

MAVERICK

Bill Monroe

Father Of Bluegrass Music

MVD Visual MVDV4577 90mins

'Blues had a baby and they called it rock'n'roll' (Kentucky Headhunters) but bluegrass had a hand in it too —as did Kentuckian, Bill Monroe. Now before you think this 90 minute DVD is out to show his influence, it most certainly isn't. It is straight, honest and pure bluegrass, and with people like John Hartford and Ricky Skaggs heard talking with him (mostly during his latter years) out at his home place —the recording gives great insight into this complex and hugely dedicated figure.

To go with the interviews is live footage of Bill on stage with his band the Bluegrass Boys, and him performing his beloved mandolin like no other before or since (out on his front porch and sometimes sitting around a log fire). His songwriting it also gets a good mention and how he got to write some of them, and the location of *Jerusalem Ridge* — one of the most beautiful instrumental tune ever written. Especially so when fiddle ace Kenny Baker played it with him.

The DVD is a fascinating and totally unexpected delight that I am unable to praise producers too much for. Such the manner in which they have put it together and with everything covered from his days with his brothers Charlie and Birch, and how when they split up and went their separate ways. With Bill forming the Bluegrass Boys and how he met Judge D Hay and others from the Grand Ole Opry (Ryman Auditorium) and became a life-long member.

Another from the era, Roy Acuff recalls the early days, while Monroe tells of how he opened his account with *Mule Skinner Blues* and was on guitar and not his famed, mandolin. It wasn't till a little time afterwards that he took to leading the Bluegrass Boys on mandolin, and who could better him.

Emmylou Harris and long time buck dancer, Jackie Christian joins him as he struts his stuff as a dancer —this being where, for Bill his life as an entertainer started.

Coming across as a proud southern gentleman, Monroe's life story playing bluegrass music is told by among others former band members Chubby Wise, Jimmy Martin, Mac Wiseman, Sonny Osborne, Peter Rowan, Del McCoury and his son, James Monroe. Tied together in part by Marty Stuart, John Hartford and Ricky Skaggs both the music and stories flow, freely.

Bill's philosophy of hard work is underlined as this once stout and strong man could drag a load like any mule. Although financially, he struggled in the early 1960s he did —as proved in later years prove a big influence and inspiration to many acts. Rowan, Bill Keith, McCoury, 'Ranger' Doug Green (Riders In The Sky), Stuart and the late Grateful Dead, founder member/ leader Jerry Garcia being at the top of the list. People who not only have like the above mentioned Harris a great love of a music created by Monroe, but a deep, burning passion so strong that they eat and breathe music!

One of the most memorable quotes told on the documentary is the quote by Marty Stuart, 'If you can play bluegrass you can play anything', and there is Rowan (*Walls Of Time*) describing how Bill's music lit a fire in his soul and how having his voice lean against Bill's. It gave him during the acid drenched 1960s, the greatest of highs. Likewise, just as riveting is how Monroe's July 1923 F-5 Gibson mandolin was rebuilt after it was vandalised and broke into no less than 250 pieces.

- Maurice Hope

