

JIM SHUMATE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUEGRASS FIDDLING

A Thesis
by
NATALYA WEINSTEIN MILLER

Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2018
Center for Appalachian Studies

JIM SHUMATE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUEGRASS FIDDLING

A Thesis
by
NATALYA WEINSTEIN MILLER
May 2018

APPROVED BY:

Sandra L. Ballard
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

Gary R. Boye
Member, Thesis Committee

David H. Wood
Member, Thesis Committee

William R. Schumann
Director, Center for Appalachian Studies

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate
Studies

Copyright by Natalya Weinstein Miller 2018
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

JIM SHUMATE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUEGRASS FIDDLELING

Natalya Weinstein Miller, B.A., University of Massachusetts

M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Sandra L. Ballard

Born and raised on Chestnut Mountain in Wilkes County, North Carolina, James “Jim” Shumate (1921-2013) was a pioneering bluegrass fiddler. His position at the inception of bluegrass places him as a significant yet understudied musician. Shumate was a stylistic co-creator of bluegrass fiddling, synthesizing a variety of existing styles into the developing genre during his time performing with some of the top names in bluegrass in the 1940s, including Bill Monroe in 1945 and Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs in 1948. While the “big bang” of bluegrass is considered to be in 1946, many elements of the bluegrass fiddle style were present in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys prior to 1945. Jim Shumate’s innovative playing demonstrated characteristics of this emerging style, such as sliding double-stops (fingering notes on two strings at once) and syncopated, bluesy runs.

Jim Shumate’s story also offers a way to look more closely at the multicultural roots of Southern fiddling. There were many diverse types of music in the mountains prior to the radio and recording era of the 1920s including traveling medicine shows, tent revivals, religious music, and dance music played on fiddle, banjo and percussion instruments. African American musical styles of the twentieth century such ragtime, blues, jazz, and swing contributed greatly to the development of bluegrass fiddling. This thesis integrates a musical

biography of Jim Shumate, examines the characteristics of bluegrass fiddling and the early genres which influenced it, and analyzes key recordings of pre-bluegrass fiddlers.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank my thesis committee for their continuous support of this project, and especially Sandy Ballard for her editing expertise, feedback and encouragement. I greatly appreciated Dave Wood's ability to push me one step further with my writing and analysis, and Gary Boye's thoughtful and detailed attention to bluegrass history and music terminology. The faculty and staff at Appalachian State University were very helpful with my project, and I'd like to thank Billy Schumann, Katherine Ledford, Dean Williams, Mark Suggs, and the Center for Appalachian Studies.

I would also like to thank my husband, John Cloyd Miller, for his insights, knowledge, and patience with my research and writing process. I am very grateful for the amazing support of our families as well: Rita & Frank Miller, Judy and Naomi Shumate, Jerry Weinstein and Ann Kahn, Phyllis and Don Pennell, and especially my mother, Janine Roberts. Even our three-year-old daughter, Cadence, would ask, "how's your thesis?" The Starnes and Walker families generously shared their personal collection of fliers, songbooks and recordings with me. As a distance learning student, I primarily worked on writing my thesis at Warren Wilson College, and I'd like to thank the wonderful faculty, staff, and students there for the conversations, support, and the use of their library.

Lastly and most importantly, I'd like to thank Jim Shumate for the music and the inspiration, for without him, none of this would be possible.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to Jim and Naomi Shumate. Jim and Naomi welcomed me into their family and into their home, and I'm so thankful for their love and support. I'd also like to dedicate this work to my daughter and their great-granddaughter, Cadence Naomi Miller — may the circle be unbroken.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Dedication	vii
Table of Figures	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review	1
Chapter 2: The Multicultural Roots of Bluegrass Fiddling	17
Chapter 3: Pre and Early Bluegrass Fiddlers	31
Chapter 4: Jim Shumate's Life and Story	52
Chapter 5: Jim Shumate's Creative Legacy in Bluegrass	77
Bibliography	83
Appendix A. List of Audio Tracks on CD	87
Vita	88

Table of Figures

Figure 1: “Lazy Man Blues” Transcription.....	51
---	----

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

“I knew we were making some kind of history, when everybody was wanting to do what we were doing... We’d do something on the Grand Ole Opry on a Saturday night and next week when we’d be traveling around we’d hear these little groups, every one of them trying to do exactly what we did.” — Jim Shumate¹

Pioneering bluegrass fiddler James “Jim” Shumate (1921-2013) was born and raised on Chestnut Mountain in Wilkes County, North Carolina. Shumate was a stylistic co-creator of bluegrass fiddling, synthesizing a variety of existing styles into the developing genre during his time performing with some of the top names in bluegrass during the 1940s, namely Bill Monroe in 1945, and Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs in 1948. Growing up in Southern Appalachia in the 1920s and 1930s, Shumate’s experience was common: he grew up working on the family farm and then migrated off the mountain to find work in the industrializing towns and cities of North Carolina. Moving to these urban areas exposed Shumate to a wide variety of music and musicians and helped connect him with radio and performance opportunities.

¹ Jim Shumate, interview by Wayne Erbsen, *Digital Archives of Appalachia*, January 3, 2003, <http://dla.acaweb.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/Warren/id/3494/rec/44>.

Jim Shumate is significant in bluegrass history for several reasons. First, he arranged for three-finger style banjo player Earl Scruggs to audition for Bill Monroe, which resulted in Scruggs joining the Blue Grass Boys. This moment is considered by many to be the inception of bluegrass.² Shumate is also credited with popularizing the fiddle “kick-off” (introduction) to vocal songs and is revered for his quintessential solos on the first Flatt & Scruggs Mercury recordings.³ His playing also demonstrated many characteristics of the emerging bluegrass fiddle style. Shumate’s unique position at the inception of bluegrass and his innovative fiddle style place him as a significant yet understudied key player in the history of bluegrass. As Wayne Erbsen wrote in his 1979 article, “Jim Shumate is long overdue to receive credit for the changes he helped create in bluegrass music.”⁴

Shumate’s story also opens the door to looking more closely at the roots of Southern fiddling in general. The history of bluegrass often focuses on the rural, white roots of the genre, although some sources including Robert Cantwell’s *Bluegrass Breakdown*, discuss the “colossal debt bluegrass owes to black music.”⁵ However, the fiddle, in particular, has been sidelined in the literature. In *Bluegrass Breakdown*, there is a whole chapter on the banjo and another chapter on singing, while Cantwell refers to the fiddle as “peripheral” in bluegrass.⁶ Neil Rosenberg’s seminal work, *Bluegrass; A History* offers a comprehensive chronology of bluegrass including primary musicians, but with a limited discussion of fiddle styles.

² As presented in *Bluegrass: A History* by Neil Rosenberg and *The Bluegrass Reader* ed. Thomas Goldsmith.

³ Ron Stewart, *The Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs* (Roanoke, VA: AcuTab Publications Inc., 2011), DVD.

⁴ Wayne Erbsen, “Jim Shumate: Bluegrass Fiddler Supreme,” in *The Bluegrass Reader*, ed. Thomas Goldsmith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 117.

⁵ Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 110.

⁶ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 219.

However, the fiddle was a key instrument in early bluegrass bands, and therefore, one motivation for my research into what characterizes bluegrass fiddling and what influenced those characteristics.

While Southern Appalachia has often been regarded as an isolated region, broad and diverse types of mountain music prior to the recording and radio era of the 1920s included the music of traveling medicine shows, tent revivals, music in churches, and dance music played on fiddle, banjo, and percussion instruments. The population of the region, and hence the origins of Appalachian music, was a combination of Scots-Irish and German settlers, African Americans, and Native Americans. While the fiddle has European roots, there is a single-string fiddle ancestor from Africa, and the banjo has strong roots in West African musical traditions. While not as much research has been done about the Native American influences on bluegrass, old-time and bluegrass musicians from Western North Carolina with Cherokee heritage include Raymond Fairchild, Manco Sneed, Osey and Earnest Helton, and Fred and Clyde Moody. Jim Shumate's first professional band, the Blue Ridge Boys, included Fred Moody (Clyde's brother), and Shumate's fiddling was surely influenced by the diverse sounds infiltrating the mountains during the 1920s and 1930s, which I will explore more in subsequent chapters.

While music scholars have examined the significant musical interchange between white and black musicians in American music, mainstream vernacular tends to gloss over the presence of non-whites, especially in regard to string band and country music, which were important predecessors to bluegrass. As Rhiannon Giddens recently stated in her keynote address at the International Bluegrass Music Association conference in Raleigh, "That enormous moment in 1945 when Earl Scruggs joined Bill Monroe's bluegrass boys was, of

course, not born of a vacuum — it was a moment that was hundreds of years coming.”⁷ She went on to emphasize that bluegrass is a creole music, a synthesis of styles from multiple cultures. Giddens also argued that the influences of African Americans on bluegrass, such as Arnold Shultz, are not a footnote to the story, but in fact part of the main narrative and that we need to “put the diversity back in bluegrass.”⁸ While the majority of bluegrass musicians in America have been white, I believe Giddens is trying to highlight the diverse influences which played into the genre. For example, the cultural exchange between black and white musicians in the regions of Sugar Grove and Surry County in upper Western North Carolina, as highlighted in Cecelia Conway’s *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (1995), examines how white mountain musicians were incorporating varied elements in their playing.⁹ Jim Shumate’s life and music offer a unique entry point into looking at this history.

Literature Review

This literature review examines how the advent of industrialization, radio, and the recording industry were significant to the creation of country and bluegrass music. This section also presents a brief history of bluegrass, the current scholarship on Southern fiddling, and the existing sources on Jim Shumate.

