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THE HIGH LONESOME SOUND DEFINED: EXAMINING THE MUSIC OF BILL MONROE 1945-1948

A Thesis

By

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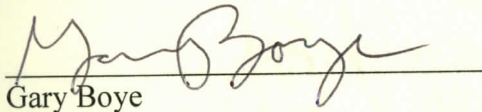

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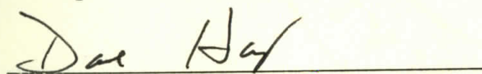

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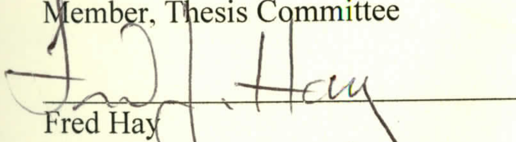

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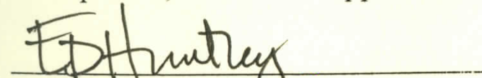

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ABSTRACT

THE HIGH LONESOME SOUND DEFINED: EXAMINING THE MUSIC OF BILL MONROE 1945-1948 (May 2009)

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The term "high lonesome sound" has for many years been used to describe the sound of bluegrass and some folk music. The exact origination of the term is fuzzy at best and the source of many heated scholarly discussions. In contrast to what others have previously said, the music does not sound "high and lonesome" because the singer is singing in the upper register, nor does it sound "high and lonesome" because of intricate rhythmic relationships. Rather, the "high lonesome" sound comes from a detailed relationship between linear movement in composition, identifiable through the manipulation of third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees, and "driving" rhythmic design, as well as intricate harmonic relationships that can be traced back to early popular and traditional influences.

This paper examines theoretical properties of bluegrass music as per Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys, 1945-1948. It is a study of tonal relationships, rhythmic design, and intricate melodicism, tracing the roots of Monroe's musical influences from the 1920s through the mid 1940s.

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CHAPTER I
Introduction

The term "high lonesome sound" has for many years been used to describe the sound of bluegrass music. The exact origin of the term is fuzzy at best and the source of heated scholarly discussions. In his book, *Bluegrass: A History*, Neil Rosenberg recalls two instances of first encountering the terminology, and credits these instances for introducing the phrase into bluegrass music.[1] The first is John Cohen's Kentucky film, shot in 1962 and debuted in 1963, and the second in Roscoe Holcomb's album released one year later. Before this, the only known documented instance occurred in the Country Gentlemen's song, "High Lonesome," released in 1958 on a Starday single. This has not been substantiated, and many disagree with this claim offering various instances of the use of "high lonesome" to describe country, bluegrass, and hillbilly music. D.K. Wilgus, a leading folksong scholar and author who spent much of his life studying folk, hillbilly, old-time, country and bluegrass music as a professor at Bowling Green State University in the 1950s, gives his own narrative of first encountering the terminology. Wilgus recalls that "high lonesome" had been used to describe Appalachian singing style before Cohen's 1960s use of the word. In a 1985 publication of the journal *Popular Music* Wilgus presents a review of Charles Wolfe's *Kentucky Country* in which Wilgus quotes Wolf as stating, "The term 'high, lonesome

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[1]Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 173.

sound' was not originally coined to describe the singing of Roscoe Holcomb in the early 1960s. I recall Alan Lomax using it to describe the singing of Aunt Molly Jackson at least as early as 1941!"[2] Aunt Molly Jackson, a traditional singer and composer from Kentucky, did in fact interact with father-son duo John and Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle between the years 1935 and 1939, when the team of folklorists recorded a number of her songs for the Library of Congress. Neil Rosenberg has worked with this claim extensively, searching through publications and writings by Lomax that describe the music of Aunt Molly Jackson. While Rosenberg did discover a 1942 description of Aunt Molly Jackson's singing style in the liner notes of a Library of Congress album as well as a 1961 issue of *Kentucky Folklore Record,* (Aunt Molly Jackson issue), he responds that "both of these descriptions are compatible with the style of high lonesome singing that I associate with Roscoe Holcomb."[3] Furthermore, he goes on to state that as of yet he has not discovered a single instance in which Lomax uses the words "high lonesome" to describe the music of Aunt Molly Jackson. However, Rosenberg does support Wilgus' claims as evidence that Alan Lomax was implementing the term in speech as early as 1941, years before it ever appeared in text. While the original use of the term "high lonesome" is most likely unknown and will continue to remain a point of discussion among bluegrass enthusiasts, perhaps it was in 1966 with the help of Ralph Rinzler and the release of the album *The High Lonesome Sound of Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys,* that the nation began to associate the "high

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[2]Ibid., 273-274.

[3]Ibid., 173-174.

lonesome sound" with the music of Bill Monroe. This study is a theoretical examination of the "high lonesome" sound as per Bill Monroe's 1945-1947 Blue Grass Boys.

WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

The sound of "high lonesome" music, to some people, exists only in an audible understanding. By this, I mean one can search accounts of the sound and descriptions of its characteristics, but there seems to be something lacking from all I have encountered. Most descriptions describe the "high lonesome" sound solely in terms of Monroe's singing style or a general style of the music: "Monroe's soaring tenor voice and a marked blues influence have led to the use of the phrase 'high, lonesome sound'."[4] Others have delved slightly deeper into the sound, incorporating more aspects of the music. Perhaps the most descriptive literature I have encountered as of yet occurs in Neil Rosenberg's *Bluegrass: A History*.

In his book, Rosenberg describes the elements of bluegrass music and discusses the "high lonesome" sound in terms of vocal quality, harmonies, and meter.[5] The "preferred vocal tone," Rosenberg tells us, is "often described as 'clear,' or 'cutting,' sometimes, 'piercing'." Rosenberg talks of the emphasis in bluegrass music on vocal harmonies. He tells of duets, trios, and quartets, the placement of the "tenor" voice above the melody, and the location of the "baritone" below the melody. The tempo, as Rosenberg describes, is usually faster than most country music and in duple meter (meaning 2/4, 4/4, or a time signature that

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[4] Tom Ewing, *The Bill Monroe Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 33.

[5] Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 7.

is divisible by two). Rosenberg talks of 'tensions' in the music, particularly "rhythmic tension between the bass and guitar (which stress the first and third beat)," and "between the mandolin and other lead instruments "which, when they are playing rhythm, stress the second and fourth beat."[6]

While I do not disagree with Rosenberg's assessment of the "high lonesome" sound, I feel it lacks some of the musical elements and characteristics that work hand in hand to create what has come to be described as "high and lonesome." I have not discovered a single example which employs actual notation or transcription. While he describes the vocal qualities as "high," "clear," and "cutting," as a music theorist this did little for creating an understanding of what he was trying to say. I can recall many operatic instances, as well as other genres, in which vocalists sing in high registers and alter their voices to sound cutting or piercing, yet emotionally I did not feel or associate the music as being lonesome. Metrically, I believe Rosenberg provides a nice analysis of the meter of bluegrass music. He also paints a descriptive understanding between instrumental relationships, yet I am still uneasy as to his crediting rhythmic polyphony to creating tension in bluegrass music. What he describes is one feature of the bluegrass sound, however it is not unique to bluegrass music as it is found in other genres such as jazz or western swing. I do not deny that rhythmic counterpoint plays a part in the creation of tension and "lonesome" qualities, however I do feel this is just a part of a larger collection of important musical qualities--qualities I intend to identify.

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[6]Ibid., 7-8.

It is my purpose to identify theoretical components of bluegrass music that compose the "high lonesome" sound. I will paint the tension in the music as not being caused by one section or musical style, but rather as detailed and specific relationships between sound, rhythm, meter, and style. I will provide an overall understanding of bluegrass music employing theoretical concepts and understandings of relationships, time and space, and linear progression.

CHAPTER II
THE THEORY BEHIND THE MUSIC

In music theory a body of work is placed into a specific key, which is determined by the notes used in that particular piece of music. For example, anything classified as being in the key of C major includes the notes C-D-E-F-G-A-B. Any movement away from these seven specific pitches may result in a change of key. This is the rule for every key. The key of G major contains the pitches G-A-B-C-D-E-F#, and the key of A major contains A-B-C#-D-E-F#-G#.

In bluegrass music (as well as blues and jazz) the third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees are altered one-half step to change the sound and quality of the music. This is a trait that may be traced back to blues music and other genres. For example, in the key of C major the E, G, and B are lowered one-half step to create a new scale: C-D-Eb-F-Gb(F#)-A-Bb, some refer to this as a "blues scale." Recordings show that certain elements often exist before pitch qualities are altered. For example, rarely in bluegrass are the third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees lowered at the same time. This would alter the sound of the music altogether and ultimately produce a seemingly minor sounding piece of work. Also, it is an important factor to remember when differentiating between bluegrass theory and others such as blues. In bluegrass the three pitches are generally lowered one-half step at specific times and raised at specific times in order to create the desired sound. In other words, the three

scale degrees are in constant motion from their original quality to one-half step below the original quality, throughout the music. Before we continue further in the discussion of altered pitches an important thing to remember is commitment: the degrees on the scale are experiencing constant manipulation and refraining from commitment to specific scale degrees.

