

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 *Song-catcher* 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. ■