⁷ Rhiannon Giddens, “IBMA Keynote Address” (International Bluegrass Music Association Conference, Raleigh, NC, September 2017), 2.

⁸ Giddens, “IBMA Keynote,” 2.

⁹ I will be using the terms “African American” and “black” interchangeably during this paper, drawing on the terminology of most of my sources, although I recognize that those terms do not capture the nuanced identities in the Black American diaspora.

Industrialization and the Music Industry

Life was changing rapidly for young Americans in Appalachia in the 1930s and 1940s. Mountain families were moving away from family farms as industrialization shifted economic opportunities. Bluegrass was born during this time, as young workers who were also musicians gathered in industrial centers to live, work and make music together.

Appalachian musicians were influenced by their upbringing on rural homesteads in addition to new technologies entering the mountains, such as radio, recordings and the railroad. The advent of radio broadcasts and the recording industry brought new sounds to mountain communities, such as string band music, blues, gospel, ragtime, classical and jazz. Early “hillbilly” and country music drew on these diverse influences.

Professional music offered certain young men in the upland South an alternative or a supplement to work on the farm, in the mines, or in mills and factories. According to noted North Carolina historian Bob Carlin, the “1930s and 1940s were the decades during which the country music industry was created.”¹⁰ The preponderance of radio stations went hand in hand with the growth of country music. Radio stations provided a home base for bands and the shows served as on-air advertisement for personal appearances. By the mid-thirties, larger radio stations with more bandwidth had sponsors for their live music shows as well as Saturday “jamboree” programs where all the performers from the week would appear. Listeners would come out to see the bands perform and would buy songbooks and photos,

¹⁰ Bob Carlin, *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 204.

generating more cash for the performers. When a region was “played out,” bands would move to a different station.¹¹

Records could sometimes be an additional financial source for musicians; however, many hillbilly musicians didn’t make royalties off the record sales, and they were used mostly for publicity. Artists were contacted by labels once they had built up a good radio following. Companies would often pay a flat rate to the musicians for the session, and “few performers owned the publishing rights to the songs they recorded and therefore rarely benefitted from that potent source of income,” explains Rosenberg.¹² Music was a challenging business. Highway systems were not in place, and often musicians spent countless hours traveling down the two-lane roads.

The microphone also played a key role in the development of bluegrass. Bluegrass is a performance-based music for the stage, unlike string band music, which was primarily used for dances, and by nature necessitated the use of a microphone for volume. Complex vocal arrangements, flashy instrumental solos, and growing audience sizes also required the use of the microphone in performance. Bluegrass musicians also took breaks — improvised variations on the melody: “A bluegrass band carefully gears its movements and its music to the microphone, and its techniques of integrating voices and instruments as a unified ensemble depend on the use of that device, for without the microphone to give it prominence, the lead part cannot stand out.”¹³ The shift to a performance-based music influenced the developing fiddle styles within the genre as well.

¹¹ Carlin, *String Bands*, 204.

¹² Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 26.

¹³ Mayne L. Smith, “An Introduction to Bluegrass,” in *The Bluegrass Reader*, ed. Thomas Goldsmith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 89.

Microphones were also crucial in radio use, and the radio boom of the first half of the century disseminated the new genre across the South. One of the most important stations was WSM, based in Nashville. Started by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company in 1925, the station broadcasted the popular Grand Ole Opry radio show weekly on Saturday nights. Based on the minstrel and medicine shows popular in the rural South, the Opry quickly grew into a popular radio barn dance dedicated to the preservation of old-fashioned rural music. Many musicians, such as Bill Monroe, greatly furthered their careers by performing on the Opry.¹⁴ Musicians like Jim Shumate were greatly affected by music they heard coming live from the radio, and radio became a major means of musical transmission in the 1930s and 1940s.

Bluegrass History

During the time when Jim Shumate began playing the fiddle, the label “bluegrass” was not yet used to describe the music characterized by Bill Monroe’s fast mandolin playing, syncopated rhythms, and “high lonesome” singing. Shumate was on the cusp of a major development in “hillbilly music,” as it was called at the time. There are some controversies about the exact dates of when bluegrass began, although many scholars agree that it was with Bill Monroe’s 1946 band including Chubby Wise, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and Howard Watts (aka Cedric Rainwater), just after Shumate left the band in 1945. While bluegrass is often thought of as an Appalachian music tradition, historian Bill Malone states that bluegrass was essentially started in the Piedmont, although Appalachian people became a

¹⁴ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*.

core audience for the music. However, mountain-born musicians contributed to the propagation of bluegrass music in the North and to the common association of the genre with Appalachian culture.¹⁵

Chubby Wise is considered the pre-eminent bluegrass fiddler, since he was a member of Monroe's 1946 band. However, his predecessors in the Blue Grass Boys contributed much to the development of this new and innovative style of fiddling in the American South. Bluegrass historian Neil Rosenberg postulated that Chubby Wise drew from and continued the tradition of fiddlers who had come before him: "Because he appeared on all the records which this influential band made, Chubby Wise gained the reputation of establishing high standards for bluegrass fiddling. It is more accurate to say that he maintained those established by Art Wooten, Tommy Magness, and Howdy Forrester, although he also contributed a distinctive style of melodic interpretation."¹⁶ It is unfortunate that Jim Shumate has been left out of this list, because as this thesis argues, Shumate introduced significant stylistic elements to the Blue Grass Boys.

The musical roots of bluegrass came from diverse sources. Bill Monroe's influences included recording bands of the twenties such as Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers and Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers. Speaking about the members of the Skillet Lickers, Robert Cantwell remarked, "Neither Tanner's rhythmic fiddle style nor Fate Norris's clawhammer banjo style, both of which are strongly black-influenced and date back well into the nineteenth century, survive in bluegrass; but the two instruments, which were

¹⁵ Bill C. Malone, "Music" in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 69-70.

joined in minstrelsy and formed the core of the old mountain dance bands, have been given special emphasis in bluegrass through new techniques designed specifically for the...music.”¹⁷

Though Southern, white musicians were the primary players of bluegrass music, African American music, such as jazz and blues, had a marked effect on the genre. The banjo originated in Africa, as did its rhythmic stylistic elements. Bluegrass musicians used the blues scale with flatted scale degrees in their solos. Vocalists and fiddlers often bent or slid into notes with imperfect intonation. Offbeat syncopation (emphasis) may have derived from black banjo styles and emerged in ragtime, blues and jazz.¹⁸ Bill Monroe especially admired “bluesy” fiddlers who incorporated these techniques. Monroe always credited a black musician named Arnold Shultz as one of his main musical influences. Bill used to perform with Arnold at dances in Kentucky: “There’s things in my music, you know, that come from Arnold Shultz — runs that I use a lot in my music.”¹⁹ Cantwell suggested that Arnold Shultz’s guitar style had “all the earmarks of jazz, if it was not actually a jazz style.”²⁰

In addition to African American roots, bluegrass repertoire derived from the fiddle tunes of the British Isles, church music, and popular songs of the twentieth century. Original songwriting was also an important component of the genre, with musicians penning their own songs with topics ranging from memories of the old home, family, and heartbreak to occasional subjects of modern and urban life: “The sacred repertoire comes from a wide range of sources, from old spirituals to newly composed gospel songs; religious songs are

¹⁷ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 52.

¹⁸ Dick Weissman, *Blues: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 22.

¹⁹ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 32.

²⁰ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 31.

performed by virtually every bluegrass band, usually in vocal quartets.”²¹ Virtuosoic traditional and original instrumental numbers made up the remainder of the repertoire.

Bluegrass as a genre coalesced in the late 1940s and early 1950s as other groups began emulating the sound of Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys. Other seminal bands in early bluegrass were Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys, the Stanley Brothers from Southwest Virginia, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, also from Southwest Virginia, and Jimmy Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys. All of these bands had residencies on regional radio stations and toured across the South, thus spreading their music far and wide.

Multicultural Roots of Southern Fiddling

The tradition of Southern fiddling goes back hundreds of years. The violin traveled over from Europe with Scots-Irish and German immigrants, and the instrument was picked up in the New World by Native Americans and enslaved Africans. African American fiddle traditions in the United States can be traced back to the mid to late-1600s, when slave fiddlers were playing for white and black dancers in the New Amsterdam settlement (New York City) and frequently played for plantation balls in Virginia. In fact, black and mixed-race fiddlers were common throughout the eighteenth century, and colonial dance historian Kate Van Winkle Keller has cited “nearly four hundred who were active between 1709 and 1789.”²² Black fiddlers and square dance callers often entertained groups of whites at

²¹ Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 8.

²² Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 46.

plantation dances. Musical slaves were valued by their owners and were even occasionally given formal musical training.

African American fiddle and banjo duos were observed as early as 1756 and became more prevalent in dance bands by the nineteenth century.²³ During the 1800s black musicians provided dance music at resort hotels across the country as well as for steamboat passengers on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. In one case, a string band of free blacks from South Carolina played for dances at the Deaver Hotel near Asheville, North Carolina between 1830 and 1860.²⁴ The fiddle was also a key instrument in white minstrel groups, which were usually composed of a fiddle, banjo and percussion, such as the bones and tambourine. Minstrelsy was most popular in the mid-1800s, especially in Northern cities. Black and white musical interchange happened in a plethora of settings during the nineteenth century, such as in factory towns, on riverboats, during the Civil War, in the mines and on railroad crews.²⁵

The African American presence in the upper South has greatly influenced old-time string music and country music, two genres thought of as being generally music of rural, Southern whites. Historian Gerald Milnes writes, “Many older white musicians in central West Virginia attribute fiddle and banjo tunes to African American sources and talk about being influenced in some way by black musicians.”²⁶ Burl Hammons played tunes of Irish and British origin, but also many from the African American and minstrel tradition. Many

²³ Jamison, *Hoedowns*, 50.

