

# APPALACHIA *Heritage and Harmony*

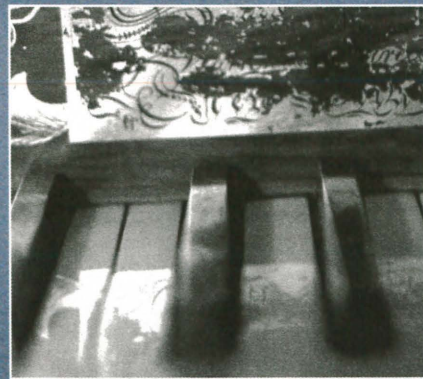
by JEFF PLACE

Co-curator of the *Appalachia: Heritage and Harmony* program, Jeff Place has run the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian since 1988. He is a two-time Grammy-winning producer of 25 compact discs of American folk music for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

THE PERIOD FROM JULY 2002 THROUGH JULY 2003 has been declared by Congress the “Year of Appalachia.” The year also marks the 75th anniversary of the historically important Victor recording sessions held in Bristol, Tennessee, in 1927. A small museum in Bristol administered by the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance (BCMA)—a non-profit group run by country music enthusiasts and supporters of Appalachian music that is also an affiliate of the Smithsonian—approached the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage with a proposal to mount a Folklife Festival program in 2003 celebrating Appalachian culture. The year began with a series of regional concerts in Appalachia and now culminates with the *Appalachia: Heritage and Harmony* program on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Smithsonian staff worked closely with scholars and experts in the Appalachian region to help us tell their story, to discover what qualities in the region have made it such a hotbed of musical creativity and cooperation. Especially important in this process have been the staff of the BCMA and the Center for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. We also relied on volunteers from other regional institutions—music scholars, musicians,





Photos by Scott Odell

and experts on Appalachian culture—and we thank them for their contributions of time and knowledge.

Although it was not the first time country music had been recorded for commercial distribution, the 1927 Bristol Sessions are considered the “big bang” that kicked off the country music industry. These were the first recordings of the original Carter Family and the singing brakeman, Jimmie Rodgers, the two most important early country music stars. They began what has now become a multi-billion-dollar business. For this reason the area around Bristol, Virginia/Tennessee, has been referred to as “the Birthplace of Country Music.” (For more on the Bristol Sessions see page 18.)

The program *Appalachia: Heritage and Harmony* focuses on the region within a hundred miles of Bristol, although certainly important music was and still is being made in the other parts of Appalachia. What forces converged in this one area of the United States to produce this music? There were various factors: isolation, strength of family, a strong religious faith, a feeling of community, and a sense of innovation. People come together musically at various social settings—home, church, festivals. One can find local stores where people gather to “jam” on weekends; the store in Floyd,

*Appalachia: Heritage and Harmony* is produced in collaboration with the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance and the Center for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University.

