

Central Texas BLUEGRASS



Bulletin

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Music of the Southern Appalachian Mountains

An Historical and Musical Background on the Southern Appalachian Region

By Mike Seeger

The music you will be reading about here is from the Blue Ridge and Southern Appalachian mountain regions of Virginia, West Virginia, southward through Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and barely into Georgia and Alabama.

This area is to the west of the flat tidewater and piedmont areas of the Atlantic coastline and includes some broad valleys with good agricultural land, such as the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, as well as many smaller valleys, some just wide enough for a little bottomland next to a creek. The eastern mountains are not nearly as tall as the Rockies; they generally rise 1,000 to 3,000 feet with a maximum of 6,000 feet, and are forested with a variety of deciduous and evergreen trees and many smaller bushes and flowers. Some mountains are green, rolling hills, but in certain areas, such as in the southeastern area of Kentucky and some of West Virginia, the mountains are quite steep and rocky.

After Native Americans, the first people to settle in this region came from the British Isles in the mid-1700's. These early settlers included Scots-Irish but were primarily English. A small number of immigrants later came to this area from Germany. Although there were some large landholders, most settlers farmed just enough land to provide for themselves. There were certainly some



craftspeople and some small industry to supply local needs, but until the late 1800's there was little industrial development. Little slavery existed in the area largely because the hilly land didn't lend itself to the plantation system of the flat land to the east and south. The mountains were more difficult to farm, less accessible, and therefore not as desirable as the tidewater and piedmont, so that many of the less wealthy settlers, or those wanting more independence and isolation, sought to live there.

For the most part, people were pretty self sufficient in these mountain areas, although they often had furniture, tools and food utensils made by experienced regional craftspeople. Clearing of land and the building of houses and barns in the new country were often community events and were followed by ample food, socializing, music playing and dancing. Most food was raised by each household and only a few items were store bought. *Continued...*

Board News

Jane Laughlin pointed out that we need to try and get all CTBA members e-mail addresses so that we can more easily communicate news and events. It was suggested that we add something to the renewal cards regarding a request for donations to CTBA over and above the dues, and that we offer a free CD with a donation of \$10 or more (you'll see it in this issue). Steve Zimmet had been contacted by a disc jockey named Johnny Timewarp of the show Dark Side of the Highway on WFCS 107.7 FM in Connecticut asking for any CD's that he could use on his roots music program and a CTBA CD was promptly mailed. The band scramble and auction is set for July 11th at Artz. The possibility of doing another CD was also discussed.



CENTRAL TEXAS BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION

For information on CTBA membership and activities, contact:

Central Texas Bluegrass Association
P. O. Box 9816
Austin, Tx, 78766-9816
512-261-9440

email:ctba@centraltexasbluegrass.org
www.centraltexasbluegrass.org

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Central Texas Bluegrass Bulletin

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CTBA Artists and Bands BOOKING INFORMATION

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Blazing Bows: Mary Hattersley 512-873-8925 blazingbows@lycos.com

Brazos Country Grass: Gary Potter 979-690-6951 gdpotter@startel.net

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Canyon River : Sonny Herpeche 830-597-5478 flattopdove@yahoo.com

Cedar Break: Jon Whitley 830-257-6043 cedarbreakmail@yahoo.com

Convict Hillbillies: Bryan Eagle 748-0380 eags@convicthillbillies.com

Eddie Collins: 512-836-8255 tuneman@texas.net

Farm Boys: Nicholas Dotin 512-657-0285 nicholas@farmershouse.com

Grazmatics: Mike Landschoot 512-454-7343

Hard to Make a Living: John Hood 512-376-7767 johnhood@grandecom.net

Ledbetters Band: S. Drake 210-698-2601 kthdrak1956@wmconnect.com

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No Strings Attached: Aubrey Skeen banjo6@earthlink.net

Pet Rooster: Jay Richardson 979-297-2709 5rs@quik.com

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Sarah Jarosz & BlueEyedGrass: Sarah Jarosz 512-847-6104

mjarosz@austin.rr.com

Shawn Spiars 512-218-3928 sspiars@abac.com

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Wayfarers Mick Del Greco 210-491-8815 mickdel@juno.com

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Copy deadline is the 20th of the month.