²⁴ Jamison, *Hoedowns*, 49.

²⁵ Christopher J Smith, *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 28-29.

²⁶ Gerald Milnes, *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 97.

early country and Western swing musicians such as Bob Wills and Doc Roberts credited learning much of their material from black musicians.

As Bill Malone pointed out in *Southern Music: American Music*, “Fiddling has been so important in white country music for such a long time that it is easy to forget how popular it once was among blacks.”²⁷ There are numerous accounts of slave fiddlers in newspapers, travel accounts, memoirs, plantation records, runaway slave narratives and WPA interviews with ex-slaves. However, the black string band tradition declined in the early twentieth century for a variety of reasons: the rise of the popular blues genre and the record companies’ separation of “race” and “hillbilly” categories, and the disassociation of blacks from rural, plantation life.²⁸

Scholarship on Jim Shumate

While many articles have been written on Jim Shumate over the past 50 years, most focus primarily on his time in the middle to late-1940s, performing with Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys and Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys. Wayne Erbsen conducted a series of interviews with Shumate in the late 1970s and in the early 2000s and wrote down many of the stories he shared from his life on the road. For example, Bill Monroe first heard Jim Shumate fiddling live on WHKY with Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys when he was driving through Western North Carolina. It wasn’t long afterwards that Monroe put the call in to ask Shumate to join his Blue Grass Boys.

²⁷ Bill Malone, *Southern Music: American Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 12.

²⁸ Diane Pecknold, ed., *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

Once Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs left Monroe's band to start the Foggy Mountain Boys in 1948, they asked Shumate to be their first fiddle player. Shumate joined the band during that first year and recorded with them at the Mercury recording sessions in Knoxville, TN. Shumate fiddled on two tracks, "We'll Meet Again Sweetheart" and "My Cabin in Caroline." While performing with Flatt & Scruggs, Shumate won the fiddle contest at the National Fiddler's Convention in Richlands, Virginia, with his signature version of "Lee Highway Blues." After leaving the Foggy Mountain Boys, Shumate had other musical projects, such as founding the Sons of the Carolinas, performing with Dwight Barker and the Melody Boys, managing a country music venue, and hosting a radio show on WHKY.²⁹

Shumate is also well-known for his original song, "The Old Country Baptizing", which many artists have covered, including Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons and the Steep Canyon Rangers. In 1980 Shumate released an LP record titled *Bluegrass Fiddle Supreme* and in the 1990s recorded five cassettes on Heritage Records. As Gary Reid wrote in his 2011 article on Jim Shumate in *Bluegrass Unlimited*, "this furniture-selling family man from Hickory, N.C., has left an indelible mark on the music...Jim Shumate is a consummate stylist, innovator, and pioneer — a true bluegrass triple threat."³⁰

Research Contribution

While the topic of bluegrass has been the subject of extensive scholarship, a closer examination of bluegrass fiddling is warranted. What are the characteristics of bluegrass

²⁹ Erbsen, "Jim Shumate."

³⁰ Gary Reid, "Bluegrass Triple Threat," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 46, no. 1 (July 2011): 44.

fiddling? Which early fiddlers contributed to the bluegrass fiddle sound? What genres did they incorporate? Jim Shumate has been interviewed and written about numerous times, however, parts of his story are still missing. Growing up in a primarily white region of Appalachia, how was Shumate exposed to other types of music? How did he keep music a part of his life beyond the Flatt & Scruggs years? What additional recordings did he make?

Additionally, more research is needed on Jim Shumate's personal life and his musical pursuits beyond the years with the founders of bluegrass. His solos on the Flatt & Scruggs Mercury recordings have been touted as some of the best in early bluegrass, and I will look in-depth at why his playing has been so highly revered by other musicians in bluegrass. For example, fiddler Ron Stewart stated, "I think Jimmy was a genius bluegrass fiddler and way ahead of his time."³¹ I will also examine how his upbringing and musical background compared to the other fiddlers with Bill Monroe in the early 1940s, such as Chubby Wise. There are many discrepancies in the current literature about the timeline for early bluegrass, specifically when Jim Shumate played with Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs. A few books and articles, including Neil Rosenberg's *Bluegrass: A History*, have the wrong dates recorded.

Research Methodology

I am married to Jim Shumate's grandson, John Cloyd Miller, and as a member of Jim Shumate's family I had unique access to family scrapbooks, photos, fliers, and newspaper articles, as well as personal conversations with his family members. I first met Jim in 2006 at

³¹ Stewart, *Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*.

his home in Hickory, North Carolina and began playing music with him around the same time. I had the opportunity to sit with him and learn his music firsthand until his passing in 2013. This gave me the chance to observe his style up close and learn his repertoire of tunes and songs.

Using personal interviews in addition to participant observation, recordings, and archival materials from the 1940s, I examined the development of bluegrass fiddling vis-a-vis Jim Shumate. I conducted semi-structured interviews with Jim's wife Naomi, his daughter Rita, and his grandson John, as well as musicians who played with him in his later years such as Steve Kilby and Allen Mills. This data illuminated Shumate's specific stylistic innovations and clarified timelines. Jim Shumate's wife, Naomi, proved to be a valuable source for remembering dates, as she used the births of their children as reference points.

I studied sources such as articles from *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine, books about bluegrass and fiddle music, and materials such as show flyers and census data to analyze Shumate's life and music. Recordings from the Blue Grass Boys, as well as Flatt & Scruggs, live Opry recordings from 1945, Shumate's 78 rpm circa 1952 with Don Walker, his 1980 LP, and his series of five cassettes from the 1990s were also valuable resources. In addition, I used a video oral history conducted with Jim by the International Bluegrass Music Museum and the video series, *Grassroots to Bluegrass*. I utilized these sources to understand more about how Jim's style developed and drew on musical genres outside his immediate family and community.

I will argue that Shumate developed a unique style that was different from his early influences as well as from his contemporaries. Shumate's main early mentors were his Uncle Erbie and his brother Mack, who were both old-time fiddlers. However, his brother Mack

was ten years older than Jim and left the family farm to go to work in West Virginia. Mack performed with the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers in West Virginia. Shumate also listened to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio and bought Arthur Smith recordings. While Shumate borrowed a lot of Smith's repertoire, his approach to the songs differs from Smith's. Shumate was part of the new generation which grew up hearing old-time music in their family and local community but were then exposed to a much broader variety of music through recordings and radio, thus making him a fascinating subject for investigation.

My research and thesis on the role of fiddler Jim Shumate in bluegrass music features a discussion of the multicultural roots of Southern fiddling and their possible influences on him (in Chapter 2); an examination of early and pre-bluegrass fiddlers including Shumate (in Chapter 3); and the first extensive analysis of the ways that Jim Shumate's life and work reveal his musical influences and contributions to bluegrass history (in Chapter 4). The final chapter sums up my research and outlines my conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: THE MULTICULTURAL ROOTS OF BLUEGRASS FIDDLE

The history of fiddling in the Southern United States is a story of creolization and musical exchange, primarily between European immigrants, African Americans, and Native Americans. Although the fiddle is sometimes associated with rural, white musicians, many diverse American musical styles fed into the canon of bluegrass fiddling, including early dance music, minstrel tunes, ragtime, blues, jazz, and Western swing. Many of these genres were greatly influenced by African Americans. In fact, place played a key role in shaping Anglo-Celtic and African American cultural exchange.¹ The workplace environments provided by maritime, riverine, and plantation life in the late 1700s and 1800s became fertile grounds for the sharing of songs, tunes, dances, gestural and verbal languages.²

Many characteristics of bluegrass fiddling can likely be traced to this rich cultural exchange, although ethnomusicologist Jacqueline DjeDje warned against trying to trace the lineage of specific traits in American music, as it could lead to misrepresentation. For example, some traits exist in multiple styles of music, such as the pentatonic scales which are present in Scottish and West African music. Another common oversimplification is “the belief that Africa contributed rhythm and Europe melody to what became known as ‘American’ fiddle music.” DjeDje writes that “there are many musical traditions in Africa

¹ Christopher Smith, *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2013), 28.

² Smith, *Creolization*, 29.

that can be described as melodic just as European culture is not completely devoid of musicking that emphasizes rhythm.”³

However, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of different cultures, especially those that have been historically misrepresented. For example, fiddler and folklorist Alan Jabbour argued that the syncopation in the bowing patterns of both white and black Southern fiddling comes from the influence of African American culture and that these bowings had been in use long before the advent of radio and recordings.⁴ Kentucky fiddler John Harrod asserted in DjeDje’s article that “both white and black musicians attribute the use of slurs, slides, and glides in U.S. fiddle music to black culture.”⁵

It is also important to acknowledge the understudied, but highly likely, role of Native American musicians in this cultural exchange in the South. In Western North Carolina (WNC) specifically, Cherokee musicians have been playing string band music for generations. Chief Junaluska is purported to have been a fiddler, and Manco Sneed was known as the “Indian Fiddler” at regional fiddle contests.⁶ Sneed was revered as a highly skilled fiddler, and Swannanoa fiddler Marcus Martin learned some of his tunes from Sneed.⁷ The main source about Cherokee fiddle music was written by Blanton Owen in the 1970s, after he conducted fieldwork with Manco Sneed, although parts of his research are now considered inaccurate by people living in Cherokee.⁸ Manco Sneed cited white fiddler J.D.

³ Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 15.

⁴ DjeDje, “(Mis)Representation,” 25.

⁵ DjeDje, “(Mis)Representation,” 25.

⁶ Jake Blount, interview by Natalya Weinstein, February 2, 2018.

⁷ Marcus Martin, “Old-time Music and Songs,” (Croton, NY: Field Recorders Collective, 2004), compact disc.

⁸ Blount interview 2018.

(Dedrick) Harris, from Flag Pond, Tennessee, as his main influence.⁹ Another Cherokee fiddler who lived in Asheville was named Osey Helton. Helton learned to play the fiddle from a formerly enslaved black man who was working with his father in a whiskey distillery.¹⁰ Famous Cherokee banjo player Raymond Fairchild lives out in Maggie Valley and has been performing his unique Don Reno-influenced style of bluegrass banjo for decades.

Many of the fiddlers in WNC shared tunes and repertoire, regardless of race and ethnicity, illustrating the cross-pollination of sounds and styles, as emphasized by young musician and scholar Jake Blount:

The assumption throughout history has kind of been that the Cherokee musicians all learned to play from white mountaineers who came in with the music, but the Cherokee were also a slave-holding nation, so at the height of the American slave trade they were twenty percent African American, and we know there was also musical exchange happening on that front from the story of Osey Helton.¹¹

It is difficult to know where the music came from since the sources are so limited, and there are no recordings of the black fiddlers who influenced Osey Helton and others; however, this example illustrates that Cherokee musicians were likely learning from both white and black sources. While this research is outside the scope of this project, more attention is needed in

⁹ “Manco Sneed,” Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/manco-sneed>.

¹⁰ “Osey and Ernest Helton,” Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/osey-and-ernest-helton>.

¹¹ Blount interview, 2018.

the field of Cherokee fiddling and string band music, and how music was transmitted across ethnic groups in the South.

Fiddle/Banjo Dance Music

As stated in the introduction, the tradition of fiddle music in the United States goes back for hundreds of years. German and Scots-Irish immigrants brought the fiddle with them along with songs and tunes from their homeland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The fiddle was primarily used for dance music during this early time period. There are numerous accounts of slaves and freed blacks playing at dances for both blacks and whites, and there was invariably a sharing of styles and repertoire between whites and blacks.¹²

Interracial sharing of music in the South continued well into the twentieth century, and many Appalachian old-time musicians such as Dock Boggs, Hobart Smith, Doc Roberts, and Tommy Jarrell credited learning from black fiddlers and musicians in their community. Appalachian dance scholar Phil Jamison states, “The repertoires and syncopated bowing patterns of these and countless other Southern fiddlers were no doubt influenced by the African American musicians from whom they learned.”¹³ African American fiddler Joe Thompson, who recently passed away, played songs that were common in both black and white repertoires. As Bob Carlin illustrated, there was a shared repertoire of music which demonstrated how white and black musicians were influencing each other:

¹² Bob Carlin, *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 41.

¹³ Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 51.

Many of Joe's pieces, "Georgia Buck," "Molly Put the Kettle On," "Black Eyed Daisy," "Old Corn Liquor," "Soldier's Joy," and "Old Joe Clark" are staples of both African and Anglo-American string bands throughout the Piedmont. At the very least, the passage went both ways, with some melodies coming from African Americans, some from Anglo-Americans, and some from outside sources."¹⁴

Acclaimed banjo historian Cecelia Conway also agreed that Joe Thompson's repertoire, which contained a large portion of white fiddle tunes, demonstrated the influence of Celtic American traditions on the Thompsons, which "likely resulted from their greater contact with white musicians."¹⁵

Minstrelsy

Minstrelsy, a huge cultural phenomenon during the nineteenth century, has a racially complex and painful legacy. Becoming popular both nationally and internationally, many modern folk songs have their roots in minstrelsy. Beginning in the 1820s, early minstrels were usually white, solo performers, although William Henry Lane, known as "Master Juba," was an early black performer. White minstrels were performers who put black makeup on their faces and caricatured African American culture while playing instruments such as the fiddle, banjo, bones or percussion and tambourine. The first popular minstrel group was the Virginia Minstrels, formed in 1843 in New York City. By the late 1800s, there were a

¹⁴ Carlin, *String Bands*, 41.

¹⁵ Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 113.

number of African Americans performing in minstrel troupes, although the troupes were often owned by white entrepreneurs.¹⁶

Christopher Smith argues in *The Creolization of American Culture* that “early blackface practices were neither simply incompetent imitation (of Southern black folkways) nor mere racist parody, though the racism of the period was unquestionably part of the idiom; rather they represent a theatricalization of a process of back-and-forth exchange that was present everywhere in the new republic.”¹⁷ Many of the early blackface practitioners such as Daniel Emmet, George Washington Dixon and Joel Walker Sweeney were exposed to multiracial environments, either as children or working adults, and they based their performance material on their direct observation of creole settings and behavior.¹⁸ Smith argued that minstrelsy was not just a simple case of white appropriation of black art, but an ongoing interchange, which is likely the case for the development of Southern fiddling as well.

Many common fiddle tunes were popularized as minstrel songs or were first presented in a public setting on minstrel stages, such as “Buffalo Gals,” “Turkey in the Straw,” “Arkansas Traveler,” “Old Molly Hare,” and “Mississippi Sawyer.” Minstrel songs came from Anglo-Celtic, Afro-Caribbean and African origins.¹⁹ Some songs were written specifically for the minstrel stage while others were older tunes re-appropriated. Many of the minstrel songs have racially derogative lyrics and have been changed or adapted, although there is still controversy in the folk community about whether minstrel songs have a place on

¹⁶ Dick Weissman, *Blues: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14-16.

¹⁷ Smith, *Creolization*, 30.

¹⁸ Smith, *Creolization*, 30.

¹⁹ Smith, *Creolization*, 166.

the modern stage considering their racist history. Quite a few of these minstrel songs have been adopted by old-time and bluegrass musicians and show up in the common repertoire of bluegrass fiddlers.

Ragtime

Ragtime historian John Edward Hasse defined the genre as, “a dance-based American vernacular music, featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment.”²⁰ Gaining momentum at the end of the nineteenth century, ragtime arose in the cities of the Midwest from African American roots.²¹ The term “ragtime” came from the phrases “broken-time” and “ragged-time,” used to describe the syncopated rhythms in African American dance music. The popularity of ragtime surged at the turn of the twentieth century and declined soon afterwards. Although many of the racially derogatory lyrics of popular “coon songs” were set to ragtime music, being a musician was one of the few professions open to African Americans, and two of the top composers in ragtime, Scott Joplin and James Scott, were black.²²

The piano was a key instrument in the development of ragtime. The piano was a symbol of middle-class status and served as a focal point for the family: “It was the main instrument used for indoor public musical entertainment in saloons, restaurants, ball rooms, and theaters. Most published music was either composed for piano solo or for voice with piano accompaniment.”²³ In ragtime, the left hand of the pianist would keep a steady “oom-

²⁰ John Edward Hasse, ed., *Ragtime: Its History, Composers and Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 2.

²¹ Hasse, *Ragtime*, 6.

²² Hasse, *Ragtime*, 11.

²³ Hasse, *Ragtime*, 14.

pah” pattern of single notes and chords while the right hand used a series of syncopated melodic lines. The banjo was also used in ragtime music, and it has been hypothesized that the right-handed piano syncopations originated from black banjo styles played on the 5-string banjo.²⁴

The syncopated rhythms of ragtime were also present in Southern fiddling and made their way into bluegrass fiddle bowing patterns. For example, the classic ragtime rhythm of groups of three notes over duple time is the root of the double shuffle bowing pattern. Rags were also a prevalent fiddle tune form in pre-bluegrass fiddling, and “Fiddlin’” Arthur Smith played a variety of rags including the “Red Apple Rag,” “Peacock Rag,” and his original tune, “Smith’s Rag.” Many rags are still popular today in the bluegrass repertoire such as “Ragtime Annie,” “Red Apple Rag” and “Black Mountain Rag,” sometimes called “Black Mountain Blues.”

Blues

Arising after the minstrel phenomena and around the same era as ragtime, the blues began around 1890 in the deep South. Originally an unaccompanied, *a cappella* singing style, the tradition soon incorporated the guitar. Drawing on black musical influences such as field hollers, work songs, and spirituals as well as European ballads, dance tunes, and religious songs, a new American musical form was born.²⁵ While the blues started out with a less formal structure with differing measure numbers, the standard 12-bar blues was formalized

²⁴ Weissman, *Blues*, 21.

²⁵ Weissman, *Blues*, 27.

by professional musicians and singers after about 1910, and women were commonly the singers for the classic blues. Developing concurrently with ragtime and jazz, these musical forms both informed and influenced each other.²⁶

The effect of the blues on bluegrass is strong, with Bill Monroe drawing heavily on the blues in his repertoire, songwriting, and his stylistic interpretations. Originally from Mississippi, Jimmie Rodgers was a main influence on Monroe and was considered a progenitor of the “country blues.” Over a third of Rodgers’ recordings were the blues, likely songs he picked up while working on the railroad.²⁷ In the 1920s, Rodgers hired jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong and his wife Lillian Hardin Armstrong, on piano, to record on “Blue Yodel No. 9,” in one of the earliest mixed-race recording sessions. According to the introduction in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, “The song represents an amalgamation of musical styles: a standard twelve bar African American blues composed of floating verses, sung in a nasally white Mississippi drawl, that featured both vaudeville-inspired yodeling and New Orleans-style jazz accompaniment.”²⁸

Harmonica player DeFord Bailey was the first African American to perform on the Opry, and he used to play tunes on the harmonica such as the “Pan American Blues” and the “Evening Prayer Blues,” which Bill Monroe played as well. Monroe toured with Bailey during his early tent show seasons. The bluesy double-stops (two notes at once) and train sounds that Bailey played on the harmonica could have been possible influences on

²⁶ Weissman, *Blues*, 27.