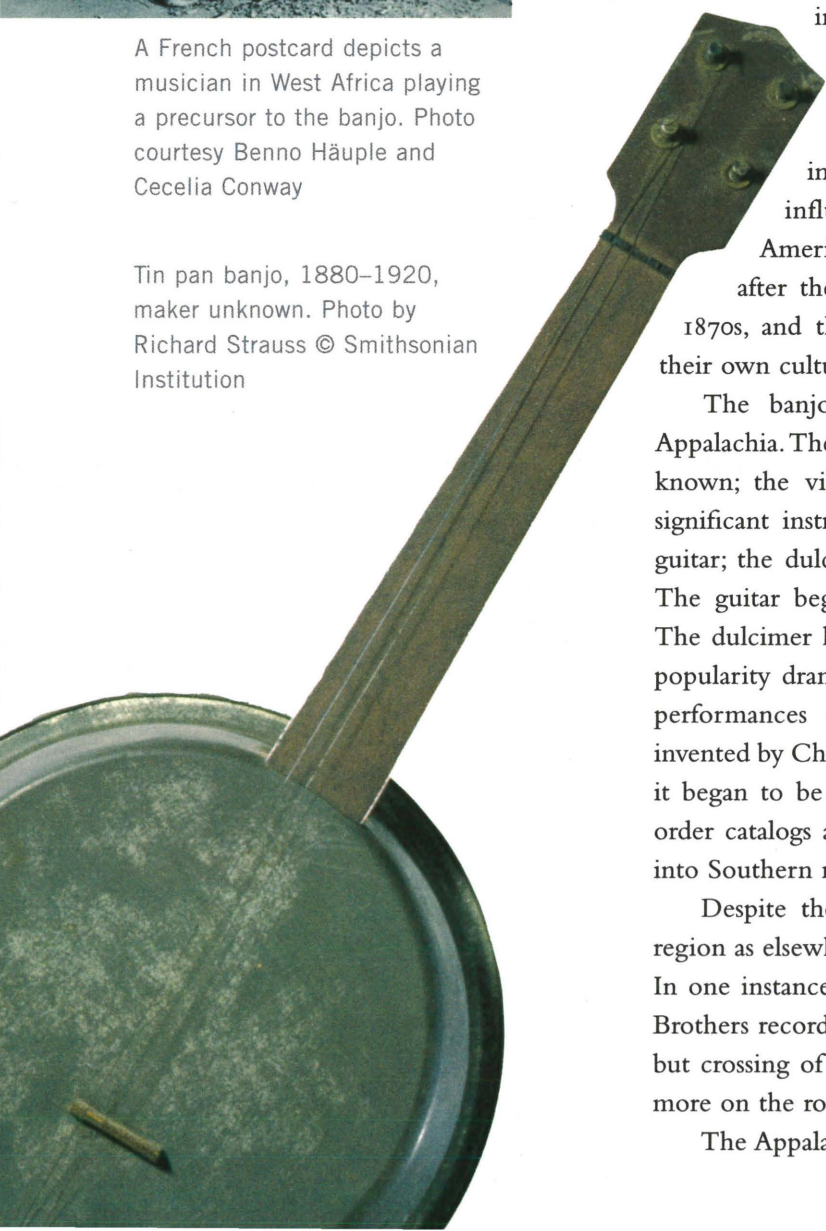
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A French postcard depicts a musician in West Africa playing a precursor to the banjo. Photo courtesy Benno Häuple and Cecelia Conway

Tin pan banjo, 1880–1920, maker unknown. Photo by Richard Strauss © Smithsonian Institution



Virginia, is one of the best known. These non-programmed gatherings to play music are important to the culture. At music festivals, musicians can be found playing together wherever they can find space. The area's music has influenced subsequent American popular music, but traditional music is still alive and thriving in the region, with younger people learning to play. Traditional music is even being taught in schools, such as the Mt. Rogers Combined School in Virginia and East Tennessee State University, which has a program in bluegrass. Nowadays, the music is also played and loved all over the planet, from Europe to Japan.

The Festival program surveys the different kinds of music one can find in the region. There are older master performers and those just starting out. During our research for this program, we found an embarrassment of riches. For every group we selected to bring to the Festival there were dozens of other worthy candidates.

Of course, music existed in the Appalachian region for many centuries before European colonists arrived. The American Indian peoples have a strong musical tradition, and performers in Cherokee, North Carolina, still dance to and sing traditional songs (see page 30).

The roots of country music as we know it began after the immigration to Appalachia of settlers from the British Isles, beginning in the 1750s and peaking in the 1820s and 1830s. These individuals, moving west into the mountains, brought with them their songs, dances, and instrumental traditions. Over time their traditions were influenced by people around them, especially African Americans. Other groups migrated to the region, particularly after the beginnings of the railroad and coal industries in the 1870s, and these migrants from other European countries brought their own cultures with them as well.