The scale degrees are typically lowered at moments in the music where they are exposed, such as during instrumental and vocal solos. The rhythm instruments most commonly continue in the original key of the music, with only the exposed notes being lowered one-half step, usually the notes played by the soloist. Together, this creates tension in the music. In my opinion this is the tension that most bluegrass articles discuss yet fail to pinpoint. A C major chord consists of the notes C-E-G, or I-III-V of the C major scale. In an instance where the fifth scale degree is manipulated one-half step, the rhythm and other background instruments would be playing the notes C, E, and G, while the exposed portion, usually the soloist, is playing in C major with an added Gb(F#), or lowered fifth. The Gb(F#) played against the G natural in the rhythm instruments creates dissonance in the music. The same can be created when a vocalist is singing a C major scale but substitutes a lowered fifth, or b5. This may also occur as an ornament leading to a 5 or a 4, yet whatever the case may be the contrasting notes are played simultaneously. Listeners commonly identify moments like this as being tense. The dissonance exists, yet it is not as exposed as it would be if the G/Gb relationship were played on one instrument, instead of one instrument playing the Gb against what is usually the rest of the ensemble playing a G. In bluegrass music the alteration of the scale degrees usually occurs on only one instrument, while, on average,

there are two to four other instruments playing major chords of the scale. While this may seem like a stylistic devices used in blues, there are slight differences such as in the chords played on accompanying instruments.

In blues it is common for the rhythm instruments to play similar I-IV-I-V progressions, yet the instruments typically play these chords with an included seventh, (I7-IV7-I7-V7 progression) as well as altered scale degrees. For instance, the I chord may include 1-3-5-b7 and the IV, 4-6-1-b3. The inclusion of the seventh scale degree and the altered notes in the chord are two factors that set this sound apart from that of bluegrass. In bluegrass it is uncommon for the rhythm players to include seventh chords, particularly I7, as well as chords that contain altered scale degrees. Remember that in bluegrass scale degree manipulation almost always occurs in exposed portions of the music, usually the solo instrumentalist or vocalist. This creates an imbalance in the sound and a slight dissonance that, to the untrained ear, is difficult to identify and difficult to describe. The tension is there, yet it does not exist as an obvious element of the music. A good example is found in Bill Monroe's version of "Goodbye Old Pal."

In "Goodbye Old Pal" it is both the vocalist and the mandolin player who alter the chord progression. This is a good song to examine because it shows clearly that the high lonesome sound comes from more than just one element, such as the use of tension, but rather it is the combination of many factors. In this case Bill Monroe expresses several such factors in the song giving it a high lonesome sound, but first let us look at the theory.

The song is in the key of B major, which consists of the tones B-C#-D#-E-F#-G#-A#. In measure twenty two, the second full measure of the "verse," the vocalist sings a D

natural pitch, which is the third scale degree of a B major scale lowered one-half step.[7] This, played against the D# in the B major chord, creates subliminal dissonance, a factor that creates the "high lonesome" sound of Bill Monroe. Again, while this is a common feature in blues music, one must consider other elements that are different in bluegrass but not in blues, such as instrumentation, tempo, and meter. In this case, it is the tension one would hear if you played two notes directly beside each other on a piano keyboard. From a keyboard the sound produced would be too tense for enjoyment. Reactions from the adjacent keys could approach what one might feel from the sound of fingernails on a blackboard. Here Monroe hits the D natural on an eighth note on the "and" of the second beat, while making a run to a B natural, which is the key of this song. It is important to note that the dissonance here is fast and quick, yet long enough to create tension.

Also note that the verses in this song are sung in the tenor range, or what would be based on the fifth scale degree. In other words, Bill Monroe sings the verses as if they are in the key of F# but with no E#, constantly resting on the F# at the end of musical phrases, instead of the tonic of the song, B natural. In other words, it is like singing the tenor position in the harmony, without a lead part. This, perhaps, may explain why some individuals describe the "high lonesome" sound simply as a vocal part that is "high." Monroe does not sing the actual pitch of B major until the chorus. In other words the sound created is one where the tenor part is exposed without a lead accompaniment.

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[7]Butch Baldassari, Rob Haines, and Jeff Story, *Bill Monroe: 16 Gems* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1997), 14.

Another example of dissonance occurs with the mandolin many times throughout the music. The mandolin in this case is played similarly to Monroe's vocal style, in terms of where the dissonances lie and how long they are sustained. Examples of this may be found in measures six, fourteen, and eighteen of the instrumental introduction.[8] In measures six and fourteen the technique is almost identical to the second full measure of the verse. Here the mandolin plays a D natural in each of these measures against a B major chord which is played throughout the rest of the instrumentation. The D natural is, in both measures six and eighteen, sustained for only the length of an eighth note. Again, it is played as an ornamentation leading up to the D# played in the following quarter note, yet nevertheless it serves its purpose in the creation of a dissonant tone. Like Monroe's dissonance in the vocals, this lowered third is played quickly and in the context of a run. In this case, however, the runs are working toward an F#, which is the fifth scale degree of the B natural scale. In measure eighteen the mandolin lowers the seventh scale degree (A#) and plays an A natural against the A# the rest of the band is playing; a run beginning on b7 or b3/V. It is similar to playing two adjacent notes on a keyboard, yet in this case the notes are again played on separate instruments. In this instance the lowered seventh is actually used as a sixteenth note, or in the form of an ornamentation, and it is being used in the context of a run which ends on B natural.

These and other cases of subliminal dissonance can be found throughout this and many other Bill Monroe compositions. It is important to remember that instances of scale degree manipulation are often so fast they can sometimes be difficult to pinpoint by the

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[8]Ibid., 14.

untrained ear, both in instrumentation and vocals. Remember when Bill Monroe just touched on the D natural in "Goodbye Old Pal" while singing the run down to a B natural. This is due in part to the fact that bluegrass tempos are usually quicker than what most music might be, and because the manipulated notes are most commonly found during runs or fast breaks such as this one. Rarely are the altered scale degrees sustained long enough for the untrained listener to identify their exact location. In all of "Goodbye Old Pal" there are no cases of dissonance that last longer than the length of an eighth note. In fact, most of the altered scale degrees are played as sixteenth notes. This is common in the mandolin, vocals, and the fiddle arrangement.[9]

Aside from the use of tensions, other elements of this recording work to give it a "high lonesome sound." Again, Bill Monroe did not write this song but he did borrow several stylistic elements from previous recordings as well as add his own. I want to emphasize that, although theoretically there is much importance to the use of manipulated scale degrees, this is merely one proton in the molecular structure of the "high lonesome sound." An earlier recording of "Goodbye Old Pal," recorded in 1934 by Cliff Carlisle features similar stylistic elements as Monroe.[10] Carlisle's vocal technique would be considered "country" by today's standards. His inflections in his vocal style are similar to ornamentations used by Bill Monroe. In both cases the vocalist hits notes that are lowered from the original tone, as he scoops into the intended pitch. This is an early stylistic element that would become a recognized trademark of bluegrass music. Other examples of this will

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[9]The fiddle is likely Monroe's source of influence for his virtuosic scales. See pages 25-33 of thesis.

[10]Carlisle, Cliff, "Goodbye Old Pal," *A Country Legacy, 1930-1939.* JSP, 2004. Compact Disc.

be discussed later; for now, let us concentrate on the differences between these two recordings. The most noticeable difference is perhaps the absence of Cliff Carlisle's Hawaiian-style steel guitar playing. Although the instrument is not included in Bill Monroe's recording, the melody is kept and transferred to the fiddle and mandolin. In addition, Bill Monroe adds a string bass and a banjo; an acoustic guitar is also used. A final touch Monroe adds to the music is to speed up the tempo quite a bit. In fact, he creates a different rhythmic design altogether in which the bass stresses the downbeat and the mandolin sounds on the offbeat. The mandolin offbeat "chop" is a distinctive characteristic of bluegrass syncopation. It is why some bluegrass scholars, like Robert Cantwell, refer to the mandolin as the "timekeeper," or metronome of bluegrass.[11] What we now have is the same song recorded in two different genres: bluegrass and country. This is an important aspect to consider as later we will discuss similar songs that have bridged the genre gap. Such an occurrence creates musical hybridity in which stylistic elements of certain genres are borrowed from others. Also, consider that, while genres of music may share similar characteristics, (such as the use of altered scale degrees in bluegrass and blues), it is the combination of many musical elements that create particular sounds. In the case of "Goodbye Old Pal" it is the use of altered scale degrees, increased tempo, and a change in the instrumentation that create a sound unlike Carlisle's; a sound that is "high and lonesome."

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[11]Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 107.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SEVENTH

It is my opinion that one of the most important scale degrees, and perhaps the most complex, is the seventh. The seventh scale degree by itself has the power to produce tension, to assist in the resolution of a piece of work, to change sounds, and to stand out in a musical progression. The seventh is the alpha and omega of movements in bluegrass music, as well as many other genres. This is due to the fact that the seventh scale degree (i.e. a B in a C major scale), is the closest of all scale degrees to the root, or tonic, of a given key.[12]

The root of a scale is the key which that scale is in. For example the root of a B major scale is B, C is the root of a C major scale, and D of a D major. It is the meaning behind the roman numeral, I. Another term commonly used to describe the root in music theory is "tonic." For our purposes I will use the terms root, tonic, and I, all of which refer to the first scale degree, or the key, of the scale.