Publication on or about the 1st.

Contact the editor at soapycows@hotmail.com for more info.

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Mike Seeger, continued ...

Little money was needed or used. The work could be hard, but many older people say that it was a more satisfying, less hurried existence than today.

Communities were also nearly self sufficient culturally, and almost everyone could either sing, play an instrument, dance, or tell a story, usually in a style distinctly their own. English-language culture was dominant. The most popular instruments were the jew's harp and fiddle. Less often one would encounter a plucked or hammer dulcimer, some other home made instrument or possibly a flute or fife. Old stories, tunes and songs were unwritten and passed down through oral tradition and were traded with travelers and new settlers. Songs were sung solo, by a group of family members or by a church congregation, almost always without instrumental accompaniment. Songs ranged from the oldest British ballads and humorous songs to religious songs, and naturally, to newer creations by community members inspired by the new environment. Southern music was and still is a very important part of life for most rural (now working class) people.

The most important element in the creation of American musical styles has been the interaction of English/European and African cultures. Spirituals, jazz, ragtime, blues, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, rap - and in the rural southeast, the banjo-and-fiddle string band and many of the later developments in commercial country music - were all products of this interaction, which was all too often plagued by the cruelties of exploitive racism.

During the first two centuries that African slaves and their descendents were in America, Anglo Americans took little notice of African-American music, thinking it too "primitive." This music ranged all the way from sounds transported directly from their homeland to the composed European music some slaves played for their masters. During this period, African-Americans created new genres of song and melody as they mixed the music of their native homes with the harmonic and rhythmic structures they found in the new country. In the early and mid-1800's a few Anglo Americans began taking notice of African-American banjo music and songs, adapting them to their own use. Some were professional entertainers who learned

to pick the banjo and composed songs based on what they heard African-Americans doing, often for blackface minstrel shows which portrayed African-Americans in derogatory stereotypes. It was during this period that the mixing of peoples in the armies of the civil war, the development of the minstrel show, and to some extent, the popularity of black religious music, accelerated the process of African - English musical interaction, a process which continues today. It must be emphasized that until very recently this process consisted largely of white exploitation of black creativity.

With emancipation in the 1860's, more African-American people moved into the mountain areas, which tended to be less racially polarized. In addition to bringing their native banjo to the region, by the late 1800's African-Americans had also introduced newly evolved guitar styles along with a new type of song, the intensely personal blues. In time the banjo and the guitar were blended with the old fiddle and song traditions to create the beginnings of a truly American string band tradition. Around the turn of the century some European instruments such as the french harp (harmonica), mandolin, and the recently invented autoharp made their appearance by way of mail order catalogues, travelling salesmen, and the increasing contact with national urban culture.

Although some music notation, usually from northern cities, came with instruments, rural men and women didn't "play by note" (read music) and each devised their own personal way of playing rural-style music on their new instruments. This period between about 1870 and 1930 was the golden age of old-time southern Appalachian music. The old songs and tunes were still vital, and there was still a role for them in everyday life, yet there was much new music being created.

this article will be continued in the next issue...

Mike Seeger has a recent recording out on Smithsonian Folkways titled
"True Vine"
40136
www.folkways.si.edu
www.mikeseeger.info

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Bluegrass Trivia Quiz

by Gordon Daugherty

How many albums has the Bluegrass Album Band made?

Can you name the musicians that have been on every album?



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Answer to Trivia Question: Eight albums; Doyle Lawson, J. D. Crowe, and Tony Rice.

The Bluegrass Album Band, a sort of all-star team of bluegrass, has numbered from 5 to 8 players over the years. Though the core band is clearly Lawson, Crowe, and Rice plus Todd Phillips and Bobby Hicks, only the first three have been on all eight albums. Hicks and Phillips missed number five for some reason; on that one Vassar Clements and Mark Schatz were added.