²⁷“Jimmie Rodgers,” Mississippi Blues Trail, accessed March 6, 2018, <http://www.msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/jimmie-rodgers>.

²⁸ Diane Pecknold, ed., *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 20.

Monroe's early fiddlers. Coming from a family of string band musicians, DeFord Bailey illustrated the crossover between country and blues music happening in the 1920s and 1930s in Southern music.

The fiddle, as one of the instruments most capable of emulating the voice, was able to transmit blues slides, and sustained notes and blues intervals, such as flatted thirds and sevenths, into bluegrass music. The common blues chord progression of I-IV-I-V-I also emerged in the bluegrass songwriting form, such as in Bill Monroe's original compositions, "Heavy Traffic Ahead" and "The Rocky Road Blues."

Jazz

Evolving in early twentieth century New Orleans, jazz was another creole tradition which incorporated a variety of musical styles. However, it is difficult to tease out which elements came from which source due to the "study of a hybrid that evolved through many stages of cross-fertilization over a period of more than a century."²⁹ In jazz music, as opposed to classical music, a higher emphasis was placed on the rhythm, with melody and rhythm equal in significance to each other. Also, the emphasis on syncopation and the offbeat is an important stylistic predecessor to swing and bluegrass. The form of jazz, in which an instrumentalist states the melody and then the other instruments take turns playing the form in an improvisational fashion, can be seen in the development of bluegrass, where the musicians take solos both during singing songs and instrumental tunes.

²⁹ Gunther Shuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 4.

Another component of jazz which traveled into bluegrass is the “swing” eighth notes where in a pattern of two eighth notes, the first one is given more time and emphasis to make a “long-short, long-short” rhythm. The timing of jazz, which includes rhythm, syncopation, accent, and tempo, emphasizes movement on the off-beat, or between the beats. Some of the key jazz violinists in America in the 1920s were Joe Venuti and Stuff Smith. They certainly influenced Western swing and bluegrass with their jazzy solos, “swing” timing, and complex rhythms and double-stops.

Western Swing

One of the most well-known bandleaders in Western swing was Bob Wills, a fiddler, singer, and showman. Jim Rob “Bob” Wills was born into a musical family in Texas in 1905. He grew up alongside African Americans in cotton picking camps and heard both the frontier fiddle style of his father and other family members as well as the guitars and horns in the black community. At night, the camps were full of music, and during the day, women in the fields would sing the blues. As Bob Wills’ biographer, Charles Townsend, noted:

It was significant that Wills learned much of his music and style directly from blacks.... Jim Rob did much more than learn rhythm with the blacks; he got a feeling for it, a feeling that enabled him to lay down a beat, create a tempo, and develop patterns for dancing that astounded musicians in his band who were much better trained than himself.³⁰

³⁰ Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976), 4.

Much like Bill Monroe, Bob Wills synthesized a variety of different American musical genres into a new sound.

The fiddle was an important member of Western swing bands, especially in Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys (formed in 1934) as well as in Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies (formed in 1932), both key predecessors to Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. Wills himself was a fiddler but also hired out the spot, and Milton Brown hired a classically trained fiddler named Cecil Brower to play with his band. Brower was a master fiddler and was known for his improvisation and bringing the double shuffle into Texas fiddling and Western swing.³¹ The double shuffle, a showy performance technique, appeared in pre-bluegrass fiddling in tunes such as “Orange Blossom Special” and “Fire on the Mountain.” Another trait shared with bluegrass and Western swing was the fiddle lead-off to a song, where the fiddler would play through the verse form of the melody before the singer began singing. A defining characteristic of Western swing, and swing in particular, is the emphasis on the off-beat, which made its way into bluegrass through the mandolin chop. As in jazz, the instruments would take turns taking instrumental solos in Western swing bands, which Monroe also incorporated into bluegrass.

Characteristics of Bluegrass Fiddling

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, bluegrass fiddling was influenced by a variety of American musical traditions. Bill Monroe was synthesizing the sounds and music

³¹ Charles Gardner, “The Origins of the Texas Style of Traditional Old-Time Fiddling,” in *2001: A Texas Folklore Odyssey*, ed. Francis Edward Abernathy (Denton: University of Texas, 2001) no. 58, 65.

he was exposed to during the 1930s and 1940s, from big band to Western swing, fiddle-banjo dance music, gospel quartets, and black and white blues singers. Monroe's fiddlers, such as Jim Shumate, were also doing the same. From analyzing recordings of Bill Monroe's fiddlers from 1939 to 1945, these elements stand out as characteristics of bluegrass fiddling:

1. Fast, virtuosic breakdown fiddling such as on "Katy Hill" and "Sally Goodin"
2. The ability to play in multiple non-traditional keys such as E and B to back up a singer
3. Instrumental fills and solos on singing songs
4. Swing eighth notes and syncopated, bluesy improvisations around the melody
5. Sliding into and out of exact pitches and using double-stops
6. Complex bowing patterns using two and three-note slurs to vary the rhythmic feel away from "long, short-short, long, short-short" (the traditional shuffle pattern)
7. Use of the double shuffle, a syncopated grouping of three notes over duple meter time

Bluegrass developed as a performance music for the stage and for radio, which differentiated from the fiddle-centric dance music of the previous era. Fiddle contests of the 1930s and 1940s likely stimulated musical advancement amongst fiddlers. The role of the fiddle was also shifting to backing up the singer in country music. Early bluegrass fiddlers were creating a style which both supported the singer and entertained the audience, including flashy licks and techniques such as the double shuffle.

Jim Shumate

So where did fiddler Jim Shumate pick up these influences and skills? While this is a difficult question to answer without asking Shumate directly, we can hypothesize on how he incorporated these diverse styles into his fiddling. Growing up in Wilkes County, Shumate's

early influences were his family members up on Chestnut Mountain. With the advent of radio and record players, he was able to hear the sounds of the Grand Ole Opry as well as records by “Fiddlin’” Arthur Smith. Moving down “off the mountain” into industrial centers such as North Wilkesboro and Hildebran, his exposure to music increased exponentially as he had greater access to the radio and other musicians. Working in the CCC camp in 1940, Shumate was known as the “camp fiddler,” and there were likely other musicians in the camp.

When Shumate moved to Hildebran in 1941 and began playing on WHKY, he heard a wide variety of music on the radio station from classical to big band, as well as at the barn-dance style, WHKY “Saturday Night Frolics.” By this time, he would have also heard Bill Monroe and his band on the Opry with a number of different fiddle players, including Art Wooten, Tommy Magness, Birch Monroe, and Howdy Forrester. Appearing on the Opry at the same time as Roy Acuff and Curly Fox, Shumate picked up musical licks from other musicians backstage. While much of Shumate’s style was a conglomeration of his outside influences, his particular brain and personality made him synthesize what he heard in a unique way, and his style sounded markedly different than the other fiddlers around him at that time. Jim Shumate was a product of time and place, as well as of his own musical sensibility, during an exceptionally vibrant period of American musical development. We will explore his and other pre-bluegrass fiddle recordings in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: PRE AND EARLY BLUEGRASS FIDDLERS

“I think Jimmy was a genius bluegrass fiddler and way ahead of his time.”

- Ron Stewart (International Bluegrass Music Association Fiddler of the Year)¹

Jim Shumate was part of a long progression of Southern fiddlers who contributed to the classic sound of bluegrass fiddle. Beginning with fiddlers like Clayton McMichen and Arthur Smith in the 1920s and 1930s and moving on to those in Bill Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys in the early 1940s, these players furthered the evolution of modern fiddling in America. Bluegrass fiddling evolved from a rhythmic, Southern dance style with subtle variation into an improvisational, bluesy, and virtuosic technique. This chapter will examine that transformation through the history of key fiddlers, including Jim Shumate.

While most scholars credit the solidification of bluegrass with Monroe’s 1946 band, many facets of bluegrass fiddling developed prior to that date. In fact, Thomas Goldsmith wrote in *The Bluegrass Reader*, “Certainly performances such as a 1941 version of the instrumental, ‘Back Up and Push,’ recorded years before Flatt and Scruggs joined the band, captured a band with great drive, inventiveness and authority.”² Just as Monroe’s driving

¹ Ron Stewart, *The Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs* (Roanoke, VA: AcuTab Publications Inc., 2011), DVD.

² Thomas Goldsmith, editor and author, “Introduction,” in *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 4.

mandolin style and Scruggs' rolling, three-finger banjo approach were individually developed before the synthesis of the genre, many characteristics of modern fiddling were present well before 1946.

Bluegrass is a synthesis of American musical styles, and Shumate's innovations highlighted the diverse sounds making their way into the developing genre, such as blues, jazz, and swing. Bluegrass was an offshoot of country music — faster paced with acoustic instrumentation featuring high singing, bluesy back-up, jazzy solos, and flashy instrumentals. While Shumate was just one of many top-notch fiddlers who played with Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs in the 1940s, his style epitomized many of the developments emerging in Southern fiddling.