The seventh scale degree is only one-half step away from tonic. For example, in the key of D major the seventh scale degree is C# which is only one-half step away from D natural. Being so close to tonic, the seventh scale degree has the power of resolution. This is one of the fundamental characteristics of the seventh. When movements of music are about to resolve they almost always resolve to tonic. In some cases they will resolve to the fifth, or dominant note of the scale, but most often it will be the tonic. Other than in cases of modulation, movements that do not resolve to tonic are few and far between. However,

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[12]Referring to actual scale degrees, and not chords built on scale degrees.

before resolving to tonic soloists commonly play the natural version of the seventh scale degree, then proceed to resolve. For example, a movement in D major will likely include a C# just before resolving to tonic, or D. This gives the movement more strength, and ultimately greater contrast if the movement contained a lowered seventh scale degree before reaching resolution.

Altering the seventh scale degree also allows the musician the ability to fake resolution and extend a piece of musical work. An example of this occurs in measure twenty-one of "Honky Tonk Swing."[13] In this measure the soloist plays a lowered seventh scale-degree (which is a Bb because the music is in the key of C) immediately followed by a B natural. In this instance the musician could be on the verge of resolution, yet instead of going to a C it goes to G natural, the dominant, and continues on for three more measures before reaching resolution on C. The raised seventh scale degree gives off a deceiving sound, which almost seems as if it has to resolve. This technique is, once again, reflective of the style of Bill Monroe. Like in "Goodbye Old Pal," the altered scale degree is only as long as one eighth note. It is difficult to hear yet a powerful factor in this genre of music as well as others. The altered seventh adds tension and excitement to the music and is a valuable tool for extending musical movements.

Altering the seventh degree is also one of the only scale degree movements to occur outside of the soloist or exposed movements in the song. In bluegrass, as well as most other forms of music, the seventh scale degree is almost always lowered when the rhythm, or sometimes other, instruments play a seventh chord. For example a musician playing a C7

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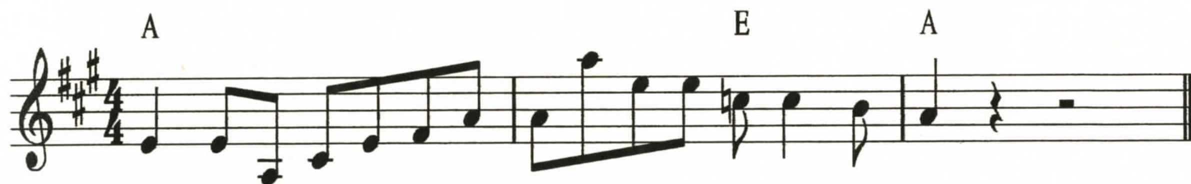
[13]Todd Collins, *Monroe Instrumentals: 25 Bill Monroe Favorites* (Pacific: Mel Bay, 2002), 5.

chord will thus play the notes C-E-G-Bb, with a lowered Bb in the seventh position. This also occurs in minor seventh versions of chords such as the C minor seventh. However, such a chord is more common in jazz and blues as minor sevenths are found less often in bluegrass. It is also common to find seventh chords played in substitution of regular dominant chords to solidify the cadential progression to tonic (V7-I). The lowered seventh adds a hint of tension to the music and makes for a much nicer contrast when resolving. For this reason, we most commonly find seventh chords played at the end of musical phrases or just before resolution. A good example of this occurs in measure twenty-nine of Bill Monroe's "Cheyenne."[14] This song is in the key of Gm, composed of the notes G-A-Bb-C-D-Eb-F. Just before resolving to tonic in measure thirty-one the rhythm section begins strumming a D7 in measure twenty-nine. It is particularly interesting to notice the added tension Bill Monroe places on these two measures leading into measure thirty-one. As the rhythm section nears tonic in measure thirty-one and begins playing D7 chords, Monroe continues to add tension by lowering and raising the third scale degrees in measure thirty:

[14]Ibid., 43.

The lowered third adds stress by creating tension between the rhythm and lead progressions. It is important to note here that bluegrass songs featuring simultaneous altered scale degrees in both rhythm and lead parts are uncommon, particularly in the music of Bill Monroe. However, altering the third scale degree in the solo instrument is fairly common during cadential movements. Notice how Monroe incorporates this motion in four other of his recordings:

1) "True Life Blues"[15]



2) "Goodbye Old Pal"

B F♯ B

Hee, hoo hoo,

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[15]"True Life Blues," "Goodbye Old Pal," "Bluegrass Special," and "Heavy Traffic Ahead" transcriptions from *Bill Monroe, 16 Gems, Authentic Mandolin Transcriptions*.

3) “Heavy Traffic Ahead”

E A

3

4) “Bluegrass Special”

A E A

“True Life Blues,” “Goodbye Old Pal,” Blue Grass Special,” and “Heavy Traffic Ahead” all contain altered third scale degrees during a cadential V-I motion. Three of the four tunes contain lowered thirds on the downbeat of the dominant (V) chord. The lowered third is a technique common to blues music, which is most likely the source of influence.

Also, by playing a seventh chord and lowering the seventh scale degree the performer is at the same time creating an additional chord within the chord that is being played. For

example, a C7 chord consists of C-E-G-Bb. Because a chord, by definition, must have three notes, there now exists a chord within the C7 chord made up of the notes E-G-Bb, as well as the basic C major triad of C-E-G. In music theory this type of chord, (E-G-Bb), is referred to as diminished because of the specific interval between the notes of the triad. A diminished chord is essentially a minor triad with a lowered or diminished fifth. Thus, whenever a seventh chord is played, a hidden diminished chord likewise exists. It is important to note that manipulation of the seventh scale degree is also a common feature of jazz music as well as blues. It allows players to solo for longer periods of time because, with a lowered seventh, as long as tonic is not played, there is no hint of resolution and the player can seemingly go on forever. Both the diminished sound of the seventh chord and the ability of the soloist to play breaks with altered scale degrees are comparable to jazz. It is the alteration of the seventh chord that leads many listeners of bluegrass music to make this comparison. The same exists for the thirds and fifths, which is commonly lowered in blues music and can give the impression of having a bluesy sound.

I would like to add that two differences concerned with altering any scale degrees are duration and commitment. In bluegrass music the altered scale degrees are almost never sustained for long periods of time. In some instances vocalists or fiddle players will sustain an altered scale degree for longer than just a few notes, but it is highly unlikely that such a change will continue beyond musical phrases within a given song. This is also a feature that can occur in jazz. The lack of commitment and duration to altered scale degrees in jazz and bluegrass is another example of musical hybridity, or a bridge between two genres. In most cases the player either touches on the altered scale degrees during runs or passages leading to

tonic or dominant, or during melodies. Either way, the altered pitches are short lived, without duration, which can work to "hide" the notes in the music. Also, the specific scale degrees that are altered are only done so temporarily, usually only one note at a time, before switching back to its usual form. This is why I use the word "commitment" as a crucial factor in distinguishing bluegrass music from other genres. In jazz and blues the altered scale degrees can last for much longer than in bluegrass, sometimes, throughout entire pieces of work. In other words, although altered scale degrees are also used in blues and jazz, it is commitment and duration that differentiate the bluegrass style from both of these genres.

PERFECT FOURTHS AND FIFTHS

It would be a great injustice to bluegrass music for me to not mention the use of perfect fourths and fifths. They are as much a part to the overall design as the guitar, banjo, stand-up bass, or mandolin. The terms perfect fourth and perfect fifth refer to the interval relationships between the first scale degree and the fourth and fifth. The relationships are termed "perfect" because they belong to a group of intervals known as "perfect," which consists of the fourth, fifth, and octave. The group was coined perfect for the close relationship of intervals and extremely consonant sound. In simpler terms, the perfect fourths and fifths are pleasing to the ear. The perfect fifth relationship is so common and so strong it is found in most every major, minor, or seventh chord stemming from tonic, save some instances in jazz. In other words, the perfect fifth is crucial in major and minor chordal construction. The perfect fourth is the second strongest relationship between two notes. The

movement from tonic to the fourth scale degree is extremely smooth and consonant. Also, it is in close relationship to the perfect fifth. If you invert a perfect fourth interval, the result is a perfect fifth. For example, take a perfect fourth relationships such as C and F, invert the two, and what you now have is F-C, C being the fifth of F. Thus the perfect fourth is simply a reflective, mirror image of the fifth. This is why they are both so evenly pleasing to the ear. To make things a bit simpler, try to imagine the tune "Here comes the Bride." The interval between the words "Here" and "Comes" is a perfect fourth. See below:

Here Comes the Bride
Scale Degree: 1 4

The same works for the perfect fifth relationship in the song, "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." If you consider the interval between the first "Twinkle" and the second "Twinkle," what you are hearing is actually a perfect fifth relationship, or a I-V. See Below:

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
Scale Degree: 1 5

What you are probably wondering now is what all of this has to do with bluegrass music. Well, the answer is simple: everything! The perfect fourth and perfect fifth relationships are used in the construction of the overall design or chord progressions of bluegrass songs, in the construction of melodies, as well as vocal and instrumental solos.