They have made six Bluegrass Albums plus one of Flatt and Scruggs songs ("Down The Road") and another of Monroe tunes ("Lonesome Moonlight"). Bluegrass Albums 1-5 came out in '81 through '89 and the sixth one in 1996.

Jerry Douglas is on three of the Bluegrass Albums plus the Monroe one, Clements on two of the former plus Monroe. The Monroe album band is big, everybody's there: Lawson, Phillips, Crowe, Hicks, Rice, Douglas, Schatz, and Clements.

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CALENDAR

LOCAL SHOWS

March

5, Brazos County Grass, 5:30- 8:30 pm, Brazos County Youth Livestock Association, Kurten Community Center, Bryan, TX

6, HTML, 6pm, Luling Bluegrass Show, Longer Park, Luling, TX

27, The Sieker Band, 7p.m, the Palace Theater, Georgetown, TX, \$10, \$5 for students, kids under 6 free.

27, Eddie Collins, 11:15 – 12:00. Bike riders finishing the Rosedale Ride will be treated to live music from the High Stakes Rollers. Samsung building on Parmer Lane one mile east of IH-35.

28, Eddie Collins, Paul Sweeney, and very special guests entertain, 6:00 – 8:30, Artz Ribhouse

April

24, Cumberland Gap, 7 pm, the Georgetown Palace Theatre, 512-869-7469, \$10, Students 7-21 \$5, 6 and under are free

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

March

7th, Eddie Collins and Texas State Banjo Champion, Rolf Sieker, 1:00 – 5:00, banjo workshop at Harmon's BBQ, 100 S. Main St., Cibolo, TX 78108 (near San Antonio).

Cost of the workshop is \$50. Limited to 20 participants. A \$25 deposit sent payable to Eddie Collins, 8407 Loralinda Dr., Austin, TX 78753 reserves your spot, or sign up below using PayPal. Contact Eddie with further questions: tuneman@texas.net or 512-836-8255. Harmon's phone number: 210-658-8889.

Sieker Worskhop (\$25 dep.)

19 & 20, 4th Annual Spring Break in Paris Bluegrass Festival, Paris, Texas, contact Brenda 903-784-8859

28, Eddie Collins and 5-string icon/former Bad Liver, Danny Barnes, 1:00 – 5:00. Artz Rib House, "Advanced Concepts" banjo, \$50. Limited to 20 participants. A \$25 deposit sent payable to Eddie Collins, 8407 Loralinda Dr., Austin, TX 78753. Or sign up using PayPal at www.eddiecollins.biz

Please contact venues for up to date information.

Please submit band show dates, festivals and other events to the CTBA Newsletter editor by the 20th of each month at soapycows@hotmail.com.

Attention all bands and musicians,

email the editor to announce your show by the 20th of each month! You can also submit articles, photographs, songs or tablature or any other ideas you think might be good in the CTBA Bulletin. Authors/artists always retain copyright of submitted materials.
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For Family, Band, and Patron Memberships, please append a list of the members of your family or band.

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Pkwy 259-7702 for more info

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• **Contra Dance**

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• **AFTM Jam Session**

2nd Sun at Threadgill's South
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• **Spring Creek Club Jam/Show**

4th Sat: 5pm-jam, 7pm-show
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SAN ANTONIO

• **Contra Dances**

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Folk Culture Center at Our
Lady of the Lake Univ.
512-434-6711, ext. 407

SOUR LAKE (Beaumont)

• **Jam & Free Show**

Southeast Tx BG Music Assn
3rd Sat: 4pm, Elementary
School, Hwy 326 S.
Edy Mathews 409-755-0622

WIMBERLEY

• **Bluegrass Jam**

Fri: 8-12 pm, Charlie's Catfish
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The Central Texas Bluegrass Association

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