The banjo and fiddle have been the mainstays of music in Appalachia. The banjo is derived from West African lutes that slaves had known; the violin or fiddle has its origins in Europe. Three other significant instruments in the development of country music are the guitar; the dulcimer, an instrument from Germany; and the autoharp. The guitar began to grow in importance in the early 20th century. The dulcimer has been used for solo accompaniment and increased in popularity dramatically during the 1950s, owing to the recordings and performances of Kentucky-born Jean Ritchie. The autoharp was invented by Charles F. Zimmerman in 1865. During the years 1900–1920, it began to be sold in the Southern mountain regions through mail-order catalogs and door-to-door salesmen-tuners, and it found its way into Southern musical groups, most notably the Carter Family.

Despite the segregation that characterized racial relations in the region as elsewhere, blacks and whites would come together over music. In one instance in the 1920s in Georgia, the African-American Baxter Brothers recorded with the Anglo-American Georgia Yellow Hammers, but crossing of boundaries in such circumstances was not unique. (For more on the role of African-American music see page 25.)

The Appalachian mountain region was very isolated before railroad





The Melton and Russell families pose with homemade instruments on Jacob Ray and May Melton's porch in Galax, Virginia, in 1965. Photo by Scott Odell, courtesy J. Scott Odell Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

lines were built, and even afterwards only those near a rail line or with money to leave got out of their own environs. In any event, it took a long time to travel very far, and most people stayed close to home and created their own entertainment. A combination of poverty, self-subsistence, and isolation motivated residents to be innovative. Many a cabin had a homemade banjo or fiddle hanging on the wall. North Carolina guitarist Doc Watson remembers making his own instruments as a child, his first experiment involving tying a wire to the granary door and manipulating it to make notes. The family banjo had been made from the hide of a family pet.

Fiddlers or banjoists would frequently entertain at social functions. A.L. Longstreet, writing in 1835, described a rural house party in Georgia; word was given out that a dance was being held at some farmer's house, a room or two was stripped of furniture, and a fiddler was hired to keep the dancers moving. This same scenario could be repeated a hundred years later. At regional fiddle contests documented as far back as 1736, players would gather to show off their skills (see Malone 2002, 17–18).

Some older ballads from the British Isles were sung as they had come over, but others started to evolve into what began to be referred to as “Native American” ballads. Religious sensitivities made it awkward to sing of the murder, adultery, and thievery that were described in many British ballads, so the plot lines began to be sanitized, or a verse with a moral directive was tacked on at the end. Singers began to compose new “American” songs based on local events, songs like the “Wreck of the Old 97” or “John Henry.”

During the 19th century other musical styles began to influence country singers in Appalachia. Religion has always had an important role in daily life in Appalachia, and in turn religious music has had a major influence on the secular music of the region (see page 27). Appalachian musicians could frequently find common ground by going back to the







## The Bristol Sessions

TED OLSON

Today a commercially successful, internationally appreciated genre of American music, country music was first commercially recorded in the early 1920s. Since then, it has been strongly influenced by traditional and popular music genres from several regions of the United States—by gospel and blues from the South, cowboy music from the West, and Tin Pan Alley music from the North. Granted these influences, Appalachian music and Appalachian musicians have played a central role in the creation and evolution of country music.

Shortly after World War I, technological developments in sound recording led to the proliferation of commercially distributed disks, which showcased opera, Tin Pan Alley pop, marching band, and dance music. African-American audiences preferred recordings of blues music (generally referred to by the record industry at the time as “race music”). The first recording sessions of country music were conducted in the early 1920s, in such cities as New York and Atlanta. Country music was then known as

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“hillbilly music,” a catch-all term for much of the white folk and popular music composed and performed in the Southern United States during that era. Musicians from across the South—including many from Appalachia—traveled to those cities, for the experience of making records and the possibility of financial reward. The music recorded at these studios, incorporating essentially the same repertoire then being performed on front porches and at other community events in the South, sold far more copies than record companies and producers had anticipated. Looking for additional musical talent to make more “hillbilly” records, producers transported equipment to the countryside where the musicians lived. While some of the recordings sold reasonably well, their sound quality was often poor.