Bill Monroe had three main recording sessions between 1939-1945 including the Victor sessions on 7 October, 1940 and 2 October, 1941 as well as the 13 February, 1945 Columbia session.³ Due to World War II and the recording ban, there are very few recordings from The Blue Grass Boys from 1942 to 1945. However, live Opry air checks labeled "Prince Albert acetates" from that time period are a valuable source of information about pre-bluegrass music. This chapter will examine and analyze recordings of early fiddlers such as Clayton McMichen and Arthur Smith as well as recordings from Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys (1939-1945), and the first Flatt & Scruggs recordings, to see what characterizes early bluegrass fiddling.

³ Bill Monroe, Charles K. Wolfe, and Neil V. Rosenberg, *Blue Moon of Kentucky: Bill Monroe, 1936-1949* (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2002), liner notes.

Before delving into the evolution of bluegrass fiddling, here are some important musical definitions:

Musical Terms and Definitions

Arpeggio: The notes of a chord, played one at a time

Back-up: Supporting the singer or soloist with musical phrases that embellish the lead

Breaks or solos: An improvisation section of a tune or song featuring one instrument at a time

Double shuffle: A syncopated bowing technique where the fiddler plays a repeating pattern of three notes over duple time, alternating between low and high strings

Double-stops: To produce two or more tones at the same time, as in playing two strings at once on the fiddle

Downbeat: The first beat of a measure of music, which is usually emphasized

Fill-ins: Filling the space after a vocal line with a musical phrase

Harmony: the combination of different musical notes played or sung at the same time, usually to form the notes in a chord

Long-bow fiddling: Using more bow to note the melody, more notes in each bow stroke.

Melody: a series of musical notes that form the main part of a song or piece of music

Offbeat: The traditionally weak beat of a measure of music, usually beats 2 and 4

Rhythm: A regular, repeated pattern of sounds

Short-bow fiddling: Using less bow to note the melody, perhaps 2-3 inches. Fewer notes in each bow stroke

Slur: Combining two or more notes into one bow stroke

Song: A musical piece that features singing

“Swing” eighth notes: The first eighth note of the pair receives more emphasis and time

Syncopation: Musical rhythm in which stress is given to the weak beats instead of the strong beats

Tempo: The speed at which a musical piece is played or sung

Timing: A broad, musical term which can relate to the rhythm, syncopation and/or tempo

Tune or instrumental: A musical piece that features instruments rather than singing

Twin fiddling or double fiddling: Two fiddles playing at the same time, usually in harmony

Roots of Bluegrass Fiddling, 1920 - 1937:

The fiddle reigned supreme in traditional Southern string band music: “Only the fiddler was a really serious instrumentalist, the one who kicked off the tune, played the melody, took the breaks, drove the band. It was always assumed that the fiddle was the hardest of the folk instruments to play and that the fiddler was the most serious artist in the classic Southern string band.”⁴ The first commercial recordings of Southern fiddlers were made in the early 1920s featuring musicians such as Eck Robertson and Fiddlin’ John Carson.

While many old-time fiddlers were recording and performing on the radio during the 1920s, Clayton McMichen and “Fiddlin’” Arthur Smith are most often credited as the “grandfathers of bluegrass fiddling.”⁵ Bill Monroe especially liked Clayton McMichen’s fiddling and used to listen to him on the Grand Ole Opry. McMichen fused many styles such as old-time, gypsy music, and swing and played in different band configurations. His grandmother played the fretless banjo, and his father was, in his own words, a “sophisticated

⁴ Charles K. Wolfe, *The Devil’s Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1997), xvi.

⁵ Wolfe, *The Devil’s Box*, 81.

Irish violin player, and he's the one [that McMichen] learned all this fancy fiddling from."⁶

McMichen's father knew how to read music and played waltzes with a pianist at high-society balls. McMichen was successful as a contest fiddler in his hometown of Atlanta, a fast-growing center for fiddler's conventions. His recordings with the old-time band the Skillet Lickers are his most well-known, although he formed his own band, the Georgia Wildcats, in 1931, which incorporated elements of Western swing.

In addition to Clayton McMichen, Arthur Smith, a native of central Tennessee, was also hitting the airwaves during the "heyday of fiddling" in the 1920s in America. Smith's modern take resonated with many young musicians of that time. As Charles Wolfe wrote in *The Devil's Box*, "whatever you call his style — long bow, rolling notes, finger-noting — it had a tremendous impact on Southern fiddling."⁷ Smith was also a prolific songwriter, penning both instrumental tunes and singing songs, many of which became standards in the bluegrass repertoire. Paul Warren, a long-time fiddler with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, credited Smith as his main influence. Smith could "fit two notes to everyone else's single notes" and liked to play at blistering speeds, a characteristic common to bluegrass fiddling. He also slid his finger into melody notes, common in the blues, and accented the rhythm with his fingers rather than the bow. Both McMichen and Smith were most certainly progenitors of the bluegrass fiddle style, along with their other early contemporaries such as Curly Fox, Ed Haley and Clark Kessinger. The liner notes to Arthur Smith and His Dixieliners illustrate his virtuosity, as well as his effect on other fiddlers, such as Howdy Forrester.

⁶ Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, 82.

⁷ Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, 113-114.

If one compares a Smith record with any of the late 1920s records made by any of these fiddlers, the differences are apparent and striking. Smith is often faster, more aggressive, more daring than many of these acknowledged shapers of modern fiddling.... In a more specific vein, Howdy Forrester, who both watched and listened to Smith with a superb critical sense, says: “The thing I remember is that Arthur did more with his fingering than with the bow. He did a lot of accents with his fingers, where the rest of us at that time — Clayton McMichen, myself, others — we did it more with bow work.”⁸

One bowing innovation that Arthur Smith brought was a complex use of slurs and separate notes. Instead of just using the standard shuffle rhythm (“long, short-short, long, short-short”), Smith varied his bowing pattern in tunes like “Fiddler’s Dream” and “Sugar Tree Stomp.”⁹ As Jim Wood wrote in his article in *Strings* magazine, “Smith knew perfectly the trick of strategically placing slurs and single bow strokes into phrases so as to amplify their intrinsic strength. The result is a flowing, hard-driving rhythm which avoids the stiffness and monotony of using just one bow pattern throughout an entire tune.”¹⁰ Wood also emphasized that Smith was one of the earliest to make blues a “prominent feature in country fiddling.”¹¹

The significance of Arthur Smith cannot be understated, especially in regard to bluegrass fiddling. He was present at Monroe’s first Victor recording session in Atlanta in 1940 and used members of Monroe’s band to back him up, although his recordings were

⁸ Arthur Smith, *Fiddlin’ Arthur Smith & His Dixieliners*, Vol. 1, album notes, County Records 546, 1978, LP.

⁹ Jim Wood, “Modern Southern Fiddling: The Genius of Arthur Smith,” *Strings* 4, no. 3 (1989): 34-35.

¹⁰ Wood, “Modern Southern Fiddling,” 33.

¹¹ Wood, “Modern Southern Fiddling,” 33.

released as “Arthur Smith and His Dixieliners.”¹² Arthur Smith and Tommy Magness did a twin fiddle version of “K.C. Stomp,” and other tracks from the session included “Peacock Rag,” “Smith’s Rag” and “Crazy Blues.” As Wood reiterated, “Arthur Smith dominated the stylistic development of an entire generation, and his influence is still indirectly felt through the many popular fiddlers who so thoroughly assimilated certain aspects of his playing.”¹³

Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys: 1938-1946

Bill Monroe got his musical start performing with his brother Charlie as the Monroe Brothers. Originally from Rosine, Kentucky, the brothers moved up to the Chicago area to find work in the factories. There they cut their teeth performing in the Midwest at live venues and on various radio stations. However, by 1938, the brothers parted ways, and Bill Monroe formed his own band called the Blue Grass Boys, named after a region in his home state of Kentucky. Expanding beyond the duet format, Monroe hired multiple musicians and comedians to perform with his new band. He chose a variety of fiddlers to join the Blue Grass Boys in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and each had distinctive musical strengths.

Bill Monroe emphasized that the fiddle was a crucial part of the bluegrass sound, and Monroe always carried at least one fiddler in his band, sometimes even two or three. “I think the fiddle is the king instrument of string music,” he said in 1974, according to Neil Rosenberg and Charles Wolfe.¹⁴ Monroe’s early fiddlers shared certain characteristics: they often had a bluesy feel, could play at breakneck speeds, and could back up a singer in various

¹² Charles Wolfe, “The Odyssey of Arthur Smith,” *Bluegrass Unlimited*, 13 (August 1978): 56.

¹³ Wood, “Modern Southern Fiddling,” 32.

¹⁴ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg, *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, 25.

keys. He liked both long-bow and short-bow fiddlers, and his first two fiddlers, Art Wooten and Tommy Magness, played in the more old-time short-bow style. “Monroe was a fan of ‘long bow’ fiddlers like Clayton McMichen and Arthur Smith, but he also saw a ‘place in his music for the older mountain ‘jiggy bow’ style and Magness was one of the very best.”¹⁵ However, the role of the fiddle in country music was changing in the 1930s and while once the featured instrument of the band, the fiddle was transitioning to the role of a secondary instrument behind the vocalists, except during instrumental numbers.

