

Breaking Down Bluegrass: The Invention of a Genre from Ballads to Banjos to Bill Monroe

By Lorna Dries

“Bluegrass is a wonderful music. I’m glad I originated it.”

-Bill Monroe

Introduction



Live Bluegrass music at Shreves Store in Smoke Hole Canyon, West Virginia

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smoke_Hole_-_Shreves_Store_2.jpg

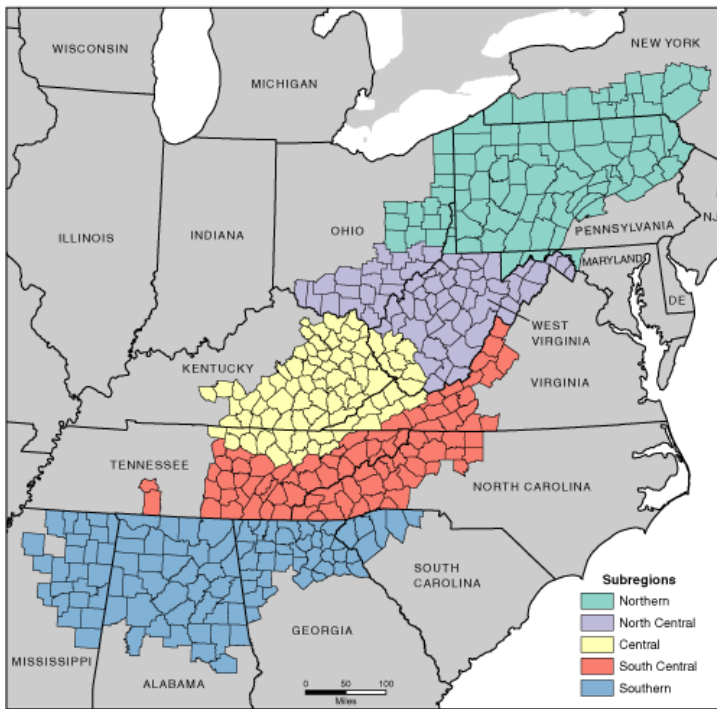
Bluegrass is possibly unlike any other traditional American musical genre. Like most other American traditional music, its origins come from a mix of music brought over from various immigrant groups. Unlike most other American traditional music, its creation can be traced back to one man: Bill Monroe. What started as Monroe’s sped-up and tightly structured brand of old-time or hillbilly music became a musical genre that would sprout its own permutations and variations.

In its purest form, bluegrass incorporates the following musical elements: the use of acoustic instruments; fast, virtuosic playing; tight vocal harmony in either two-, three-, or four-part harmony; and planned instrumental solos for individual musicians (Rosenberg 5). A typical bluegrass band is generally comprised of a banjo player, fiddler, stand-up bass player, guitarist, and mandolin player. Some bluegrass bands include a Dobro guitar; however, this is not an instrument Monroe included when he first was credited with the bluegrass sound.

Although bluegrass can be traced to Appalachian mountain music and various aspects of the African-American music traditions, it is by and large a commercial music, devised and performed with the microphone and for the stage (Rosenberg 5). Although Bill Monroe learned to play and sing music along with the rest of his siblings, he started performing publicly and for profit with his brother, Charlie, touring and playing on radio shows such as "The Grand Ole Opry."

Bluegrass's story is one offshoot path of the American musical journey. Considered by many as a part of country music, it shares ancestors with several American folk music genres. This Discovery Guide is not so much concerned with the history of the genre of bluegrass but rather the musical heritage that informed the creation of the genre.

Mountain Ballads



Map by: Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009.

Appalachia and its subregions, Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009

http://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=31

tended to attract poorer people looking for cheaper or unwanted land" (McClatchy). The Scottish, Irish, and Welsh settlers came to the Appalachian region looking for land and isolation. They brought with them rural British ballads, narrative poems passed down from generation to

An analysis of bluegrass music generally starts with an examination of the folk music played by the British settlers who populated the Appalachian Mountains during the 18th century. At this time, the Appalachian Mountain region was a place difficult to traverse and even more difficult to populate: "Two hundred million years of erosion turned the Appalachians from high, Alp-like peaks into rounded hills, but ridges of hard quartz sandstone survived, forming long valleys of softer shale. This produced a long range of accordion-like steep ridges, full of foliage entanglements like mountain laurel, and therefore difficult to transverse, alongside valleys and 'hollers' full of generally agriculturally useless soil. The Appalachians therefore

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generation (Price 6), which were monophonic, in minor or modal tonalities and sung unaccompanied with little emotional expression. Instrumental music took the form of dances, which were played on fiddles and sometimes dulcimers.