First, examine the use of perfect fourth and perfect fifth intervals in the construction of bluegrass songs as a whole. For this example, let us look at Monroe's "Honky Tonk Swing."[16] This is a classic example of the use of perfect fourths and fifths to construct a song. Remember, the song itself is in the key of C major, so beginning on two G pick-up notes, the song begins on C in measure one. C chords are played in the first measure and continue to measure five where it then switches to F, (the fourth of C). Following this the chords change back to C in measure seven. In measure nine the chords change to G and then become C again in measure eleven. What has just been played is a very symmetrical I-IV-I, I-V-I, chord progression where the fourth and fifths are sustained for two measures before going back to tonic. In measure seventeen this whole process is repeated again, until measure twenty-three where the C chord, (tonic), is played until the end of the song. An important note to remember: earlier when I mentioned the subliminal dissonances created by the soloist or vocalist, occurs when the manipulated scaled degrees sound against the chords I have just described. The chart below should help to better understand the perfect fourth and fifth chord progressions of "Honky Tonk Swing."

Chord:	C	F	C	G	C	F	C	G	C
Scale Degree:	I	IV	I	V	I	IV	I	V	I
Measure number:	1	5	7	9	11	17	19	21	23
Duration of measures:	4	2	2	2	6	2	2	2	2

Notice how the only chords used in the whole song are from the first, fourth, or fifth scale degrees: the major chords of the harmonized scale. Also, consider the symmetry of the

[16]Ted Collins, *Monroe Instrumentals: 25 Bill Monroe Favorites* (Pacific: Mel Bay, 2002), 5.

song. The song is constantly alternating between tonic and the perfect fourth, and tonic and the perfect fifth. The chords are also played for an even number of measures. Although this is common in many different types of music, it is important to note here because it is a characteristic of most any bluegrass or country song. Also, remember that the perfect fifth is the strongest interval from tonic. Bill Monroe plays the perfect fifth, I-V-I chord progression, before concluding the song. In music theory, this is called a cadential ending, and is one of the strongest endings one can play before resolving to tonic.

Let us now take a moment to examine the use of perfect fourths and fifths in instrumental and vocal technique. As I mentioned earlier, in "Goodbye Old Pal," Bill Monroe actually sings the verses in the tenor position. In this situation the tenor happens to be an F#, and, since the song is in the key of B major, Monroe is actually singing a perfect fifth above the chords. This is so very important in Monroe's style because together, his vocals along with the instrumentation are creating a perfect fifth relationship. Now, remember in measure twenty-two, the second measure of the verse, Monroe plays a quick eighth note D natural, (a lowered third). At this moment in the song we have now heard the three notes of a crucial subliminal chord created collectively by Monroe's vocals, mandolin, and the rest of the band, which includes a dissonant, lowered third. The notes of the dissonant chord we are hearing spread over two measures, giving it a real subliminal feel. The chord is composed of the notes, B, D natural, and F sharp. Which, broken down, looks like this:

Monroe's Vocals:	F#
Monroe's Mandolin:	D natural
Rest of Band:	B chord (B, D#, F#)

This is a very important element in the construction of this song because the altered third we are hearing exists only in one of many sounds in the music. Also, the individual notes of the chord are not played simultaneously, but stretched out over two measures. It is almost as if the dissonance is hidden from the audience, yet its presence is still there. This is one of several reasons many people refer to the music as "lonesome" without a real explanation as to why or how they feel this way. Another important note about this musical phrase is, after the second measure of the verse, (where the chord we just discussed occurs), the rhythm section begins on an E, which is a perfect fourth interval from B. At this time Bill Monroe begins the next line with the word, "Texas," which he sings on a G#, which happens to be the third of E. He then finishes the last syllable of "Texas" on a B, which is the fifth of E. The significance of this is great. It shows us that throughout Monroe's verses he is constantly constructing chords between his voice, his mandolin, and the rest of the band. To conclude this musical phrase Monroe ends on a low F#, an octave below where he began. At this moment the rest of the band is playing the tonic chord, B, against Monroe's F#. The distance is a perfect fifth relationship.

Above is a notated example of what I am referring to. Remember, "Goodbye Old Pal" is in the key of B major, however the example above is an excerpt that occurs when the band is playing the perfect fourth, or E chord, just before resolving to B, the tonic. Notice how all of the band, save for Monroe, is playing an E chord. This is the root of the chord Monroe is constructing (an E major). Second, notice how Monroe begins this line of the verse on the third of the chord, and then moves to the fifth, a B. The line of this verse moves in linear motion, hitting the arpeggios of the E major chord. In this case Monroe has the choice of movement between either E, G#, or B, as those are the constructs of an E major chord.

Another characteristic of Monroe's "high lonesome sound" is his yodeling. Monroe yodels in many of his songs that contain lyrics. His yodeling is so common, it is one of the features that has become associated with bluegrass music. Some of his yodeling is sung in normal lead and tenor registers, while others are achieved through the technique of falsetto.[17] Below is an excerpt from measures thirty-nine through forty-three of "Goodbye Old Pal," in which Monroe sings four measures of yodeling, demonstrating his normal and falsetto techniques.

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[17]Falsetto is a singing technique in which the vocalist hits notes above their normal register. It is usually higher and different in sound than their regular voice. In singing styles, this is also referred to as one's "head voice."

Voice

Oh, de -lay-de-a - le-do - lay-de o - le-do lay- hoo - ooo.

Notice how in the first two measures Monroe uses a perfect fifth interval to create his yodeling sound. He begins on an F# and then jumps to a high C# before coming back to F#. The significance here is great in that Monroe sings a simple I-V-I progression to create his yodeling sound. Listen closely to the recording of this excerpt. You will notice that briefly on the high C# and on the octave jump to a high B at the end of the yodel, the sound of Bill Monroe's voice has become high and different than it usually sounds. In these instances Monroe is using the technique of Falsetto. The perfect fifth leap and use of falsetto is one of the reasons many people refer to bluegrass music as being "high."

At this point I have examined multiple theoretical qualities of bluegrass music, from perfect fourths and fifths, scales degree qualities, and song structure and style. While examining the theoretical principals is a crucial aspect to understanding bluegrass music, it is likewise important to know the historical influences that helped shape and mold the sound. For this, let us examine the history of Bill Monroe, and the years leading up to the creation of the Blue Grass Boys and their "high lonesome" sound.

CHAPTER III
THE LIFE OF BILL MONROE- THE EARLY YEARS

Bill Monroe is one of the most important figures in bluegrass history. He is responsible for the creation of the bluegrass sound and style. For this, he is known as the "father of bluegrass music."[18] In addition to creating the bluegrass sound, he also practiced a lifelong musical career, and helped to start and influence the careers of many other talented bluegrass musicians. A knowledge of the theoretical elements of Bill Monroe's musical style is key to understanding the "high lonesome sound." By knowing how Monroe structures his "high lonesome" style we are better equipped to study bluegrass music as a whole. The theory behind the music, however, is no random construction. Rather, it is a result of a lifetime of musical influences.

Born in Rosine, Kentucky in 1911, Monroe began his life surrounded by talented musicians. His father, James Buchanan "Buck" Monroe and mother, Melissa Vandiver Monroe owned a 655 acre farm where they plowed, harvested livestock, mined, and timbered. Bill's parents were pioneers in the Rosine area. They came to the Kentucky territory, crossed the divide, and built their lifestyle on the same homestead that still stands today. The Monroes never experienced wealth but they always managed to survive, producing enough goods to share with neighbors and the less fortunate.

[18]Tom Ewing, *The Bill Monroe Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 22.

Melissa Vandiver Monroe (Bill's mother) was the Monroe children's first musical influence. She often sang ballads and traditional tunes in addition to playing the fiddle.[19] Later in his career, Bill recalled his Mother's side of the family as all being "gifted musicians," that could "all play, all sing, and could fiddle the old-time breakdown numbers."[20] The times to come would only get harder for Bill and his siblings. His mother passed away when he was ten and the following year Monroe suffered a ruptured appendix, barely escaping death himself. Five years later, Bill lost his father. Orphaned at sixteen, a teenage Bill Monroe was left alone with his two sisters; possibly one of the loneliest times of his life.

It is not that Bill did not love or care for his sisters, but that he felt they could not fill the void left by his parents. Bill missed his brothers as well, who moved to the north to find work. He longed for the days they would stare at mail-order catalogs filled with images of new guitars and mandolins. Bill remembered the loneliness he felt during these days for the rest of his life. He described "seeing [loneliness] through the eyes of [his] music."[21] In 1929 Bill reunited with his brothers in the North, however, he would spend his final teenage years interacting with talented family members and local musicians.

The young Monroe often traveled and performed music with his uncle, Pen Vandiver, and observed local performers like blues player, Arnold Schultz. Today, Arnold Shultz is a man whose influences have reached popular figures in country music, such as

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[19]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* MCA, 1994. Compact Disc.

[20]Tom Ewing, *The Bill Monroe Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 47.

[21]Ibid., 46.

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guitarist Kennedy Jones. In turn, Jones influenced Mose Rager, the man responsible for teaching Merle Travis to play guitar. From Arnold Schultz, Monroe learned blues runs that "[he] used a lot in [his] music."[22] Monroe admired the way Shultz would "follow a fiddle piece or a breakdown... use a pick, and could just run from one chord to another the prettiest you've ever heard."[23] Often in what would later be described as "high and lonesome," musicians perform ornamentations or "fills" between chords, precisely what Monroe describes Shultz as having done. Monroe began implementing these "fills" while recording as the Monroe Brothers, before refining his bluegrass style. For example, the Monroe Brothers' recording of "He Will Set Your Fields On Fire" (1937) uses this technique while transitioning from chorus back to verse.

