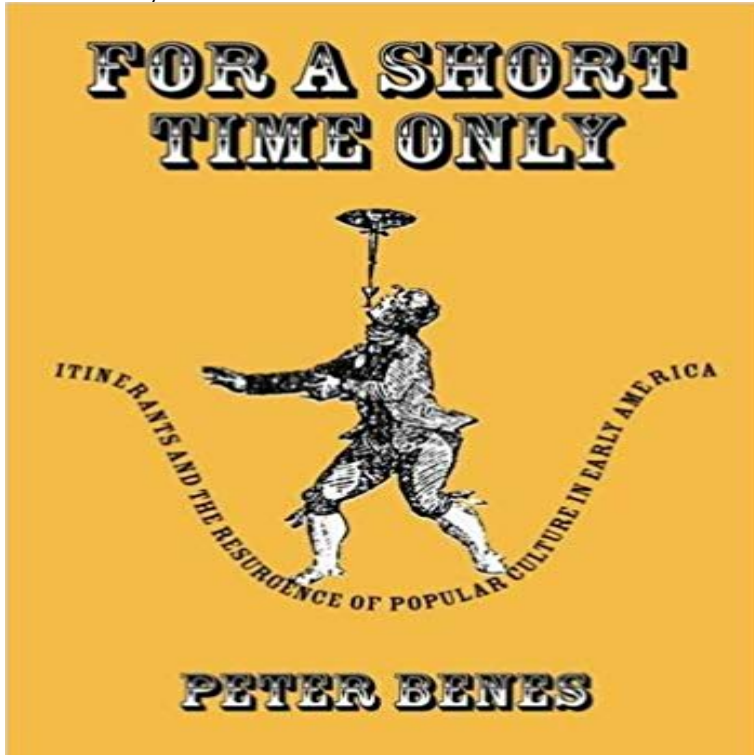


For a Short Time Only: Itinerants and the Resurgence of Popular Culture in Early America



By the 1740s, colonists living in North America began to encounter scores of itinerant performers from England and Europe. These show people?acrobats, wire dancers, tumblers, trick riders, painters, dancing-masters, waxworks proprietors, healers, and singing and language teachers?brought novelty and culture to remote areas. Advertising in newspapers, they attracted audiences with the hook of appearing for a short time only. In this richly illustrated and deeply researched book, Peter Benes examines the rise of early American popular culture through the lives and work of itinerants who circulated in British North America and the United States from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. Although they were frequently reviled as quacks and absconders by many provincials, these transients enjoyed a unique camaraderie and found audiences among high- and lowbrow alike. Drawing on contemporary diaries, letters, reminiscences, and hitherto inaccessible newspaper ads, broadsides, and images, Benes suggests why some elements of Europe's carnival and folklore traditions failed to gain acceptance in American society while others flourished brilliantly.

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