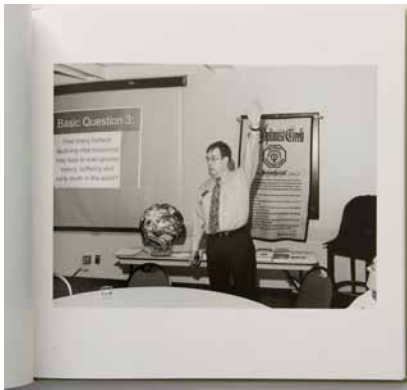


# Songbook Alec Soth

*Book Review by Brian Steptoe FRPS*



27x28.5cm,  
144 pages, 73  
photographs,  
tritone printed,  
green canvas  
padded cover,  
published  
by MACK,  
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Alec Soth has said that he sees this as his most important photobook since *Sleeping By The Mississippi*. It is a work to be read multiple times over, with more able to be extracted by the reader each time. If you are familiar with Soth's four Little Brown Mushroom publications during 2012 and early 2013 in partnership with writer Brad Zellar, a number

of photos in *Songbook* will be re-encountered from those earlier works. But here they are accompanied on a few pages by wording selections from songs of the 1930s, creating an element of nostalgia and yearnings for simpler times.

Many of the photos give thought to the reader. And then there are more subtleties in the sequencing. Images of solo flying, parachuting, writing in the skies, followed by a Dakota oil worker (perhaps fracking), then tumbling waters, lead us to the Optimist Club, with a question about declining resources on the screen. Soth himself has said that sometimes the stories can reside in between the sequence of photos.

How strange some of the institutions featured seem to the British viewer. We see activities that

perhaps fill otherwise rather empty lives, Then we are brought up with a bang by an execution scene from Huntsville prison.

How was Soth able to find all these happenings? But then we may recall the motto that luck comes to those photographers that look for it - *The best photographers are adept at getting luck on their side and being in a position to capture the luck when it happens ...* David Hurn.

An extensive interview with Alec Soth was published in the March 2015 issue of the *British Journal of Photography*.

The first major UK exhibition of Alec Soth's work, including *Songbook*, will be held at the Media Space, London in Autumn 2015.