The ballads that the settlers sang were centuries-old tunes and stories, comprised of many verses and many variations. These songs were from "the British tradition of the single personal narrative, but the list was selective; most of the one hundred or so variations of the three hundred classic ballads found in American tradition are to do with sexual struggles from the female standpoint, as *Barbary Allen*, *Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender*, and *Pretty Polly*" (McClatchy). After a period of time, ballads' lyrics were changed by the Appalachian settlers to reflect their new environment. "Names of characters and locales were Americanized: 'The Oxford Girl' became 'The Knoxville Girl,' while 'Bonnie George Campbell' turned into 'Georgie Collins' (Price 8). Due to the distance between settlements in the Appalachians and the nature of the variability due to oral transmission, people living in relatively close proximity to each other could sing widely different versions of the same ballad.

The Appalachian region was mostly isolated from the rest of the American public so that the settlers' musical traditions remained untouched from other influences. However, after the Civil War, the mobility and new-found freedom of slaves and the advent of minstrel shows would influence the music of Appalachia.

The African-American Influence

The importance of African-American musical traditions on bluegrass has often been overlooked in the past. The notion that bluegrass is a purely white musical tradition has been the prevailing narrative in musicological circles. However, racial segregation in the antebellum South, and to a certain extent in the pre-Civil War South, was not as absolute as was previously thought. "At times, many blacks and whites interacted not so much as members of segregated racial groups engaged in cultural imitation or barter but as members of one group sharing class consciousness vis-à-vis the planter class" (Farmelo 182).

Some believe that the segregation of white and black settlers in the mountains was not as prominent among those of ethnic groups who shared the same social class. It is believed that whites and African-Americans often came together through the Church. The second Awakening, a religious revivalist movement that started in the early 19th century, spread through the South starting in Kentucky. The movement "gave rise to the massive outdoor camp meetings where for the first time black and white met on anything like equal terms" (Small 99).

16 STAR IN THE EAST 10, 11. Baptist Harmony, p. 35

Hail the blest morn, see the great Mediator, Down from the regions of glory descend! } *Cantus.* Brightest and best of the sons of the morning!
 Shepherds, go worship the babe in the manger, Lo, for his guard the bright angels attend. }

Down on our darkness, and lend us thine aid; Star in the east, the ho - ri - son a - dorn - ing. Guide where our infant Re - deemer was laid.

2 Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining;
 Low lies his bed, with the beasts of the stall;
 Angels adore him, in slumbers reclining,
 Wise men and shepherds before him do fall.
 Brightest and best, &c.

3 Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
 Odours of Eden, and offerings divine,
 Gems from the mountain, and pearls from the ocean,
 Myrrh from the forest, and gold from the mine?
 Brightest and best, &c.

4 Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
 Vainly with gold we his favour secure,
 Richer by far is the heart's adoration:
 Dearest to God are the prayers of the poor
 Brightest and best, &c.

"Star in the East" from the 1854 edition of *The Southern Harmony*, pg. 16

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Star_in_the_east.png

The revivalist religious movement also helped to spread what was known as shape note singing schools. Shape note singing was devised in the late 18th century as a way to allow religious congregations to sing better. Each note on a scale was assigned a specific shape that would indicate pitch to the congregation. This methodology was perfect for congregants who were not

music literate. Shape note singing became popular throughout the Antebellum South. The hymn texts were taken from English hymnists such as Isaac Watts and Charles and John Wesley, as well as from poems by lesser-known American hymnists. The melodies drew upon songs from varying musical traditions—fiddle tunes, psalms, ballads, camp-meeting tunes, and anthems (Campbell). The evidence of African American involvement in shape note singing is difficult to find, although it has been discovered that “before the Civil War black singers, both slave and free, participated avidly in shape-note singings (particularly during interracial camp meetings), often having a marked impact on the style of music the antebellum books contained” (Campbell).