Two of the major record companies of the 1920s, Columbia and Okeh, had successfully promoted commercial recordings of “hillbilly music,” while another important label, the Victor Talking Machine Company (later renamed RCA Victor Records), was seeking to tap deeper into the new market. In 1927, Victor hired producer Ralph Peer, who had been responsible for the first commercially successful “hillbilly” records (by Fiddlin’ John Carson, made in Atlanta and released on Okeh). Peer identified an ideal place for making some new recordings: Bristol, a small city straddling the Tennessee/Virginia state line. He knew that some of the finest musicians who

A mural by Tim White, in Bristol, Tennessee, depicts scenes from the 1927 Bristol Sessions, and serves as a backdrop to regional performance groups. Photo courtesy the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance.

had appeared on “hillbilly” records were from this region. On July 22, 1927, Peer and his two engineers set up a temporary studio on the Tennessee side of State Street in downtown Bristol; and on Monday, July 25, the now-famous “Bristol Sessions” began, showcasing a well-known local musician, Ernest Stoneman (from the nearby Virginia Blue Ridge, Stoneman had already enjoyed several “hillbilly” hit recordings). By their completion on Friday, August 5, the Bristol Sessions yielded 76 recorded performances by 19 separate musical acts. Utilizing what was then state-of-the-art equipment, Peer and his engineers ensured that the recordings exceeded all previous “hillbilly” recordings in sound quality. Equally significant was the high quality of the performances that Peer coaxed from the musicians—including two renowned acts “discovered” in Bristol: Jimmie Rodgers, of Meridian, Mississippi, and the Carter Family, from nearby Maces Springs, Virginia.

Although Peer was primarily interested in producing records that would sell, his meticulous attention to quality at Bristol produced definitive recordings of lasting merit. Those recordings continue to influence musicians around the world—perhaps not many contemporary mainstream country musicians, but certainly numerous musicians in the contemporary bluegrass, revivalist folk music, Americana, and rock music scenes. Also remembered within the region that hosted them, the Bristol Sessions are celebrated by such local organizations as the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance in Bristol and at such performance venues as the Carter Family Fold in nearby Hiltons, Virginia.



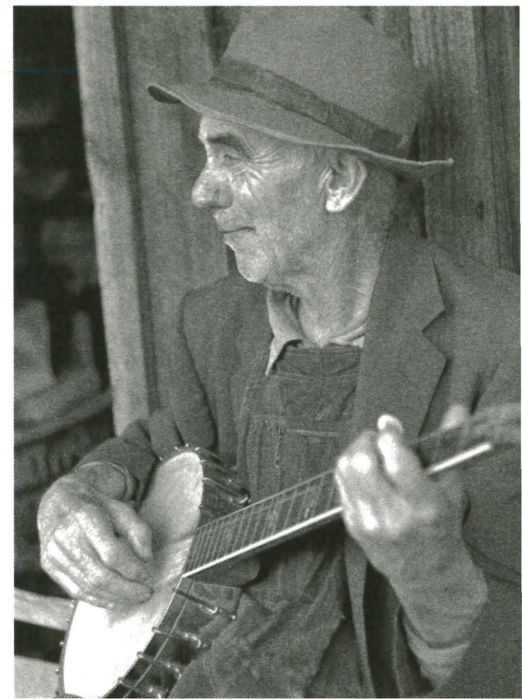
old hymns they learned in church. When bluegrass star Ralph Stanley of Virginia and Kentucky musician Roscoe Holcomb were brought north to play for folk music audiences in the early 1960s, they used to spend time singing from Baptist hymnals while traveling on the bus. The bluegrass repertoire today often includes some of these old hymns, and almost all bluegrass groups record gospel in addition to secular music.

