

From the studio of Cece Bell

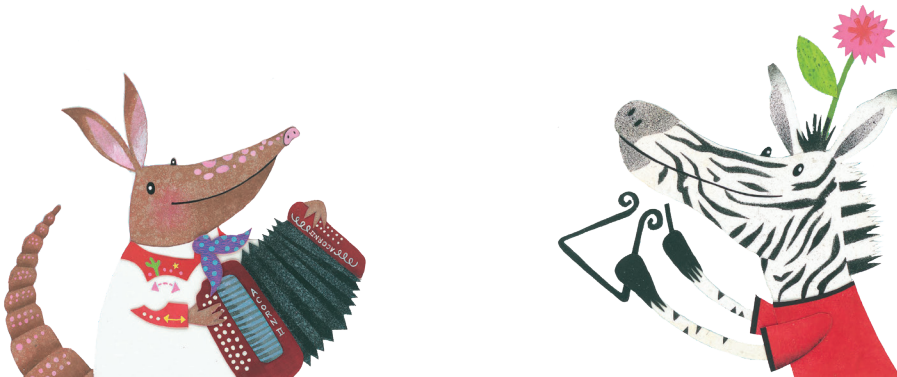
I love finding and acquiring old albums, especially those created by animal musicians. The “animal albums” in my treasured collection reflect the visionary work of several small, human-run recording studios whose mission was to elevate and promote musical talents of all kinds. From the 1940s to the 1980s, these albums proved somewhat popular and profitable, with the animal musicians themselves experiencing varying degrees of success.

However, my research reveals that these albums were never easy for the studios to produce. The communication difficulties between humans and animals during the recording sessions were a constant challenge; the volatile disagreements regarding proper toileting procedures could not have helped, either. By the early 1980s these difficulties, coupled with a waning interest from audiences both human and animal, signaled the beginning of the end of an extraordinary time in the history of music.

Although many animal albums were made during the heyday of recorded animal music, today they are hard to find. I search for them in the record stacks at thrift stores and antique malls, and when I’m lucky, I’ll spot one with a quirky and eye-catching album cover and grab it up. If I’m *really* lucky, that album will include song lyrics on the back; these are especially a treat, as I don’t hear very well and seldom understand what the animals are singing. But I *can* tell you that the music on these albums is surprisingly good. I have spent many a happy hour placing records on my turntable, listening intently and following along as the animals sing about all sorts of things, particularly love and food and a deep love of food. (I myself am particularly fond of the bouncing harmonies of the Barbershop Beagles, the elegant crooning of the elephant Ella Fontaine, and the hilarious rhymes of the Hip-Hop Hedgehogs. Even the overwrought warbling of Olga, the Ostrich of Opera, is rather good—though in truth, opera is not really my thing.) These artists have charmed me so thoroughly that I’ve begun accumulating memorabilia related to them as well.

Recently, as I was admiring my rich assortment of albums and organizing them alphabetically, a marvelous idea occurred to me: Why not share the visual beauty of some of this cherished collection with you? To that end, Dear Reader, I present to you, along with song lyrics and delightful bits of treasured memorabilia, a selection of twenty-six animal albums from A to Z. I leave you now with my fervent hope that this book might inspire you to search for some animal albums of your very own.

—Cece Bell




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