Other religious musical traditions include “lining out,” where a cantor would shout out lines of a hymn in a timed fashion so that the congregation would be able to follow the next line. This helped in areas where song books were difficult to come by and where a portion of the congregation was illiterate. African-American slaves were exposed to lining out during the pre-Civil War era. “Among the slaves, lining out was called raising a hymn. The minister or a devout male member of the community would raise the hymn. Instead of singing the lines of the hymn as they were written, or reciting them in an oratorical manner, the leader would chant the lines, often chanting two lines at a time to a tune unrelated to the tune the congregation would sing” (Boyer 7).

The most obvious African-American contribution to bluegrass was the banjo. The banjo originated from a single-stringed, gourd-bodied instrument from Africa. Later, the gourd was replaced with a wooden hoop covered in a taut skin. A four-string version of the instrument

emerged in the late 17th century, and a five string version (the addition of the fifth string is normally attributed to the Scottish-American musician Joel Walker Sweeney) can be seen in paintings of black banjo players from between 1777 and 1800 (Farmelo 189). Farmelo argues that the banjo is "probably the first distinctly African-American instrument. Details aside, the banjo grew up on the North American continent as part of a resilient African heritage" (189). Musicologists and folklorists have varying theories of exactly how white Southern Appalachian residents came to know of the instrument. Some believe that freed slaves traveling through the Appalachians brought the first banjos to the region. Others believe that there was more cultural interaction between whites and African Americans during this period.



"Away Down South in Dixie," c. 1898, three African-American soldiers playing banjos

Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>

performers making music. While this exposure to the banjo via minstrel shows is heavily documented with newspaper advertisements and magazine and journal articles, it is less evident how the banjo playing styles of African Americans were taught to the white performers (Farmelo 190). However, the use of the banjo in these minstrel shows became a symbol to newly freed African-American slaves who wanted to distance themselves from the plantation slave stereotype that minstrelsy portrayed. It was this that brought African-American folk musicians to play the banjo less frequently. Thus, the banjo was removed from the African-American folk music narrative and transferred to the white Southern Appalachian heritage (191). Despite this, some African-American string bands, most of which came from the North Carolina Piedmont region, were playing during the 1920s.

White banjo players most often used the clawhammer playing technique – a highly percussive style used by minstrel performers who most likely learned the playing style from African-American

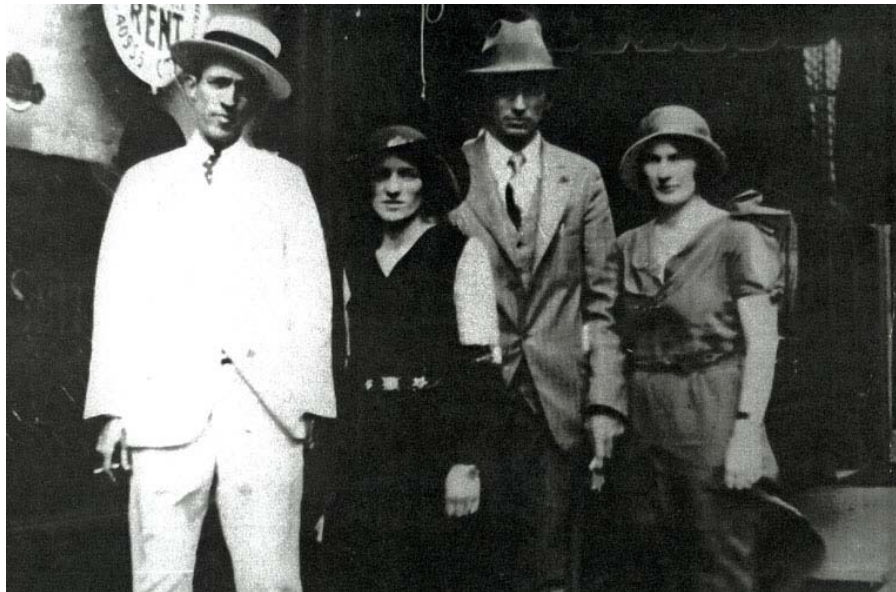
However, many folklorists believe the banjo was brought to the Southern Appalachian region via traveling minstrel shows themselves, which featured white performers imitating African-American

can banjo players. Robert Cantwell describes clawhammer banjo player as "using the force of his wrist and sometimes of his forearm [to bring] the back of his fingernail down upon the string, snapping it and striking the banjo head more or less forcefully at the terminus of its arc" (93). He goes on to say that this motion "encapsulates the note in a hard percussive shell which dissolves with the decay of the tone" (93).