Other forms of popular music were present in the region to learn from. Traveling tent and medicine shows introduced Tin Pan Alley and vaudeville songs and brought instrumental banjo pieces from the minstrel stage to paying audiences. Also, late 19th-century songbooks featured sentimental songs written for the parlor piano. The repertoires of many early country recording artists contained songs from all these sources, intermingling them in a personal style. What is now considered “traditional folk” music frequently includes songs written by professional songwriters during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Two developments in the 1920s helped spread country music. One was the beginnings of radio (see page 21). People would gather to listen to favorite programs at the house of a neighbor who was fortunate enough to have a radio; this became an alternative to the house party. Regional radio shows were very important in promoting the music careers of many regional performers. In the 1930s and 1940s, powerful radio stations were set up right over the Mexican border, to circumvent F.C.C. limitations on wattage. These shows included acts such as the Carter Family, and they could be heard in Appalachia and as far north as Canada. The second development was the beginning of commercial recording, which allowed local Appalachian musicians to make records that could be sold to their neighbors. The Smithsonian Festival program celebrates the recording sessions in Bristol in 1927, the most important of these early sessions. The early records of Appalachian performers featured individual singers, instrumental soloists, gospel singers and groups, and especially string bands.

The Great Depression put a damper on the recording industry, and very few groups sold enough disks to continue to record. Most musicians either stopped playing or performed only locally. The music stayed at home in the region and continued to be part of community life. After World War II, the country music industry discovered there was more money to be made recording new compositions (or copyrighted arrangements of traditional songs) on which additional royalties could be collected, and so traditional music began to be used less and less. However, many of the performers who became big stars in Nashville in the next twenty years had moved there from the Appalachians. Dolly Parton from Sevierville, Tennessee, Patsy Cline from Winchester, Virginia, and Loretta Lynn from Butcher Hollow, Kentucky, were among them. The outside world rediscovered Appalachian music during the Folk Revival of the 1950s and has done so again from time to time since—most recently as a result of the soundtrack of the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

One of the most important musical styles in Appalachia is the string band. A typical string band consisted of fiddle, banjo, and guitar. Some of the early



Sidna Meyers at his home in Five Forks, Virginia, in 1965. Photo by Scott Odell, courtesy J. Scott Odell Collection, Archive Center, National Museum of American History

The Stanley Brothers, Ralph (left) and Carter, perform on WCYB in Bristol in the late 1940s. Photo courtesy the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance







A parking-lot session from the mid-'60s at the Galax Oldtime Fiddler's Convention in Galax, Virginia. Photo by Scott Odell, courtesy J. Scott Odell Collection, Archive Center, National Museum of American History

At the 1927 Bristol Sessions Ernest "Pop" Stoneman (guitar) and Hattie Stoneman performed as part of The Dixie Mountaineers. Photo courtesy the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance



string bands of note were Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, the Skillet Lickers, the Fruit Jar Drinkers, Mainer's Mountaineers, the Carolina Tar Heels, and the Bogtrotters, all of whose records were very popular. Songs from these groups' repertoires can be heard in modern string band music, and the instrumentalists in these groups are still revered and emulated by younger players.

String band music continues to thrive in Appalachia. There are numerous annual gatherings and fiddle contests including Galax, Union Grove, and Clifftop. ("Fiddle contests" are not just for fiddlers but include competitions on many instruments as well as band competitions, broken down by age group.) One of the great Southern string bands today is Ralph Blizard and the New Southern Ramblers. Blizard, from Blountville, Tennessee, is an acknowledged master and one of the great fiddlers playing in the longbow style. He

is the recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. In southern Virginia, legendary fiddler Albert Hash was the founder and leader of the well-known White Top Mountain Band. After Hash's death, his brother-in-law Thornton Spencer, along with Thornton's wife Emily and family, have carried on the band. In addition, Emily Spencer runs the program at the Mt. Rogers Combined School in White Top that instructs students in old-time music.