Art Wooten was the first fiddler to join the band in 1939 while Monroe was at WWNC radio in Asheville, North Carolina. Raised in Alleghany County, North Carolina, Wooten was a breakdown fiddler who could also play backup and fills behind a singer with a solid, bluesy feel. Monroe gave lots of feedback to his musicians, and Wooten was happy to learn a specific phrase or lick that Monroe wanted to hear. Wooten’s initial time with the Blue Grass Boys was fairly short-lived, and in 1940, Tommy Magness took over the fiddle position. Born in 1916 in Mineral Bluff, Georgia, Magness played old-time fiddle with “drive and a loose, bluesy style.”¹⁶ Magness was the first fiddler to record with Monroe at the October 7th, 1940 session with Victor Bluebird in Atlanta. He raced through a version of “Katy Hill” with Monroe pushing the backbeat with his mandolin chop. Charles Wolfe described Tommy Magness in this fashion: “His fiddling was a complex bridge between the older Appalachian folk fiddling, the new country music styles of the 1940s, and the even newer emerging sounds of bluegrass.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg. *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, 27.

¹⁶ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg. *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, 27.

¹⁷ Charles K. Wolfe, "Fiddler in the Shadows: The Story of Tommy Magness," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 31 (May 1997): 52.

Another band leader named Roy Hall, who had previously hired Magness to work with his Blue Ridge Entertainers, enticed him back in 1941 with promises of a higher salary. Luckily, Art Wooten was able to rejoin the Blue Grass Boys and recorded at Monroe's October 1941 recording sessions. The fiddle highlights from that session include "Orange Blossom Special" and "Back Up and Push," discussed in the forthcoming musical analysis section. Art Wooten again left the band in 1942.

During the war years, many fiddlers performed with Bill Monroe, most notably Howdy Forrester, Chubby Wise and Jim Shumate. Often, Monroe would keep more than one fiddler on the show, such as his brother, Birch Monroe, or Opry fiddler Floyd Ethridge, to fill different functions. Monroe wanted musicians who were comfortable backing up a vocalist as well as fast, breakdown fiddlers. He also needed musicians who could play in all the keys that he liked to sing in, such as B-flat. Each fiddler had distinct traits, but a common element was the blues. In almost every description of Monroe's fiddlers, the word "bluesy" appears. Monroe certainly valued that sound and consciously incorporated it into his music.

Monroe's fiddler from 1942-1943, Howdy Forrester, was originally from Hickman County, Tennessee, although he spent years performing in Western swing bands in Oklahoma and Texas. His wife, Wilene, aka "Sally Ann," was also a musician. They came to Nashville in early 1942 and both joined the Blue Grass Boys. Sally Ann played the accordion and sang in the band. Howdy Forrester's style was similar to Arthur Smith's, as they were both from central Tennessee and Forrester had performed with Smith in the Tennessee Valley Boys. Howdy was known for his rhythmic hoedown fiddling and shuffling as well as his sliding double-stops. Monroe was quoted as saying, "Howdy was the first man with me to

play double-stops.”¹⁸ Forrester also had experience with Texas-style and twin fiddling which he brought to the Blue Grass Boys. Other fiddlers heard Forrester on the Opry and he “fast became a highly influential fiddler.”¹⁹ Forrester was soon drafted into the Navy and left the band in March of 1943, but not before greatly influencing what was to become the “bluegrass sound,” according to his biographer, Gayel Pitchford:

Old-time fiddling was undergoing a transition to meet the demands of the newer type of music where the vocalist’s role was on an equal par with the instrumentalist’s.

Working with Monroe, Howard developed new techniques for playing song melodies.

He began to play the melody similarly to the way it was sung, but at the end of each phrase, where a singer would normally breathe, Forrester would add an improvised scale portion or an arpeggio, which would lead to the next major melody note on the tonic of the new chord.²⁰

Forrester’s replacement on fiddle was Chubby Wise of Lake City, Florida and he “developed a versatile and eclectic style that was part swing, part blues, and part pop.”²¹ Monroe was initially concerned about whether Wise could pick up the older breakdown style of fiddling, which he was accustomed to having in his band, but Wise proved to be a fast learner and learned from the other Opry fiddlers Bill kept around, although he gave credit to Bill Monroe for teaching him to play bluegrass fiddle. “Bill Monroe taught me how to play bluegrass. He taught me the long blue notes... And he’d show me on the mandolin.”²² There

¹⁸ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg. *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, 40.

¹⁹ Gayel Pitchford, *Fiddler of the Opry: The Howdy Forrester Story* (Tehachapi CA: Viewpoint Press, 2007), 55.

²⁰ Pitchford, *Fiddler of the Opry*, 55.

²¹ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg. *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, 40.

²² W.W. Daniel, “Chubby Wise: Dean of the Bluegrass Fiddlers,” *Bluegrass Unlimited* 21 (April 1987): 33.

was some doubt as to whether Wise would be able to adapt his sound to fit Monroe's at first, considering his background, but he was with Monroe for close to seven years and recorded at all six of his Columbia recording sessions.

Although Wise played with Monroe on and off until 1950, there was a period from early 1945 through early 1946 when he was not a member of the band. It was at this point that Jim Shumate got his chance to be a Blue Grass Boy, in the spring of 1945, just weeks after Lester Flatt had joined the band. Bill Monroe had heard Shumate playing with Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys on WHKY in Hickory, North Carolina, and recruited him to come to Nashville. Shumate played with Monroe through the summer tent show season and into the fall, and then introduced Earl Scruggs to Bill Monroe in late 1945. Unfortunately, Shumate never got to play with Scruggs in the Blue Grass Boys, as Howdy Forrester returned from the service and got his job back with Bill Monroe. Forrester fiddled with Monroe until early 1946, when Chubby Wise rejoined the band, thus coalescing the infamous 1945-1948 band which included Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Chubby Wise and Howard Watts.

Jim Shumate credited fiddler Curly Fox with helping him out backstage at the Opry: "I learned a lot from Fox. Anything like 'Buckin' Mule' or 'Lee Highway Blues' and stuff like that that I needed to know, why during the program I'd say 'Get back here, Fox, I want you to show me something.'"²³ Musicians never knew what to expect with Monroe and had to be ready for anything. Shumate was up for the challenge and learned on the fly: "That was the first time I'd ever hit B, B-flat and I'd never played anything in E 'til I got on the stage of

²³ Erbsen, "Jim Shumate," 110.

the Opry”²⁴ In fact, the first time Shumate arrived in Nashville to play with Monroe, he had to kick off Monroe’s theme song, “Watermelon Hanging on the Vine,” to start the whole Opry show. Shumate recalled in the *Grassroots to Bluegrass* documentary when Monroe said to him, “‘Jim, do you know my theme song?... We got to open up the Opry tonight. Your fiddle will be the first thing that’s heard on the Opry.’ It scared me to death!”²⁵

Shumate, while primarily self-taught, credited Arthur Smith as the genesis of his style. In his interview with Wayne Erbsen, he explained Arthur Smith’s style of long-bow fiddling:

He [Smith] had what they called a long-bow. You know the difference between a long bow and this jaggy stuff fiddling. . . Whole lot of difference in the long bow... Well, it’s in the noting system. You can play “Katy Hill”... I can just drag the bow across the fiddle, and the faster you note it make it sound like you’re going ninety miles an hour... They used to accuse me there at the Opry of resting my arm. Those other guys were yank, yank, yank and I’d just drag it along and sound like I was just a-flyin.²⁶

Shumate started with the bluesy long-bow fiddling of Arthur Smith and added more double-stops (playing two fingered strings at one time) and slides. His use of syncopation and off-beat timing brought a swingy and bluesy feel to the style. Shumate was also able to play in a variety of keys new for the genre, such as E and B, as demonstrated on the Opry air check recording of “Footprints in the Snow” (in E) and “We’ll Meet Again Sweetheart,” (in

²⁴ Erbsen, “Jim Shumate,” 111.

²⁵ *Grassroots to Bluegrass*, (Nashville: Gabriel Associates, 1999), VHS.

²⁶ Jim Shumate interview, 2003.

B). These keys required more technical facility from the fiddler than the traditional old-time keys of A, D, G, and C.

Shumate has also been credited with popularizing the fiddle “kick-off” to singing songs, where the fiddle typically plays three notes as an intro before the band joins in. As the story goes, Monroe and Flatt were having trouble figuring out how to start a certain song and kept starting a beat off from each other. Flatt asked Shumate to try the intro after hearing him noodle around in the background while they were practicing: “Nobody kicked off a tune with the fiddle ’til I started doing it. Lester Flatt got me to kick ’em off with the fiddle.”²⁷

Shumate’s signature fiddle kick-offs are demonstrated in his recordings of, “My Cabin in Caroline,” and “We’ll Meet Again Sweetheart,” with Flatt & Scruggs.

Musical Analysis

The first recording will be of a fiddle tune titled “McMichen’s Reel.” This song was written and recorded by Clayton McMichen on fiddle, with Riley Puckett (of the Skillet Lickers) on guitar in 1929. In this instrumental tune, there’s a strong downbeat, making the song ideal for dancing. The tempo is moderate-to-fast and well-suited for square dancing and clogging, which was the purpose of early string band music. McMichen plays the melody repeatedly, with minor variations. There are some double-stops, where two fiddle strings are played at the same time. This is an example of some of the earliest decade of recorded fiddle music and demonstrates some of the characteristics which show up in bluegrass fiddling, such as double-stops (see Appendix A.1).

²⁷ Erbsen, “Jim Shumate,” 112.