Recordings, Radio and Mail-Order Catalogs

At the beginning of the 19th century, outside interest in the music of the Appalachian mountains began to accumulate. Academic folklorists such as Cecil Sharp and Francis James Child traveled the region cataloging the Scots-Irish ballads that were still being sung in the Appalachians. However, it wasn't until the commercial world came to the Appalachians that mainstream America would be exposed to its music.

Phonographs and radios made their way into the mountains much like instruments such as the guitar, auto-harp, and manufactured banjos made their way to the Appalachians: mail order catalogs. With this new technology, mountain folk became more connected to the rest of the country. However, the rest of the country



Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, Bristol, TN, 1931

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/tn/es_tn_bristol_1_e.html

would have to wait until the 1920s before the region's music came to them. Okeh Record's 1923 recording of Fiddlin' John Carson, the first documented recording of rural American music, brought about enough of a success that it prompted another recording company, the Victor Talking Machine Company, to get into the mix. Victor lured Ralph Peer, an arts and repertoire scout from Okeh, to find rural talent like Carson. Arts and repertoire men, or A&R men, were essentially talent scouts. In 1927, Peer set up a recording session in the town of Bristol, which straddled the state borders of Tennessee and Virginia and was in close enough proximity to other Appalachian states like Kentucky, North Carolina, and Georgia. For around two weeks, Peer recorded local and rural talent, trying to boost Victor's old-time music collections. These recording

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sessions are popularly known as the birth of country music, as Victor discovered such acts as Jimmie Rodgers, a yodeler who would later be called the "Father of Country Music," and the Carter Family, who would later be known as the "First Family of Country Music" (Kimball).

This newly found music was labeled as "hillbilly," although musical styles varied widely between the performers. The Carter Family, hailing from Virginia, sang mostly sentimental songs arranged in tight harmonies and accompanied by guitar and auto harp. The Carter Family's harmonies harkened back to the shape-note singing prevalent in the Appalachian region. Jimmie Rodgers was a railroad drifter from Mississippi who incorporated blues into his sentimental songs (Rosenberg 19). Contrasts could be found in every region and among every type of ensemble. There were variants among seemingly akin ensembles such as string bands. Rosenberg states that in the early 1930s "hillbilly bands were looser in structure and sound than those that followed in the forties and fifties when bluegrass emerged. Most performers had solo specialties—comedy, instrumental skills, or songs—within the band" (21). Fiddlin' John Carson, who hailed from Georgia, released hoe-dance tunes like "Dance All Night with a Bottle in Your Hand," which Carson humorously prefaced on the recording by calling it "You Can't Get Milk from a Cow Named Ben" (Price 22). Gid Tanner, another fiddler from Georgia, cultivated a boisterous and fast sound with his group the Skillet Lickers. The band was comprised of Tanner, guitarist Riley Puckett, fiddler Clayton McMichen, and Fate Norris on banjo. Fiddle solos were taken on top of each other in a no-holds barred style. The Skillet Lickers' repertoire included fiddle tunes, reels inherited from the Scots-Irish Appalachian settlers, novelty songs, sacred songs, sentimental songs, and tunes pulled from the current popular music repertoire. Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers had a less boisterous style. Poole developed a three-finger banjo playing style that picked out discernible melodies while providing accompaniment for the band's fiddlers (Price 22-23). In comparison to the unfettered playing style of the Skillet Lickers, Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers were "crisply articulated and scrupulously metrical, nearly as rigid rhythmically and as free of dynamic changes as a player piano" (Cantwell 53).