The great Georgia string band the Skillet Lickers is still performing. One of the founders of the group was Gid Tanner, and the group already has passed to four generations of Tanners. Gid's son Gordon led the group after Gid and appeared at the 1980 Smithsonian Folklife Festival; the group is now in the hands of grandson Phil and great-grandson Russ. Other string bands, both young and old, can be found at any festival in the region. Younger performers Cary Fridley, Rayna Gellert, Trish Kilby, and Todd Meade lead some of the younger bands. There is certainly a great future ahead for string band music.

When most people think of old-time string band music in Appalachia, they think of a group of older white musicians, but for many years there was a thriving African-American string band tradition. These bands entertained in the coal camps and at various social gatherings. Two of the early black string bands of the 20th century were from Tennessee: Gribble, Lusk and York; and the great string band consisting of Carl Martin, Ted Bogan, and Howard Armstrong. Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong reunited to play festivals in the 1970s. Fiddler Howard "Louie Bluie" Armstrong is still active in 2003 at 94 years of age. Other Knoxville-area musicians of note were guitarist Brownie McGhee and Lesley Riddle, the man who taught Maybelle Carter the guitar style for which she is famous and which has been adopted by many later guitarists. The black string band tradition is quickly disappearing, however. Among the few players left is Joe Thompson, who along with



his late cousin Odell entertained in North Carolina for many years. Nat Reese grew up in the coal fields of West Virginia and learned to play in many musical styles including gospel, swing, and blues while entertaining in the rough bars in the coal region. Sparky and Rhonda Rucker from Maryville, Tennessee, are performers and scholars of traditional African-American music.

The recent feature film *Songcatcher* tells a fictionalized story of the song-collecting efforts of Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil Sharp in North Carolina shortly before World War I. Campbell shared her work with Sharp, a noted British folklorist, who was amazed at how many ballads that had ceased to be performed in the British Isles still existed in Appalachia. Between the two, they collected hundreds of ballads, published as *Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians*. Other collectors subsequently traveled to the Appalachians to collect and record songs. The Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song has a large collection. This fieldwork passion was renewed during the Folk Revival, when younger folk music enthusiasts traveled south to find old singers and instrumentalists. John Cohen and Peter Gott recorded in Madison County, North Carolina, documenting singers including those of the Wallin, Norton, and Chandler families, some of whom had been present when Sharp visited in 1916. There are fewer traditional ballad singers left in the mountains as we enter the 21st century, but among the notable keepers of the flame is Sheila Kay Adams of Mars Hill, North Carolina, who



## TRADITIONAL MOUNTAIN MUSIC ON THE RADIO

### RICH KIRBY

In 1922, Atlanta's radio station WSB began broadcasting performances by a colorful Georgia folk musician, Fiddlin' John Carson. WSB, the South's first powerful station, had been on the air barely a month when it discovered that rural Southerners would eagerly listen to their own music on the radio. That experience would be repeated at stations all over the South, especially in the mountains. In the years before World War II, most radio stations broadcast live performances rather than recorded music, and many traditional artists found in the new medium a ready outlet for their work.

The situation gradually changed, as commercial influences and the power and popularity of radio itself favored more polished and self-conscious performers. The bigger radio stations began to build large regional audiences for what they marketed as "hillbilly" music. Shows such as the National Barn Dance on Chicago's WLS and the Grand Ole Opry on WSM in Nashville reached millions of listeners across the South and Midwest.

Following the war, radio station WSM and Decca Records led the way toward establishing a nationwide country music industry

Rich Kirby works for WMMT, the community radio station of Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky. He has produced several public radio series on traditional mountain music, most recently "A Fiddle Runs Through It," scheduled to coincide with the Folklife Festival. He plays music when work allows.

Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys. Photo by Ray Lawson, courtesy WMMT FM/Appalshop

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headquartered in Nashville and based on the musical styles and images of the rural South and West. The industry dropped the term "hillbilly"—thought to be demeaning—and called the genre Country and Western.

