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The Long and Winding Road: Bob Martin and the Re-birth of An Americana Classic

Every now and then I come across a masterpiece album that somehow flew underneath my musical radar or because of my age and the tender innocence of...[More...](#)



Now Playing on Roots Rad

Bill Monroe

07.11.2008 -- Review by: C. Eric Banister

In the early 1990s filmmaker Steve Gebhardt turned his lens to Bill Monroe, the Father of bluegrass music to document the history of both the man and the music for a special that would run on both PBS and the then vibrant TNN. The film was released commercially on VHS and DVD in 1999, but has since been out of print. Until now, as MVD Visual has re-released the film on DVD.

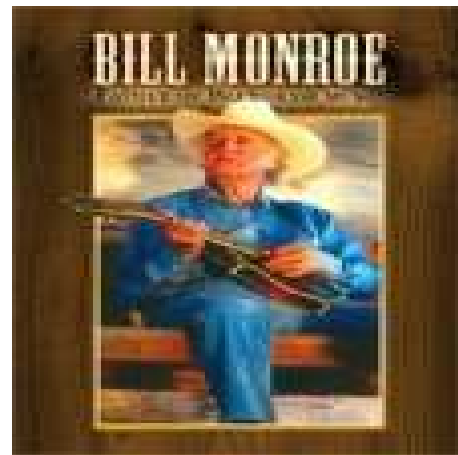
The film is a fantastic document allowing Mr. Monroe to tell his own story in a series of front porch interviews with John Hartford. Hartford, being a musician and bit of historian himself knew the right questions to get the responses we wanted to know. Seeing these two departed icons on screen together talking and playing is nearly reason enough to get the DVD.

But there is more, of course. There are interviews with Emmylou Harris, Marty Stuart, Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Garcia and others, including Roy Acuff in one of his last appearances. All of these artists talk in-depth about Mr. Monroe and his influence on not only their music, but personally. Footage of Mr. Monroe and Skaggs sitting around a camp fire talking casually and picking "Uncle Pen" on fiddle and mandolin give a glimpse into the special relationship they shared. In a solo interview Skaggs recounts the first time he met Mr. Monroe, as a six year-old kid at a show near his hometown.

Also interviewed in the film are several former Blue Grass Boys including Del McCoury, Bill Keith, Chubby Wise, Kenny Baker, Bobby Hicks, Doug Green and James Monroe. Each of them talks about meeting Mr. Monroe and how they came to be a Blue Grass Boy.

Although only 90 minutes long, the film serves as an introduction to Mr. Monroe and his music. For someone new to bluegrass, this film would serve as an excellent primer on Mr. Monroe's career and what it meant to the larger music culture. Filled with many excellent performance clips, from Mr. Monroe shows at Bean Blossom to appearances on shows with Dolly Parton and others, the viewer is afforded the opportunity to see varying configurations of Blue Grass Boys, some of which did not last very long.

Gebhardt shot many hours of footage of Mr. Monroe, from around the house to the tour bus to back stage at various concerts. According to the excellent "The Music of Bill Monroe" by Neil V. Rosenberg and Charles Wolfe, Gerhardt also recorded 130 songs in live performance, a few of which were released in 2002 on CD as *Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys Live, Vol. 1*. Rosenberg and Wolfe note that a second volume was scrapped in 2004 due to "difficulties in obtaining permissions from some artists involved."



Artist Name: **Bill Monroe**
 Album Name: **Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass Music**
 Website:
 Record Label: **MVD Visuals**
 Release Date:

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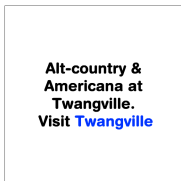
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Hopefully, some time in the future, we might be able to see not only more volumes of the recorded work, but an expanded edition of this wonderful documentary. Until then, this DVD is an excellent addition to the bluegrass lovers video library.



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