However, at the advent of the Depression, most string bands lost much of their audience as consumers had to cut back on non-essentials such as entertainment. Recordings companies cut back on their releases of old-time music. The type of old-time group that was still promoted regularly during the Depression was that of the brother duo (Price 23). It was this type of act that would bring Bill Monroe his first fame.

The Monroe Brothers

Bill Monroe was the youngest of eight children born to James Buchanan "Buck" and Malissa (Vandiver) Monroe. The family hailed from Western Kentucky, across the state from the Appalachian mountain range. Monroe's mother Malissa and her brother Pendleton "Pen" Vandiver were very musical and passed this on to Malissa's children. The youngest four children were especially interested in music, and each took up an instrument. Rosenberg describes the

family dynamics that led to Bill's choice of instrument: "[Bill] would have liked to specialize in the fiddle or the guitar, but as the youngest and smallest he was ... assigned the mandolin in the family orchestra" (28). The mandolin was not the most prominent of instruments in old-time music, but there were instances of mandolin playing in the region (Price 15).

Monroe's mother died when he was 10. Several years after her death, Bill began to play accompaniment for his Uncle Pen's fiddle at local dances. Pen would be Bill's most formative musical influence, prompting him to write the song "Uncle Pen." He also cited another local musician as one of his seminal influences. Arnold Schultz was a black coal miner who played the guitar and fiddle in the evening. Bill accompanied Schultz at dances at well and was local in his admiration of Schultz's virtuosity (Rosenberg 28). These influences very well may have informed Bill's mandolin playing style. The instrument had been used to play block chords as accompaniment. However, Bill tuned the mandolin as one would a fiddle, giving it the potential to be played as a lead instrument. Bill worked on his technique so that he could play blues notes, driving rhythms, and sustained tremolos (Price 32).



The Monroe Brothers, c. 1936

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MonroeBrothers.jpg>

Monroe's father died when Bill was 16. He and his brothers, Birch and Charlie, moved to a Chicago suburb to find work. There, they found an outlet for their musical abilities on the radio program the *WLS Barn Dance*, which would later move to Nashville in 1939 and be known by a different name: *The Grand Ole Opry*. Bill, Birch, and Charlie kept their labor jobs, although they continued to play and tour as much as they could. Birch decided to leave the trio,

which left Charlie and Bill to form a brother duet, a type of musical act that was very popular during the Depression era (Price 31). The two were offered a sponsorship from Texas Crystals, better known as Crazy Water Crystals, and became full-time professional musicians in 1934. The Monroe Brothers gained popularity, becoming regulars on several radio programs and recording for Victor Records (Rosenberg 35). The brothers' repertoire was half religious songs, with very few original songs mixed. However, their recordings of songs such as "Roll in My Sweet Baby's

Arms" and "New River Train" helped to make those tunes standards in many other upland Southern musicians' repertoires.

In 1939, Charlie and Bill lost their manager and, subsequently, split ways. Rosenberg describes the breakup as "the subject of legends endemic to the country music business" and says that Charlie's version of what happened—"We were hot-headed and mean as snakes"—may be the most accurate depiction of the split (35). Whatever the cause, the split left Bill to experiment with a sound that Price describes as including "Carter Family harmonies and instrumentals, Jimmie Rodgers' yodeling blues, Western swing, and Dixieland jazz and ragtime" (32).

The Blue Grass Boys

After the break-up with Charlie, Bill moved to Atlanta and placed an ad in the paper looking for a guitarist and singer. Former farm hand Cleo Davis was hired as Bill's replacement for Charlie. They were hired to do a daily 15-minute program, "Mountain Music Time," on WWNC in Asheville, North Carolina, where the Monroe Brothers had had a steady gig. Davis believed that Monroe specifically sought to play in places where the Monroe Brothers' frequented to "regain his popularity over the airwaves as he was building his own group" (Rosenberg 41). Monroe soon added fiddler Art Wooten and bass player Amos Garen. Although the string bass was not a common instrument used in string bands during the 1930s, its addition gave Monroe's band a strong rhythmic foundation and also separated his sound from that of the Monroe Brothers. This was the first incarnation of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys.

