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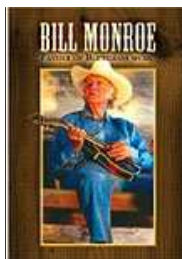
DVD Video Reviews



Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass (1993/2008)

A documentary about the inventor of Bluegrass music, told in interviews and musical performances.

Published on August 12, 2008



Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass (1993/2008)

Starring: Bill Monroe, John Hartford, Ricky Skaggs, Emmylou Harris, Marty Stuart
Directed by Steve Gebhardt
Written by Larry Nager
Studio: Original Cinema Release/Vision Arts Video
[Distr. by MVD Entertainment]
Video: 4:3 color
Audio: English Dolby 5.1 & stereo PCM

Extras: Deleted scenes, Concert footage
Length: 90 minutes
Rating: *****

There are only a handful of indigenous American musical forms, such as Jazz, Blues, Country, and Rock n' Roll. Only one of them can be traced back to one person. That music is Bluegrass and that person is Bill Monroe. *Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass Music* is a documentary made in 1993 and recently made available on DVD. Actually, it took four years to make—filming started in 1990 and ended in 1993. Directed and edited by Steve Gebhardt and written by Larry Nager, *Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass* is an intimate and affectionate look at the man who invented a new musical form.

It features various interviews with Bill Monroe, vintage concert footage, and plenty of vintage photographs of Monroe. There are interviews with musicians who knew and were influenced by Monroe, including Ricky Skaggs, Marty Stuart, Emmylou Harris, Jerry Garcia, and Roy Acuff. There's even a brief segment showing Paul McCartney singing Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky."

There are some surprises in the documentary, like the all-too-brief montage of Bill Monroe's dancing. It shows him buck dancing, a cousin to Irish step-dancing, clogging, and tap dancing. There are scenes of Monroe dancing with Emmylou Harris at the Grand Ol' Opry, dancing a few steps during his many concerts, and my favorite, Monroe dancing in a subway train with African-American youths in the background dancing along with him. This was an unexpected and endearing side of Monroe. Other little known aspects of Monroe that are explored are his Bluegrass tent shows and his days of Bluegrass baseball. Even for fans of Bill Monroe, there is plenty of new information here.

This is a great look at the man, Bill Monroe, and the music he created. It is



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told both with the words and stories of Monroe and the people around him, and it is told with the music itself. This is a fascinating portrait of one of the greatest [innovators](#) in 20th Century American music and is sure to be a welcome addition to fans of Bill Monroe, Bluegrass music, and Americana. While the quality of the [video](#) is lacking and dated at times, the content more than makes up for it. Highly recommended.

- Hermon Joyner

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