No longer in the media spotlight, traditional artists in the mountains kept playing and developing their music. Musicians who came mostly from the "Birthplace of Country Music" area took the lead in developing bluegrass, a hard-driving evolution of the older string band music. Much of this was nurtured by small regional radio stations including WNVA, Norton, Virginia; WCYB, Bristol, Tennessee; and WNOX, Knoxville. A token old-time music presence persisted on the Grand Ole Opry, but there was little traditional music to be heard on mainstream radio in the postwar decades.

The urban Folk Revival of the 1960s brought new attention to mountain music. Traditional artists could be heard on college and public radio stations across the country even though their music was not aired in their home communities. Over the past twenty years, "roots" music has become a regular presence on public and alternative radio. The recent success of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* was due almost entirely to promotion outside the usual music industry channels.

Within the "Birthplace of Country Music" area today, traditional and bluegrass music can be heard on an increasing number of public stations including WDVX, Knoxville; WETS, Johnson City, Tennessee; WMMT, Whitesburg, Kentucky; and WNCW, Spindale, North Carolina. WPAQ in Mount Airy, North Carolina, deserves special mention as a commercial station that has broadcast live music from its mountain community for the past fifty years. ■



Carolina, who learned many of her songs from her relatives, especially her great-aunt, Dellie Chandler Norton. Adams presents programs on ballads at festivals, schools, and universities. Other North Carolinians who continue to perform the old songs and stories are Bobby McMillon from Lenoir and Laura Boosinger from Asheville, a younger performer who has studied the music and songs of the region extensively and plays on a number of stringed instruments. West Virginian Ginny Hawker, along with her husband Tracy Schwarz, is another singer adept at old ballads and hymns. She teaches singing yearly at the Augusta Heritage Festival in Elkins, West Virginia, a series of weeklong programs pairing master performers as teachers with students who wish to learn traditional performance styles.

Gospel and religious music will be represented at the Smithsonian Festival by Dorothy Myles, a native of Cumberland, Kentucky (now living in Appalachia, Virginia), and Still Waters. Myles writes her own religious songs as well as mining-oriented songs. Still Waters is a bluegrass gospel group from Hindman, Kentucky, who sing in an older style.

Mining songs have always been an important part of the occupational lore of the region (see page 24). Songs have been written to help inspire coal miners in their labor struggles with company owners. Continuing the tradition of legendary songwriters like the members of the Garland Family are West Virginians Carl Rutherford of Warriormine and Elaine Purkey of Chapmanville. Rutherford worked the mines as a youth until bad health forced him to find another line of work. He is a composer of strong mining songs including "Tops off Our Pretty Mountains" and is also a fine guitar player in the style of country music pioneers Dick Justice and Frank Hutchison. Elaine Purkey began to write songs while involved in the Pittston Coal Strike in 1989-90. She began to perform at festivals in the 1990s and impressed all those who heard her, including the great labor songwriter, Hazel Dickens. Railroad work crews also wrote rhythmic songs to help them time out the laying and lining up of railroad track. The Buckingham Lining Bar Gang is made up of former railroad workers who demonstrate this process.

One of the few musical forms to have been created wholly within the United States is bluegrass music. Bill Monroe, from western Kentucky, is credited with its invention and is called the "Father of Bluegrass." "Bluegrass" comes from the name "The Blue Grass Boys," a group that under Monroe began to play a

newer, faster style of string band and country music with a focus on "high lonesome" singing and instrumental prowess. Although bluegrass was not created in Appalachia, many of the other important early bluegrass performers are from the region. Virginians Carter and Ralph Stanley and North Carolinian Earl Scruggs are early bluegrass legends. One cannot overemphasize the importance of regional radio stations such as WCYB Bristol in the rise of bluegrass. The central Appalachian region has continued to be one of the important centers of the style to this day. There are many bluegrass groups that tour nationally and whose records sell all over the world, but there are hundreds of smaller regional bands who play local events and the festival circuit during the summer. Among these, the O'Quinns are a family group who come from Birchleaf, Virginia, a stone's throw from the home of the Stanley Brothers, and who play regionally in southwest Virginia and Kentucky. A group that mixes comedy and music is the VW Boys, made up of Tim White, Larry McPeak, and Dave Vaught, all of whom have spent time in well-known groups. Tim White is also the artist who painted the "Birthplace of Country Music" mural in Bristol, a copy of which is being displayed on the Mall for the Festival.

