn from two exceptional archives: the Frederick Sherman Collection of The Society of California Pioneers and the private collection of James M. Keller, the exhibit's curator.

The Frederick Sherman Music Collection, bequeathed to The Society of California Pioneers in the 1940s, was the legacy of a son of Leander Sherman, who in 1870 founded the San Francisco-based music company that continues to this day under the name Sherman Clay & Co. This large collection is particularly rich in music published in California (by Sherman Clay and other firms) during the second half of the 19th century. For this exhibit, selections are also drawn from the private collection assembled over the past 25 years by James M. Keller, whose collection focuses on historical popular music about American places, mostly from the period 1890 to 1930, the era of vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley. Together, these two collections furnish an exceptional look into the enthusiasm with which songwriters in California and elsewhere sang the praises of the Golden State, beyond such well-known classics of the period as "Avalon," "Home in Pasadena," and "California, Here I Come."

The show, which occupies both floors of The Society of California Pioneers' museum space, also includes a generous sampling of sound recordings, from the 1910s and '20s, of selected songs that are on display. On the first floor of the exhibit, visitors hear early audio tracks privately via MP3 players, while on the second floor a still wider selection of California songs is broadcast through a high-quality audio system.

Guest curator James M. Keller has been known to San Francisco music lovers since 2000 as the Program Annotator of the San Francisco Symphony, to whose audiences he frequently delivers pre-concert lectures. He also serves as Program Annotator of the New York Philharmonic, where this season (his 17<sup>th</sup> with that orchestra) he was named to an endowed chair and where he has previously served as Leonard Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence. He is the author of *Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide*, published in 2011 by Oxford University Press. Trained in musicology at Oberlin, Yale, and the Sorbonne, he received the prestigious ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for feature writing about music in *Chamber Music* magazine. He has contributed articles to books including *Leonard Bernstein: American Original* (HarperCollins), *Leonard Bernstein at Work: His Final Years, 1984-1990* (Amadeus Press), *George Crumb and the Alchemy of Sound* (Colorado College Music Press), and *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press).

For this exhibit, Keller has been assisted by two members of the Society's staff: Director of Library and Archives Patricia L. Keats and Exhibitions and Education Coordinator Tim Evans.

## Introducing a Historically Important Piano

Among the musical instruments on display is a historically significant piano that is being unveiled in this exhibit: an elaborately designed, seven-octave, square grand piano built in San Francisco *circa* 1870 by Jacob Zech. A pioneer among instrument builders of the American West, the German-born Zech arrived in San Francisco in 1856 and for about three decades produced award-winning pianos that were considered to rival those of leading East Coast piano manufacturers. This important piano, Zech No. 587, was donated to The Society of California Pioneers in June 2011 by Valerie Klung, and the Society is pleased to unveil it as a part of this exhibit, even as it awaits future restoration to full playing condition.

## Sheet Music as an Integral Part of Local Popular Culture

The sheet music on display harks back to a pre-radio and pre-television time when people made music at home as a matter of course, and a piano was considered essential for the middle-class parlor. Says Keller: “Although some of the songs and piano solos in this exhibit would have been performed in theaters, bandstands, and other public places, many were crafted for domestic music-makers. The American piano industry peaked in 1909, when nearly 365,00 pianos were built in this country—one newly purchased for every 55 households. A good-quality upright piano, the standard design for home use, might cost \$400 to \$500, this when a worker's average annual income was about \$625. The piano was a luxury item, but to many it was an ‘essential luxury’ and it was put to good use. The songs that were sung around the parlor piano reflected the attitudes of the day. They were about love and humor and distant places, but many also reflected what people found interesting in the world around them, including the place where they happened to live. At a time before everywhere in America was pretty much like everywhere else, songs often gave voice to civic pride. During the 19th and early-20th centuries, people felt that their own home town was a place worthy of singing about.”

## About The Society of California Pioneers

Established in 1850, The Society of California Pioneers is a lively year-round venue for the study and enjoyment of California history, art, and culture. It was founded by individuals arriving in California prior to 1850 and has continued to thrive under the leadership of several generations who are their direct descendants. Located in downtown San Francisco, the Society operates as both a museum and a library, is open to the public, and features an ongoing series of exhibitions and programs focused uniquely on California.

## EXHIBITION CALENDAR LISTING

**What:** *Singing the Golden State*  
**Where:** The Society of California Pioneers  
300 Fourth Street (at the corner of Folsom Street)  
San Francisco, CA 94107

**When:** Wednesday, January 25, 2012 – Friday, December 7, 2012  
**Gallery Hours:** Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
The first Saturday of every month, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
**Admission:** \$5.00 general admission  
\$2.50 for seniors, students, and AAA members  
**Accessibility:** The Society of California Pioneers museum is wheelchair accessible.  
**Directions:** The MUNI bus lines 9X, 9AX, 9BX, 30, 45, 76, and 91 Owl stop at the Society's front door. In addition to street parking, nearby parking is available at the Fifth and Mission Garage (833 Mission Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets) and the Moscone Center Garage (255 Third Street, between Folsom and Howard Streets).  
Driving directions are available at  
[http://www.californiapioneers.org/visitor\\_info.html](http://www.californiapioneers.org/visitor_info.html)

After December 7, 2012, a condensed version of the *Singing the Golden State* will tour throughout California under the auspices of Exhibit Envoy, a non-profit organization that facilitates the distribution of ready-to-install exhibits to regional museums.

Public programs connected to this exhibit will be detailed in a subsequent press release.

For more information on hours or directions, please call the Society at 415-957-1849, ext. 32, or check its website at [www.californiapioneers.org](http://www.californiapioneers.org).

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