Arnold Shultz could also play the fiddle. At dances Bill would sometimes accompany Shultz on guitar while Shultz played fiddle tunes. Years later, Bill recalls that Shultz did not sing, "but he could 'whistle the blues' better than anyone around."[24] Another important sector in Monroe's early musical life was his experience with religious music. During his youth Monroe experienced both sacred and secular music. In church he sang hymns in the "old Sacred Harp way."[25] The congregation would perform in the shape-note fashion, as taught in local singing schools. Bill's eyes were crossed as a child, making it difficult for him to read text and music. As a result, his brothers often taught him the

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[22]Thomas Goldsmith, *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 37.

[23]Ibid., 37.

[24]Tom Ewing, *The Bill Monroe Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 23.

[25]Thomas Goldsmith, *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 36.

material they learned from hymnals. The influence of the sacred singing styles helped Monroe structure his own music. In fact, some credit the application of harmonic traditions of learned sacred music to secular music, as the reason for Monroe's music sounding "lonesome."

"Contrary to popular belief, the performers who emerged from the southern hills to become the pioneers of country music and bluegrass were not from an exclusively aural folk tradition. Formal musical education, albeit rudimentary, was available each summer in towns like Rosine in the form of 'singing schools'."[26] The teacher or instructor of the singing schools would often travel around, teaching in many areas. Adults and children were taught the "shape note" system, in which notes on staves are represented by shaped symbols. Students also learned to sing scale degrees using the shape note, "do-re-me" system. The system was invented in New England in the early 1800s. Its design resembles the classic system of vocal studies called "Solfege." The word is pronounced "Sol-Fej", or, sometimes "Sol-fish" by the youngsters. The name is based upon the syllables used to represent the seven degrees of a scale. Solfege is a common technique used in sight singing and music theory. It allows students who are reading music an easier approach to learning note intervals and relationships. Also, this technique is particularly important for vocalists who wish to recreate the notes of a given scale. A student who wanted to recreate a major scale with arpeggios would thus sing, beginning on the note that corresponds with the scale name, "Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do, Do Mi Sol Mi Do." In addition to learning to sing in the shape note

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[26]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 20.

style students in the school also studied other areas of music like, rhythm, timing, rests, keys, and measures. Singing schools followed strict guidelines for education, usually requiring students to study the rudiments found in music readers. The textbook-style teaching method required students to follow lesson plans and exercises covering a broad range of musical topics. From studies in sacred music the Monroe brothers learned harmonic relationships in vocal studies. They developed the skills to sing multiple vocal parts of spiritual music. They also learned a vast repertoire of sacred songs, such as "A Beautiful Life," "He Will Set Your Fields on Fire," and "What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul" in addition to many others. The vocal styles learned in singing schools are evident in recordings from the Monroe Brothers, as well as the Blue Grass Boys. When Bill harmonized with Charlie, the two often sang in intervals equal to a fifth, or a tonic-dominant relationships. Because there were only two vocalists to perform, they often omitted the "third" part, which would have been sung between Charlie's and Bill's. The lack of a third note created an incomplete chord, something some may refer to as "high and lonesome." Outside of church, Monroe often listened to Uncle Pen's acoustic music, usually a fiddle, and sometimes guitar, mandolin, or banjo. They often traveled and performed music together, playing waltzes, barn dances, breakdowns, parties, and local entertainment. Monroe recalls songs such as "Soldier's Joy," "Turkey in the Straw," and "Greenback Dollar" as some of the tunes he used to hear.[27] In fact, throughout his life Monroe "remembered most of the fiddle numbers that Uncle Pen played... ninety-five percent of every tune."[28]

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[27]Thomas Goldsmith, *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 36.

[28]Tom Ewing, *The Bill Monroe Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 48.

Later, Bill's sisters moved away to live with other family members and Bill found himself living alone with Uncle Pen. The two spent lots of time together during these years. They played music with each other, as well as other musicians who would visit. Literally, Uncle Pen would play music most days of the week. Monroe's tune "Uncle Pen," written eighteen years after his death, is a song about his uncle:

Oh, the people would come from far away,
To dance all night to the break of day.
When the caller would holler: "Do Si Do",
They knew Uncle Pen was ready to go.

Late in the evening, about sundown,
High on the hill, an' above the town,
Uncle Pen played the fiddle, Lord, how it rang,
You could hear it talk, you could hear it sing!
Instrumental break.

Well, he played an old tune they called the "Soldier's Joy",
And he played the one they called the "Boston Boy".
Greatest of all was the "Jennie Lynn",
To me, that's where the fiddlin' begins.

I'll never forget that mournful day
When old Uncle Pen was called away,
He hung up his fiddle and he hung up his bow,
And he knew it was time for him to go.

The song tells about the musical life of Uncle Pen, and describes Bill's reaction to his death. Years later Bill confessed the song reminds him of a time from his youth when he would put

away his livestock late in the evenings, and would hear Uncle Pen playing fiddle from the back porch.[29]

Uncle Pen's friend Clarence Wilson would sometimes stop by and visit. The three (Uncle Pen, Clarence, and Bill) would sit around and play music together. Wilson played a five-string banjo in a clawhammer style. Sometimes Bill's other uncle, Birch would join in the music, playing bass with a bow. Additionally, Uncle Pen taught Bill to dance. Bill studied some moves from his father, but mostly from Uncle Pen, who taught him how to "do the old-time Kentucky backstep."[30]

In 1929 Bill moved north to Indiana to live with his brothers Charlie and Birch. During the first three years away from Kentucky Bill and his brothers were in and out of jobs. They also played music for parties and gatherings, as they had done back home. During the third year Uncle Pen fell ill with respiratory problems back home. Pen developed bronchitis and pneumonia. A doctor was summoned from the nearby town of Beaver Dam, some nine miles away. By the time the doctor visited Pen and delivered the proper medication, it was too late. On June 22, 1932, at the age of sixty-three, Pendleton Vandiver died. Bill was not around at the time of his death. In fact, family members opted not to contact the family up north and alert them of the news, fearing finances would not allow them to travel to Kentucky for the funeral.

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[29]Ibid., 49.

[30]Ibid., 47.

Later, Bill came to feel that "the worse part of his life was that he didn't get to go to Uncle Pen's funeral."[31] His musical tribute "Uncle Pen" speaks about their lives, however Monroe does not "remember that mournful day," as he did not attend the ceremony.

Bill also did not find out until later that another musical influence had passed away during his absence. Arnold Shultz died in Morgantown, Butler County, Kentucky the previous year, April 14, 1931. He was forty-five years old. He passed as a result of a mitral lesion, which is a disease of the heart valves. Shultz was buried in a colored cemetery in Morgantown. Because headstones were often only available to the privileged, the exact location of his grave is unknown.

After his visit home Bill returned to the North to play music and work with his brothers. Their lives were not easy, but it began the creation of a sound that would eventually become a genre of its own.

THE MONROE BROTHERS

From his early influences Monroe crafted the style and sound of what will later be called "high and lonesome." He incorporated harmonies he learned in church, and melodic blues styles from Arnold Shultz. At the end of his teenage years Monroe became increasingly concerned with supporting himself and earning a living. At this time Monroe moved to Whiting, Indian to work and live.

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[31] Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 33.

In Whiting, Charlie worked at the Sinclair Oil refinery. He was fortunate to have been employed. Factory workers recall crowds of unemployed laborers that would gather outside, often "so great that the police would have hard work keeping the intersection of Indianapolis Boulevard and Marks Road open so that streetcars could get through."[32] Migration to urban areas to find employment was common during the twenties and thirties. By 1930 the typical farmer earned around thirty percent of what an urban worker made. The move from Kentucky to Indiana resembled a popular trend, as did the Monroe family's care for each other. Living six to a residence, the Monroes watched after each other as traditional families often did.

Charlie Monroe was a hard worker, both in the refinery and on the baseball field. His athleticism on the company team allowed him to recommend his brother, Bill for an open position at the refinery. After a game-winning home run Charlie told Max Tucker, his boss and also team manager: "Max, I've got a brother here, eighteen years old. Now, he's not well. Now, if we can't get him through that gate out there, I'm going to have to leave Sinclair's ball team and company."[33]

Max Tucker soon agreed and at eighteen Bill was hired to work in the steam house. Able to lift 165 pounds at the time, and six feet tall, Bill was no stranger to hard work. Bill could clean dozens of oil drums per hour, even finding a special way to tilt the drums to make cleaning easier. Later, after he became a professional musician, Monroe would often speak of his time loading, unloading, and cleaning barrels as a proud time in his life: "I got

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[32]Ibid., 29.

[33]Ibid., 29.

to where I could throw a drum like you'd throw a baseball," he said, "right-handed or left-handed, so it would slide right up to the next man, and he could throw it on farther."[34]

Later, a rivalry with a fellow worker would bring an end to Charlie's employment at the Sinclair Oil Refinery. After running into him, the man cursed Charlie. After work that day, Charlie met the man outside of the plant, exploding in anger and fury. Charlie knocked out several teeth with one blow.

For the next few months Bill financially supported five of his siblings. Every two weeks, on pay day, Bill's brothers Charlie and Birch would accompany him to the pay office. Bill would collect his money and set aside enough for basic living needs, then give the rest to his brothers to pay bills.