Monroe had great control over his band's sound: he worked with Davis on his guitar runs and, because Monroe's mandolin was tuned the same as a fiddle, he could show Wooten how to bow the notes the way he wanted them. Monroe also chose gospel quartets as a solid part of the band's repertoire, which were popular both with white and African-American audiences. This required much rehearsal and training. Although Monroe's tenor voice was used as harmony during his stint with Charlie, Bill found that he could shift parts, singing lead on the verses and harmonizing tenor on the chorus. Along with the use of the mandolin, the use of the tenor voice as lead was another key aspect to the genre Monroe was formulating (Rosenberg 43).

Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys auditioned for the Grand Ole Opry in 1939. Although accounts vary as to what songs the band played for the audition, it was agreed that the band played its version of Jimmie Rodgers' "Mule Skinner Blues." This would become one of Monroe's signature tunes, and he would go on to record it three times in his career. By Monroe's account, "Mule Skinner Blues" was the first song he ever performed on the Opry and the first song for which he ever received an encore there (Rosenberg 47).

each other, the Blue Grass Boys took their solos one at a time, much like jazz musicians divvy up their solos. And in Flatt and Scruggs, Monroe had virtuosic musicians that could meet his high standards. The sound Monroe had been tinkering to find had finally coalesced: "Each individual band member was given an opportunity to step into the spotlight, while the gospel quartet singing underscored the solidarity of the group, as did their musical interplay on the many songs where each instrument took its turn" (Rosenberg 76). However, by 1948, Flatt and Scruggs had left the band within days of each, taking Cedric Rainwater and Chubby Wise with them to form a new band.

Publicly, both Flatt and Scruggs denied that the two had any plans to form a new group when they left. Scruggs maintained that the grueling touring schedule was too much for him—consecutive appearances could be several hundred miles apart and could be scheduled two at a time in one afternoon. He hoped to stay home and tend to his aging mother. However, Monroe was known to be a demanding band leader, and his Blue Grass Boys became "a virtual 'school of bluegrass'" (New World Encyclopedia). A varying account of the split came from Jake Lambert, Flatt's biographer. Lambert maintained that, although the bandmembers were paid 60 dollars a week, they were required to do much more work than Monroe. Flatt did all the emcee work on the shows, while Scruggs was in charge of handling the group's finances. After spending enough time carrying around thousands of dollars in cash, it was not hard for Scruggs to see that they were making much less than Monroe and doing much more of the work (Rosenberg 79).



A man playing a Dobro guitar

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Man_playing_dobro.jpg

Flatt and Scruggs formed the Foggy Mountain Boys. The group included Flatt on guitar and lead vocals, Scruggs on banjo, Rainwater on bass, and Wise on fiddle. Flatt and Scruggs added one more element to their band: a dobro guitarist. The Dobro guitar was brought to the American public by in the 1920s by the Dopera brothers, Czechoslovakian immigrants who started their own guitar manufacturing company. The Dobro features a raised bridge and a resonator that amplifies the "slides and whines produced by fretting the metal strings with a steel bar ... through mail-order sales and swapping, the instru-

ment made its way along the Appalachian chain" (Price 24). The Dobro is played with the instrument across the musician's lap and is tuned to an open chord. It has become one of the standard instruments used in bluegrass, along with the fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, and bass.

Bluegrass as a Genre



Ralph Stanley performs April 20, 2008.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ralph_Stanley_2006.jpg

the fledgling genre. Bluegrass was still considered a part of country music, which was coming under fire in the 1950s with the advent of rock 'n' roll. That new genre, which was a concoction of rhythm and blues, country, and gospel music, was claiming country musicians by the handful. Hank Williams and Roy Acuff had already been accused of changing their styles in order to get radio airplay. As country musicians began dropping traditional country instruments such as the fiddle, audiences who liked the sound were drawn to the genre of bluegrass. This genre-bending by mainstream country artists further solidified bluegrass' status as a genre unto itself.