All of the styles of music discussed above have been around for years, some longer than others. There are also many contemporary bands that have taken Appalachian music in new directions. In the music marketplace, one hears the term "Americana" used to refer to roots-oriented performers, and many younger Americana bands come from Appalachia. Some bands have created new, hybrid styles combining elements of Appalachian music with other styles. Ras Alan and the Lions are a two-person group from Zionville, North Carolina, who perform reggae music and whose lyrics frequently deal with life in the region. The Virginia-based Celtibillies began as a contradance band but gradually started to incorporate sounds from the British Isles into their music, combining them with traditional Appalachian fare.

Incredible music can be found all over Appalachia, but historically there have been certain "hotbeds" that have turned out more than their share of great musicians. In southern Virginia (and spilling over the North Carolina border), the area of Grayson and Carroll counties have been the home to the famous Galax fiddle contest and a spawning ground for many well-known string bands. The most famous of these were the Bogtrotters, who started performing in the 1930s. At the Festival this area is represented by guitarist and guitar-



maker Wayne Henderson from Rugby, The New Ballard's Branch Bogtrotters from Galax, and Doug and Taylor Rorrer from Eden, North Carolina. In southwestern Virginia the area surrounding Norton, Coeburn, and Big Stone Gap has been the home of many historically important bluegrass performers such as the Stanley Brothers and Jim and Jesse McReynolds. The family bluegrass band the O'Quinns, mentioned above, comes from this tradition.

Important music has come from the coal-field regions of Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky, especially the area just southeast of Hazard, Kentucky. Music scholar John Cohen visited in 1959 and made recordings that resulted in the landmark Folkways LP, *Mountain Music of Kentucky*. Cohen recorded legendary musicians Roscoe Holcomb of Daisy and Lee Sexton of Cornettsville. He was also able to document some of the wonderful Baptist congregational singing there. That these traditions still thrive is witnessed by Lee Sexton. Clyde Davenport, a legendary fiddler from Monticello, will also perform at the Festival.

The state of West Virginia has a strong traditional music scene. Yearly events including Augusta and the Vandalia Gathering in Charleston bring musicians together. We have assembled an all-star delegation from the state that includes banjo player Dwight Diller and fiddlers Lester McCumbers and Jake Krack, his 18-year-old student.

Also worth noting for their ballad singing and musical traditions are Buncombe and Madison counties, North Carolina, located just northwest of Asheville. Bruce Greene and Don Pedi from North Carolina and Will Keys from Gray, Tennessee, will be performing at the Festival as well.

Since its founding in 1967, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival has maintained a strong interest in the culture of Appalachia. In 1968, Doc Watson & Family, Jean Ritchie, and Ralph Stanley participated in the Festival; in 1969 Dock Boggs, Maybelle Carter, Bill Monroe & the Monroe Brothers, and Merle Travis were featured. State programs on Kentucky (1973), Virginia (1977), and Tennessee (1986) have been presented on the Mall. Festival co-founder Ralph Rinzler had a great love for the region; besides "discovering" Doc Watson in 1960, Rinzler recorded and produced numerous recordings of Appalachian music and collected and documented Appalachian crafts. He was also responsible for bringing Appalachian musicians to New York and the Newport Folk Festival for concerts. The other Festival co-founder, James Morris, had been the director of the Asheville Folk Festival. It has been a great pleasure to be able to work with our old and new friends in Appalachia to make this program a reality this summer. ■



Saturday night at the Carter Family Fold, Hiltons, Virginia.  
Photo by Rob Schneider  
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Photo by Rob Schneider  
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