As their free time increased the Monroe brothers began spending more time playing music professionally. They performed at square dances and parlor parties around the area. At the same time, recordings of rural music began to rise in popularity. "RCA Victor and other record companies recognized this when they developed white 'hillbilly' records in parallel with the successful 'race' records that had appealed to blacks."[35]Charlie owned a Victrola, allowing the Monroes to hear popular music. They listened to bands like Gid Tanner & The Skillet Lickers, Charlie Poole & the North Carolina Ramblers, the Carter Family, and Jimmie Rodgers; bands that influenced the Monroes in musical repertoire, sound, and style.

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[34]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* Universal City, Calif. : MCA Records, 1994, 1936. Compact Disc. Liner notes, 15.

[35]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 31.

The growing popularity of the radio exposed many Americans to these popular sounds, as well as others. Stations broadcasted in signals strong enough to reach rural areas, deep in the hills. Chicago's very own WLS, a close neighbor to the Monroes, broadcasted a powerful 50,000-watt signal in 1924. The station aired the *Barn Dance*, which would later be syndicated across America as the *National Barn Dance*.

Some scholars credit radio as being the source of jazz influence on Bill Monroe in the 1930s. "The evidence for this comes from Bill's own music: 'Milneburg Joys' had become a Chicago jazz standard thanks to Jelly Roll Morton, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and others. Bill heard a version being played by the Hoosier Hot Shots string band over WLS, which he later recorded as a mandolin instrumental under the title 'Milenberg Joy.'"[36]

During the early years of the decade, the three Monroes (Charlie, Birch, and Bill) played house parties, clubs, square dances, and local radio programs. They even performed on WLS's *Barn Dance,* and began traveling with the stations' own country music show. They appeared with musicians like Red Foley, the Maple City Four, Rube Tronson & the Texas Cowboys, Arkie the Arkansas Woodchopper, and the Hoosier Hotshots. They also played in the WLS exhibition square dance team at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.[37]

By this time the Monroe brothers had established a fairly consistent structure. With Charlie playing guitar and Birch on fiddle, Monroe was left to play the mandolin. It wasn't his first choice but it may have been a career changing move, as it is the instrument he is

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[36]Ibid., 31.

[37]Ibid., 31.

most popular for today. Monroe crafted his own sound with the mandolin. He "wanted to be sure that [he] didn't play like nobody else, and [he] was going to have a style of [his] own."[38] It was also during this time that Monroe discovered his singing voice. His "tenor was way up there, and it had that 'lonesome' quality along with some blues feeling that made it immediately identifiable."[39] The Monroes sang in a close harmony, with styles acquired from experiences in singing school.

As they continued to perform the Monroe brothers grew in popularity. They had a regular broadcast on WLS radio and played some of the largest venues in Chicago, such as the Palace Theater. In 1932 Bill resigned from the Sinclair Oil Refinery to pursue music full time. By this time Birch had left the group. Charlie and Bill, however, continued onward to form the Monroe Brothers.

Some consider the Monroe Brothers to be "country music's best harmony team of the 1930s."[40] Both musicians sang remarkably together, with Bill singing a high tenor atop Charlie's lead. Bill's quick and intricate mandolin playing together with Charlie's speedy guitar left a group that was a force with which to be reckoned. Ralph Rinzler stated that if Bill "...had never done anything else but transfrom the mandolin into a lead instrument in country music, that would have been enough to secure his fame. It was the same with their singing--the harmonies, the yodeling. They were just great."[41] Charlie could win over a

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[38]Thomas Goldsmith, *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 41.

[39]Ibid., 41.

[40]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* Universal City, Calif. : MCA Records, 1994, 1936. Compact Disk. Liner notes, 19.

[41]Ibid., 19.

crowd with his presence and showmanship. Bill was nothing less, however. Lester Flatt remembered that seeing the two walk down a small-town street was like watching "moving statues."[42]

The early days were not profitable but they did offer increasing popularity and success. Crowds would come from all over the Carolinas to see Charlie and Bill perform. They only made about fifteen to twenty-five cents per show, but performed quite frequently. Charlie once described in an interview their reaction to a boy who tried to avoid paying for a show one night: "Bill reached up and got one, yanked him out of the window, throwed him by me. I just hit him in the face, by gosh, and let im go right on. That went on 'till we knocked down about twenty-five of 'em... we just didn't think it was right."[43] This continued until the local sheriff arrived, who made the Monroe brothers stop fighting and continue the show. Charlie recalled, "back in those days we both were just so hot-headed and mean as snakes... we didn't think anybody could whip us. Pretty much a handful!"[44] Charlie and Bill purchased John B. Stetson hats while traveling through Omaha, Nebraska. The brothers walked up and down the streets, flaunting their apparel. They also refused to remove their head pieces in fine restaurants-a deliberate social faux pas. As Bill's life and career progressed, John B. Stetson hats became more than just part of an early costume, it became an iconic feature of the "father of bluegrass." Bill wore a Stetson hat on and off stage for the rest of his life.

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[42]Ibid., 19.

[43]Ibid., 19.

[44]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 31.

In 1936 the Monroe brothers made their first recording for RCA records. RCA was also recording "hillbilly" and string band music of the time, and they were anxious to sign the brother duo. "My Long Journey Home" was the first track Charlie and Bill recorded for RCA. The song features a quick tempo driven by an athletic guitar and a speedy, melodic mandolin. The mandolin lead parts exhibit catchy melodic riffs, similar to the fiddles tunes Monroe recalls having heard Uncle Pen perform. The vocal arrangements also exhibit interval relationships similar to sacred music. At the end of musical phrases Bill transitions into the verse with fast, bluesy licks; licks that resemble techniques Monroe acquired from Arnold Shultz.[45] It is interesting to observe the stylistic influences in Charlie and Bill's recordings. Monroe's mandolin rings clearly the musical structures and styles that would soon become something larger, with a "high lonesome sound."

The Monroe Brothers recorded over sixty tunes for RCA records. Some of the material was produced as a direct result of their background in religious music. For example, "What Would You Give in Exchange (for Your Soul)" was selected from a gospel songbook on the day of the recording.[46] They also recorded "This World Is Not My Home," another gospel tune.

For the next two years Charlie and Bill became increasingly disenchanted with each other. Bill, often feeling like the "younger brother," found difficulty getting his ideas across to Charlie. At the same time Charlie was doing his part as the "older brother." In 1938 the

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[45]See "Bill Monroe: The Early Years," 26, for discussion of sacred music influences.

[46]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* Universal City, Calif. : MCA Records, 1994, 1936. Compact Disk. Liner notes, 19.

Monroe Brothers "were beginning to arrive at shows separately and not speaking to each other, ignoring each other to the point where they almost seemed facing in different directions."[47] The duo parted ways later in the year. Charlie and Bill continued to play music. They both worked hard and traveled long distances, yet one would go farther than either imagined.

BILL MONROE 1938-1945

The breakup with Charlie allowed Bill time off to work on his new sound. This time in Bill's life marks a trial period; a time of experimenting with new sounds, styles, and appearances. Bill wanted something quicker, with more syncopation. He began performing closer to the styles he heard as a child, from Uncle Pen's fiddle playing. Over the next six and a half years Bill worked relentlessly on the sound he was seeking. He tried out different musicians and different venues. He also included comedy and experimented with instrumentation. Eager to compete with his brother Charlie, who had already formed the Kentucky Pardners, Bill conceived an idea that forever changed the sound of his music-he created a band.

Bill's first group was called the Kentuckians. Little is known about the group, but they started a trend that would become a regular part of bluegrass performance; the "high lonesome" ensemble, in which multiple acoustic instruments play together. The Kentuckians

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[47]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 44.

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Bill's first group was called the Kentuckians. Little is known about the group, but they started a trend that would become a regular part of bluegrass performance; the "high lonesome" ensemble, in which multiple acoustic instruments play together. The Kentuckians only lasted about three months, but Bill spared little time before continuing his musical vision.

Bill traveled to Atlanta, home of musical stars like Fiddlin' John Carson, Gid Tanner & the Skillet Lickers, and fiddler, Clayton McMichen.[48] Soon Bill hired guitarist and singer, Cleo Davis as the first of Bill's new band. He called the new group, the Blue Grass Boys. With his musical ideas at work, Bill almost immediately purchased matching suits and John B. Stetson hats for Davis and himself. Monroe also purchased his legendary Gibson F5 mandolin from a store window for $150. Bill would begin using the Gibson as his full time instrument. Today, it is an iconic piece of bluegrass history.

Monroe and Davis traveled to Asheville, North Carolina where Bill tried a new method of advertisement: radio broadcasts. Bill called for auditions, announcing his need for band members. He soon hired Art Wooten, a fiddler from Marion, North Carolina.

The Blue Grass Boys began playing even closer to what would later become bluegrass music. Inspired by Uncle Pen and Bill's vision of a quicker, more syncopated rhythm, the group began experimenting with up-beat, more elaborate fiddle tunes. They often opened with tunes like "Fire on the Mountain" or "Katy Hill." They would then

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[48]Ibid., 48.

maintain the fast pace by playing upbeat duets like "Foggy Mountain Top." The group also included comedy acts as a regular part of their show. The comedy routines often included black-face skits and band members (including Bill) in drag.

Bill also began singing lead during this time. The Carter Family played a significant role in Bill's repertoire as a lead singer. One of the first songs Monroe performed as a lead singer was a cover of the Carter Family's "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes." The tune was even part of a regular performance skit, in which a black-face comedian would come on stage and weep while the song was being performed.