However, some artists were considered to have a bluegrass sound even though the artists themselves never considered themselves as such. When the Stanley Brothers—comprised of guitarist and singer Carter and banjo player and tenor singer Ralph—first came on the scene, Monroe resented that the band was categorized as bluegrass, as he thought the Stanley Brothers were

It took several years after Flatt and Scruggs' departure before bluegrass was officially considered its own genre. "Blue Grass" was considered more of Bill Monroe's trademark: not only was his group called the "Blue Grass Boys" but Monroe had recorded four songs with "Blue Grass" in the title, christened his tour bus the Blue Grass Special, named the professional baseball team that traveled with his show the Blue Grass Club, and released a 1950 songbook titled "Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Country Songs" (Rosenberg 98). However, it was not until 1956 when Monroe actually referred to his music as bluegrass. While visiting Rising Sun, Maryland's New River Ranch, Monroe told the operator that the country music park was "a wonderful booster of the bluegrass type of music" (98). The naming of the genre most likely occurred as a marketing tool by radio deejays and record companies. While audiences were demanding groups that played with the "bluegrass sound"—fast-paced, rhythmic old-time music with virtuosic solos and tight vocal harmonies—deejays and record companies were the first to pick up on the demand for

merely copying his signature sound. Much later, Ralph Stanley confided that he never identified his sound as bluegrass, saying that he has always preferred the term old-time mountain music (Rogovoy). Mandolin player Everett Lilly, who played with Flatt and Scruggs for two years in the 1950s, calls bluegrass a "'feud word' and prefers to describe his music as 'American folk and country music'" (Rosenberg 102).

Whatever Stanley and Lilly's feelings on the genre, it has become an accepted form of music, whether it be a subset of country, folk, or old-time music. At this time, bluegrass has established itself as a viable genre that has grown in popularity and international renown. Bluegrass festivals can be found throughout the US and abroad, evidenced by the European World of Bluegrass Festival. Rosenberg tells of Akira Otsuka, a mandolin player who moved to the US from Japan with his band the Bluegrass 45 in the early 1940s. He continued his career in the US, playing with different bands.

Bluegrass has not remained static. Several musicians in the 1960s and 1970s mixed bluegrass with other genres. Bluegrass has even spawned his own sub-genre, newgrass, which includes the use of drums and electric instruments. The most famous practitioner of this is multi-instrumentalist Bela Fleck who fused together jazz and bluegrass. However, many bluegrass purists do not approve of the liberties some musicians have taken with the genre. Rosenberg describes these fans as "cut from a somewhat different cloth. Their loyalty is not to the musicians but to a musical concept, an ideal against which they measure every bluegrass performance" (362). He also states that fans have become unforgiving with the stylistic wanderings of musicians who have fused together genres (340).



American country/bluegrass musician Alison Krauss performing at MerleFest, Wilkes Community College, Wilkes County, North Carolina.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alison_Krauss_MerleFest_2007_01.jpg

In the 20th anniversary edition of his "Bluegrass: A History," Rosenberg discusses the changes in the world of bluegrass since his book was first published in 1985. The most important contribution, he adds, is from fiddler and singer Alison Krauss, who helped break through the gender barrier of a genre that saw mostly men as its practitioners. Krauss was also involved in the soundtrack for the Coen Brothers film "O Brother Where Art Thou?," whose

soundtrack was touted as bluegrass. Rosenberg dismissed the bulk of the soundtrack as bluegrass, stating that "Man of Constant Sorrow" is the only true bluegrass tune in the film. (As a side note, "Man of Constant Sorrow" was made popular by the Stanley Brothers; it has already been noted that Ralph Stanley never believed his music to be bluegrass.) Whatever the appellation, the soundtrack did bring more awareness to the genre and made an unlikely pop star of Ralph Stanley, who sang an a cappella version of "O, Death" on the soundtrack.

Whether one agrees with the bluegrass purists or not, it is natural for genre to take on mutations and adaptations as it grows. This means that the bluegrass repertoire is growing as well; on various albums, Krauss has covered a wide variety of songs in the bluegrass, from the Beatles "I Will" to the Foundations' "Build Me Up Buttercup." While these seem unusual choices for a bluegrass performance, it must be remembered that string bands in the pre-bluegrass days performed popular songs and novelty songs that were not part of the Appalachian mountain repertoire. Just as bluegrass was formed, through the accumulation of bits and pieces of traditions from various American ethnic and social groups, it can be built upon in the same way.

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