The acoustic quartet was making great musical progress in the late thirties and early forties. Bill was still struggling on mastering his own compositions, but he began perfecting his music theory, sound, and structure. "The band continued to emphasize high-octane instrumentals and vocals... They rehearsed trips and gospel quartets... Bill and Cleo worked up 'No Letter in the Mail,' a Carlisle Brothers number... in waltz time... slowed down even further." This made the song take on a "...bluesy, almost despairing edge, a harbinger of the trademark Monroe "high lonesome sound," which would come to fruition a decade later."[49] Bill also began arranging versions of "Footprints in the Snow" and "Mule Skinner Blues," tunes that later became classic recordings of the bluegrass cannon.

During rehearsals of "Mule Skinner Blues" Bill began to develop what would later become the foundation of bluegrass rhythm. Monroe anticipated the beats in his tunes. He timed his rhythm in a way that did not accelerate the tempo, but drove it. Monroe understood the "driving" time he was creating, later stating, "'Mule Skinner Blues' set the timing for

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[49]Ibid., 55.

bluegrass music."[50] Compared to other bands at the time, Monroe's was one of the only groups to emphasize the rhythm, to "drive" the time. His tunes were also pitched up a couple whole steps and played in new keys. For example, Bill would move a tune in G or A, up to B-flat or B.

Monroe soon loaded up his new group and took their sound to Nashville, Tennessee to audition of the Grand Ole Opry. The group auditioned with a cover of the Carter Family Tune, "Foggy Mountain Top," then with a performance of Bill Monroe's version of "Mule Skinner Blues." The group finished off with a fiddle tune featuring Art Wooten, "Fire on the Mountain." The Blue Grass Boys were instantly hired.

On October 28, 1939 the group made their first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys performed their version of Jimmie Rodgers' "Mule Skinner Blues," and a traditional tune, "John Henry." They performed the songs in their new musical style- Monroe sped up the tempo, "moved [the key] up to fit the fiddle," and "played in a straight... driving time."[51] By the end of the show the crowd had witnessed the rising power of bluegrass music. That night Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys were the first to ever receive an encore. On the Opry they were also the first to wear button-down shirts and ties. In one night, they showcased beginning stages of the sound, style, and appearance of a genre that would come to be called bluegrass.

Almost one year from their debut on the Grand Ole Opry the Blue Grass Boys made their first recording. On October 7, 1940 the group recorded a number of tunes including the

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[50]Ibid., 56.

[51]Thomas Goldsmith, *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 44.

"Mule Skinner Blues" and the instrumental "Tennessee Blues" (Bill's first original composition).

As their careers progressed the Blue Grass Boys continued to perfect their sound. The role of the mandolin was something Monroe had been working on for some time. The "chop" began to see more usage with recordings like "Back Up and Push." In the recording Monroe styles his riffs in a rapid jazzy and bluesy fashion. He also "added a strong, straight downstroke on the second and fourth beats. It was an early example of the 'rhythm chop,' the backbeat emphasis that added yet another dimension to the mandolin."[52]

Monroe started another bluegrass tradition during these years: outdoor performances under canvas tents. Monroe would often perform his own shows under canvas tents. In the beginning he rented the tents from other people, but when he saw the potential profit, Bill purchased his own tents and began running his own shows. Bill organized the acquisition of necessary permits and rented lots. He also managed the advertising and promotion of the shows. The tent shows were more than musical concerts. They were, quite literally, *shows* that featured comedy, skits, one-man-bands, variety acts, and even a baseball team. Bill used the baseball team to advertise his music. He challenged local ball clubs to play his team (also named the Blue Grass Boys) in a baseball game, after which they would perform tunes from the upcoming show. The baseball team was an effective marketing tool, however, it was relatively short lived. The outdoor tent performances, on the other hand, became a regular method of bluegrass performance that is still commonly used today.

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[52]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 66.

Another milestone was reached in 1945 when Bill hired Lester Flatt to play guitar and sing lead vocals. Flatt, a seasoned musician from Tennessee, made his first radio debut in 1939. He had previously played guitar and sang tenor for Charlie Monroe as well. Flatt did not have any trouble transitioning to the Blue Grass Boys. Later he recalled, "it wasn't any trouble for [Bill] and me to sing together... because I was raised up in churches, just like I sang when I went to work with him."[53] Their shared talent for singing religious music allowed Flatt and Monroe to create one of the best harmony groups on the market. Flatt also provided his own influences, helping Monroe compose songs. The duo proved a quick turnaround in song production, creating tunes like "Will You Be Loving Another Man" and "Little Cabin Home on the Hill" shortly after Flatt joined the group.

One of the final steps in constructing what would become the legendary Blue Grass Boys lineup was the addition of a banjo. The five-string banjo is one of the only "widely played instruments to have been developed primarily in the United States."[54] It is a descendant of three different types of stringed instruments brought over from Africa. By the 1940s the banjo had become primarily an instrument used as a comedy prop. In the beginning the Blue Grass Boys included a banjo for this very reason. But eventually Bill felt the banjo ought to play a greater musical role. In 1942 Monroe hired David "Stringbean" Akeman. He performed for a number of years, but Monroe was unhappy. Stringbean was a wonderful comedian, but picked the banjo in a traditional, two-finger style. He could not

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[53]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* Universal City, Calif. : MCA Records, 1994, 1936. Compact Disc. Liner notes, 39.

[54]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 72.

maintain the tempo Monroe wanted. Things would, however, work out in the end. In 1945 Stringbean left the Blue Grass Boys to start his own music/comedy act. Bill soon began searching for a new banjo player. One evening in Spartanburg, South Carolina Bill located someone he thought would be an excellent addition to the group, a young banjo player named Don Reno. Ironically, Reno was drafted soon after Bill offered him the job. Reno would go on to become a great musical figure himself. But for Monroe, the hunt continued. Soon Jimmy Shumate recommended a banjo player from North Carolina named Earl Scruggs. Bill offered Earl a job, and it was quickly accepted. The circle was complete. Bill Monroe now had the group he needed to show the world his "high lonesome" sound.

FLATT AND SCRUGGS

Although the term "bluegrass" would not come into popular use until the 1950s, it was in the mid-1940s that Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys began perfecting their sound. In 1945, with the addition of Earl Scruggs, the group performed in a style most commonly associated with early bluegrass today. The lineup of the 1945 Blue Grass Boys included Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt, Howard Watts, and Chubby Wise. The twenty-eight songs recorded between 1946 and 1947 are now classics in the bluegrass canon, and have been covered by other great artists from various genres, such as Elvis Presley ("Blue Moon of Kentucky"). Although Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt would leave the group in 1948, Monroe continued on with the Blue Grass Boys to finish out a sixty-year musical career.

For his employment Monroe offered Earl Scruggs sixty dollars a week to join the Blue Grass Boys with an additional ten dollars a week for shows on Sunday. Earl had previously been earning fifty dollars a week working for John Miller, and he decided to accept the offer. Once the Blue Grass Boys heard what Scruggs had to contribute they realized that he was a vital asset to their music.

Earl's banjo playing was unlike any other sound heard in a professional ensemble; he was a true prodigy. The "Scruggs-style" technique of banjo performance was not the typical "claw hammer" style that was populating music of the time. The "Scruggs-style" featured, "amidst a shower of sound-usually two or three accompanying notes for every melody note-the main theme clearly registers on the listener's ear, like the raised image on a beautifully cast silver box still stands out to the eye even if rain pours upon it."[55] The "Scruggs-style" allowed three fingers to strike individual strings successively, creating a whirlwind of notes. Scruggs would alter the plucking pattern of his fingers to create different sounds. Not only did the Scruggs's method create a "fuller" sound, it drove the tempo and pushed the music to new limits; something the clawhammer method did not allow. Essentially, the "Scruggs-style" "consists of a chain of eighth notes in 4/4 time played by the thumb, index, and middle fingers in a series of variable three-finger sequences which naturally group the notes into threes or, in some versions of the style, into two groups of three and one group of two."[56]

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[55]Ibid., 88.

[56]Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 101.

For Earl's first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry the Blue Grass Boys showcased their new sound with a cover of "White House Blues," a tune that tells of the 1901 assassination of William McKinley. Prior to this, the banjo was predominately used as a comical prop. This appearance was the first time a banjo had been used with purely musical intentions. The result was incendiary; bluegrass had arrived.

The Blue Grass Boys were aware of their new sound and its possibilities. The group took what they had and ran with it. They recorded hit after hit; songs that are legendary in bluegrass today. Not only did Earl's banjo create a new sound, but Earl himself added a deep tenor to the vocal harmonies. Bill's mandolin featured the virtuosity he had been perfecting over the years. His signature "chops" provided a percussive drive to the new sound, while his bluesy solos and fills used altered scale degrees, rapid runs and jumps, and articulate duplets, triplets, and single notes to practically reinvent the role of the mandolin. Chubby Wise played his fiddle with a smoothness and melodicism that fit the ensemble well. In addition to singing lead on many songs, Lester Flatt kept a stead, consistent rhythm, driven by his patented g-note run. And Howard Watts' bass provided a pulsating, thumping beat that maintained the bluegrass "drive." Looking back, Earl Scruggs recollected, "Well, they hadn't heard [anything] like me, for instance... So it wasn't overexposed to say the least, the whole sound was new. When I first started, the dressing room would pack up with people who'd come and listen to Bill practice, because they'd never heard, you know, the banjo, this style banjo... This band, the musicians themselves, was altogether a new sound..."[57]

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[57]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 89-90.

"Performing together came easily" Flatt said, "and it worked every time. You knew it worked when the people applauded."[58] During this time the "high lonesome" sound claimed its identity as examined in this paper; it was the definitive beginning of bluegrass music. As the Blue Grass Boys continued to record it was almost instantly that they found themselves on the *Billboard's* country jukebox charts. While recording original tunes like "Mansions for Me," and "Why Did You Wander?" the Blue Grass Boys also recorded a number of spirituals, including "Remember the Cross" and "Little Community Church." They also reworked previously written recordings like "Heavy Traffic Ahead." In addition, they set the standard formula for performance, in which musicians alternated taking solo breaks moving in a circular motion around the group. Looking back, a young six year-old Levon Helms recalls seeing the Blue Grass Boys, who "...took that old hillbilly music, sped it up, and basically invented what is now known as bluegrass music: the bass in its place, the mandolin above it, the guitar tying the two together, and the violin on top, playing the long notes to make it sing. The banjo backed everything up, answering everybody..."[59]

Between 1946 and 1948 the Blue Grass Boys invented bluegrass as studied today. Their "high lonesome" sound proved a new and successful invention. Although their stint was short lived, the Lester Flatt, Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Howard Watts, and Chubby Wise ensemble recorded twenty-eight legendary tunes of the bluegrass cannon, they started a genre, and created the sound and style on which this paper focuses. There are many theories

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[58]Bill Monroe, *The Music of Bill Monroe: 1936-1994.* Universal City, Calif. : MCA Records, 1994, 1936. Compact Disc. Liner notes, 39

[59]Richard Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 94.

surrounding the reasons Flatt and Scruggs departed from Bill Monroe, the exact explanation is likely unknown to most. Earl Scruggs has said that "after years of grueling travel, he was tired. And he wanted to return home, find a job, and look after his aging mother."[60] Later, Jake Lambert, Lester Flatt's friend and biographer, claims the duo left because they felt underpaid. The two often earned sixty dollars a week, while Monroe pocketed thousands.[61] Other rumors circulating at the time claimed Earl Scruggs was uncomfortable with Monroe's public, adulterous lifestyle. No matter the reason, in early 1948 Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, and Howard Watts all resigned from the Blue Grass Boys. They would all go on to live long and successful musical lives leaving behind a legacy; a combination of their musical influences and personal creations that some have come to call "high and lonesome."

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[60]Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 78.

[61]Ibid., 79.

CHAPTER IV
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE MULESKINNER EXAMPLE

Now that I have examined several of the techniques involved in creating the "high lonesome" sound of bluegrass as well as the genre influences leading up to its creation, let us now examine an instance when Bill Monroe takes a preexisting song and "bluegrasses" it. "Muleskinner Blues" is a song recorded by many artists. One of the first known recordings was in 1928 by the artist Tom Dickson, under the title Labor Blues. The song was a solo recording with Dickson singing and playing acoustic guitar. It is not bluegrass at all, and is, in fact, recorded as a 12-bar blues. One of the key features that create the blues sound is a consistent use of seventh chords, a technique uncommon to bluegrass. Dickson, an African American, sings with a very southern bluesy dialect, reflective of popular southern blues music of the time. He does not yodel, nor does he play at an accelerated tempo. His lyrical style also mirrors that of popular blues music; the verses are sung in an A A B format:

(verse 1)

It's good mornin' Captain, 'e said "good mornin' Shine,

It's good mornin' Captain, 'e said "good mornin' Shine,

T'ain't nuthin' the matter, Captain, but I just ain't gwine.

The second recording of this song was done by Jimmie Rodgers in 1930 under the title, “Mule Skinner Blues,” or, “Blue Yodel Number 8.” In this version Rodgers borrows several musical techniques from Dickson. He also changes parts of the song and adds his own musical influences. Perhaps the most noticeable is the overall style and structure of the song. Upon hearing Rodgers’ version it is obvious the song is no longer arranged in a blues format. In this recording Rodgers performs the song in what would be regarded as an early example of American Country music.

He does not continue Dickson’s A A B verse format and slightly alters the lyrics:

(verse 1)

Good mornin’ Captain, good mornin’ Shine.

Do you need another mule skinner, out on your new mud line?

(yodel)

Notice how Rodgers omitted repeating the first line twice and instead added a yodel at the end. This is a vocal technique completely unique to Jimmie Rodgers. Because of it, he became known as the “Blue Yodeler.” It is also a musical style adopted by Bill Monroe, and would later become a stylistic element commonly associated with bluegrass music.

Throughout his career Monroe made four recordings of “Mule Skinner Blues” (1940, 1950, 1971, and 1973). The 1940 version was Monroe’s first solo recording ever made. His original version of Mule Skinner Blues also served as his audition for the Grand Ole Opry. In addition he played the song for his first live Opry performance and is credited for

receiving the first ever Opry encore. While maintaining many of Rodgers' musical devices, much like Rodgers did with Dickson's version, Monroe changed the song to suit his own preferences, giving it a "high lonesome sound."

In Monroe's version the tempo is greatly increased, moving from Rodgers' 88 bpm to a rapid 120 bpm. The lyrics were altered as well. Monroe excludes Rodgers' references to "honey," and omits many of the sexual references including "good gal waiting on a Saturday night, just to draw (his) pay," changing "pint of booze" to "walking cane," and leaving out the blatant, "I smell your bread burning," and the equally obscene lines that follow. Monroe's yodeling differs as well, whereas Jimmie Rodgers' version seems to have a consistent tonal progression, Monroe's seems more improvisational. In addition, Monroe uses a fiddle, mandolin, banjo, bass, and guitar on his recordings.

"Mule Skinner Blues" is a valuable song to examine in the history and influences of bluegrass music. Its roots influenced four genres-blues, rock and roll, country, and bluegrass-and serves as one of the founding songs of Bill Monroe's style. Since its introduction in bluegrass it has been recorded by many artists in both the bluegrass and country field, including, to name a few, Dolly Parton, Hank Williams Jr., Tony Rice, Old & In The Way, Roy Acuff, and even Van Morrison and Fenderman of the rock and roll field. Today it remains a popular and highly respected piece of musical work that is still performed in numerous musical venues.

CONCLUSION

The "high lonesome" sound of bluegrass music is not easily defined. In contrast to

what others have previously said, the music does not sound "high and lonesome" because the singer is singing in the upper register, nor does it sound "high and lonesome" because of intricate rhythmic relationships. Rather, the "high lonesome" sound comes from a detailed and intricate relationship between linear movement in composition, identifiable through the manipulation of third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees, and "driving" rhythmic design. The linear movements often occur in perfect fourth and fifth intervals from tonic. It is a result of the combination of the previously discussed musical influences and Bill Monroe's own artistic design. Also, remember it is not just the linear movement of the vocalist or soloist that create the "lonesome" sound, but rather the linear movement in contrast to what the rest of the group is playing. In addition, it is not one of the discussed elements that create bluegrass but a *combination of many*, including instrumentation, tempo, subject matter, vocal style, and tonal manipulation. Below I have outlined a few musical techniques used by Bill Monroe to create a "high lonesome" sound, as identified in this paper:

1) In exposed musical parts the third, fifth, and seventh, scale degrees are lowered or raised to create dissonance with the rest of the instrumentation. This applies to both instrumental and vocal movements alike. Remember that, in bluegrass, the third, fifth, and sevenths are often only manipulated for very short amounts of time. This is key in producing subliminal tones. They are also manipulated in moments of ornamentation and linear progressions toward tonal resolution.

2) The seventh scale degree, if lowered, must be raised at the end of musical movements or before the musical progression approaches tonic. Also, by lowering the seventh at strategic moments and avoiding the tonic until approaching resolution, the soloist has the ability to play extended solos for longer periods of time. This technique will allow the solo to continue with more "drive" than it would otherwise have with a raised seventh and tonic thrown in the mix.

3) Rhythm is commonly (but not always) played fast, often with specific instruments stressing certain beats in the music. Remember to pay special attention to alternations of stresses within the instrumentation. For example, having the rhythm guitar stress the down beat with the mandolin paying particular emphasis to the up beat.

4) Meter is most commonly some form of duple meter. Also, it is common for bluegrass to be played in cut time.

5) Vocal harmonies exist most commonly in three or four parts, each part taking one of the three scale degrees of a given chord. In cases of four part harmony the bass vocalist usually doubles on the root. Two-part harmonies exist as well.

Also, a thorough understanding of bluegrass music is perhaps made easier by having an extensive knowledge of the fretboard. Knowing the location of notes on the fretboard will allow for much easier manipulation of scale degrees, thus creating more intricate solos. A

working knowledge of scales will also help greatly in this area. A simple hint one of my first music instructors would tell me is to think note names as you are playing. By thinking in your mind the names of the notes you play, you will at the same time become more knowledgeable about the notes and altering scale degrees, while building your skills on the fretboard. The characteristics listed above are simple guidelines for understanding Bill Monroe's "high lonesome sound." In addition to knowing the theoretical components of Bill Monroe's music remember the stylistic influences that helped shape the sound and style, for it is all of the topics discussed in this paper that construct the design for bluegrass as we know it.

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Vita

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