Arthur Smith showed a slightly different approach on his original tune, “Smith’s Rag,” performed and recorded in the late 1930s. Like “McMichen’s Reel,” this tune demonstrates a fairly strong downbeat emphasis. The tempo increased from “McMichen’s Reel,” and Smith fits many notes in each bow stroke, using a variety of bowing patterns. He also varied the rhythm with occasional long, bluesy notes and slides. Smith stayed fairly close to the melody, without much variation or improvisation. Both McMichen and Smith maintained a traditional dance style, with minor improvisation and a heavy emphasis on the downbeat. However, Smith’s long-bow fiddle style emphasized the shift to left hand dexterity in addition to right arm bow work. This switch enabled fiddlers to play more notes in one bow at faster speeds, setting the stage for the virtuosic bluegrass fiddling to come. Smith also incorporates elements of the blues into this recording (see Appendix A.2).

Tommy Magness’ recording of “Katy Hill” with the Blue Grass Boys in 1940 is fast-paced and full of energy. This common fiddle tune, based on an older tune called “Sally Johnson”, is common in the bluegrass repertoire. The backup band is still focused on the downbeat, but the tempo has greatly increased from the previous recordings. Magness was a revolutionary fiddler for the era, and this version has a strong backbeat pulse. Again, he mostly stuck with the straight melody of the song. The progression of bluegrass fiddling starts to become evident with the faster tempo and driving, syncopated feel of the tune (see Appendix A.3).

During Art Wooten’s version of “Back Up and Push,” recorded on 2 October, 1941, Wooten used extensive double strings, but stayed close to the melody. This is also the first instrumental tune on Monroe’s recordings where the fiddle and the mandolin trade solos, borrowing from the jazz form. Unlike Wooten, Monroe varied his solo slightly each time.

The changing role of the mandolin is highlighted in this tune. Bill Monroe used both a galloping strumming pattern and the backbeat chop, an important technique in bluegrass music. In this tune, the characteristic “bluegrass drive” is developing, with Monroe’s mandolin chop moving the song forward (see Appendix A.4).

Also notable at these two early recording sessions was the presence of the “double shuffle,” a popular technique in modern fiddling. Tommy Magness fiddled on Monroe’s 1940 recording of “Muleskinner Blues” in the key of G and used the double shuffle as back-up to Monroe’s vocal line multiple times during the song. In 1941, Art Wooten recorded the immensely popular show tune, “The Orange Blossom Special,” written by Ervin Rouse and Chubby Wise in 1938. The double shuffle is a quintessential part of “The Orange Blossom Special,” as is the loose, improvisational C part where there are often conversations between the musicians as well as flashy fiddle licks (see Appendix A.5).

The double shuffle likely made it into the bluegrass lexicon from Texas fiddling and Western swing via 1920s jazz violinists. One of the first recordings of the double shuffle appears on Joe Venuti’s 1927 recording of “Four String Joe.”²⁸ Classically trained Texas-style fiddler Cecil Brower, who was a master of improvisation and the double shuffle brought the technique into Texas-style and Western swing fiddling.²⁹ The syncopated rhythm of the double shuffle mimics ragtime piano riffs from the turn of the century. The syncopated bowing patterns in bluegrass fiddling are similar to ragtime piano rhythms with “swing” eighth notes and emphasis on the off-beats.

²⁸ Charles Gardner, “The origins of the Texas style of traditional old-time fiddling” in *2001: A Texas Folklore Odyssey*, ed. Francis Edward Abernathy (Denton: University of Texas, 2001) no. 58, 64-65.

²⁹ Gardner, “The origins of the Texas style,” 65.

Howdy Forrester was another influential fiddler with Bill Monroe, and his version of “Fire in the Mountain” from October of 1942 highlights his showmanship (see Appendix A.6). Howdy was a masterful shuffler and demonstrated a variety of improvised licks during this song. His version of the song is closer to a contest style tune like “Orange Blossom Special,” featuring different improvisational licks from the fiddle player. Howdy did not use as many blues slides and stayed fairly on the beat with his rhythm. However, he was technically advanced and seemed to be very comfortable on his instrument.

Chubby Wise recorded on “Rocky Road Blues” with Monroe in February of 1945. His version showcases primarily single-string playing, and has a bopping, swingy feel. Wise stuck fairly close to the melody for the majority of the break and then played a double-stop lick during the last phrase of the solo. Wise’s later recordings with the Blue Grass Boys seemed to incorporate more bluesy slides than his pre-1946 recordings. Listening to other songs from the 1945 session, Wise kept his solos closer in line to the melody, such as on the “True Life Blues.” However, when playing back-up, Wise used more bluesy, sliding double-stop patterns (see Appendix A.7).

Later in 1945, live air checks from the Grand Ole Opry feature Jim Shumate’s playing from that year. Shumate’s fiddling stands out on a couple of tracks, especially “Rocky Road Blues” and “Kentucky Waltz.” Jim’s first break on “Rocky Road Blues” at nineteen seconds begins with a sliding double-stop with an E and G natural, the G being the flat seven of the root chord of A. His break is extremely syncopated, with his solo lead notes changing on the off-beats and giving a push-pull feel to the song. Jim’s second break demonstrates sliding, syncopated double-stops, and he embellishes the melody during the second half of the solo (see Appendix A.8). Shumate’s solo on “Kentucky Waltz” from the

same time period also featured bluesy, sliding double-stops and off-beat syncopation (see Appendix A.9).

While Jim Shumate's recording of "Katy Hill" is from 1997, Shumate's style was likely similar to his time with the Blue Grass Boys in 1945. Shumate's version of "Katy Hill" is markedly different from Tommy Magness' version of the same song and shows the evolution of bluegrass fiddling away from straight hoedown fiddling. The tempo remains very fast, but the emphasis is on the backbeat instead of the downbeat. The instruments trade solos, with the banjo and the mandolin trading breaks with the fiddle. Shumate varies the melody slightly each time he plays it, incorporating the improvisational flavor of jazz. He also slides into an occasional long, bluesy note with his bow, and then follows it with a flurry of short notes (see Appendix A.10).

All of the recordings so far, from 1929-1945, are a snapshot of the canon of fiddlers who contributed to the "bluegrass sound" in the early days of the genre. They illustrate the diverse musical influences on bluegrass fiddling as well as demonstrate the characteristics present in early fiddling, such as sliding, bluesy double-stops, syncopated melodies, and the double shuffle. The next section will examine Jim Shumate's contributions through his recordings with Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys as well as his original composition, "Lazy Man Blues."

Mercury Sessions

IBMA Fiddle Player of the Year Ron Stewart recently released a DVD titled, *The Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*. In the film, Stewart discussed the importance of Fiddlin' Arthur Smith on the development of bluegrass fiddling, claiming that "Arthur Smith was a powerful

fiddle player of the 30s and 40s. His fiddle style, I think, influenced most bluegrass fiddlers, post-1940, a great deal.”³⁰ Stewart credited Smith with bringing elements of old-time fiddle into bluegrass music as well as incorporating his bluesy feel. He also said that Smith contributed a new way of thinking about the fiddle lines, “where he’s maybe emulating something like a singer would sing, not flat- [out] hitting the notes, but sliding into and back off of the note.”³¹

Stewart then analyzed the two songs that Jim Shumate played fiddle on at the first Mercury session: “My Cabin in Caroline,” and “We’ll Meet Again Sweetheart.” He touted, “These are my favorite two fiddle breaks of all time” and “Those two songs are gold to me, just some of the most classiest [sic] bluegrass fiddling ever played.”³² Other than Benny Martin, Shumate was one of the only fiddlers using a lot of double-stops in bluegrass, which was a relatively new thing. Stewart described Shumate’s style of using backwards slides and delayed timing by waiting to arrive on the note as well as his “swingy” eighth notes in his solos and back-up fills.

“My Cabin in Caroline” sounds like it was recorded in the key of A-flat, however the musicians probably tuned up a half-step so they could play out of a G-shape. Often, the singer would dictate a key based on where their vocal range was, and so it was easier to re-tune the instruments than play out of a technically challenging key like A-flat. Jim’s intro mimics the melody line at the beginning, but during the second half he uses an ascending and descending G blues arpeggio pattern, sliding into the F note and B-flat note on the way down.

³⁰ Stewart, *Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*.

³¹ Stewart, *Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*.

³² Stewart, *Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*.

This one lick has permeated the bluegrass repertoire and has been used by countless musicians. The solo at 1:40 starts with a syncopated push-pull and utilizes a sliding triplet pattern with double-stops. Shumate ends the solo with the same iconic arpeggio pattern as the intro. Lester Flatt is also heavily syncopating his guitar runs while Earl Scruggs is driving the song forward with his banjo rolls (see Appendix A.11).

Jim's version of "We'll Meet Again Sweetheart" was technically challenging, considering it was in the key of B, although if Jim's fiddle was tuned up to A-flat he was likely playing out of the B-flat shape. The intro is half of the verse, as in "My Cabin in Caroline" and he uses a similar bluesy arpeggio run at the end of the intro. Jim's break on this song at 1:42 begins with a fast ascending run up to the high B on the E-string where he anticipates the downbeat. Using sliding double-stops in multiple positions, Jim outlines the melody in a creative and syncopated manner. For the time period, this solo is remarkable. These two songs demonstrate Jim's inventive way of interpreting the melody in his own unique style (see Appendix A.12).

Lazy Man Blues

One of Jim Shumate's original compositions, called the "Lazy Man Blues," demonstrates his bluesy double-stops and push-pull sense of timing. The song begins with an ascending run up to the D-note, which Jim delays until after the downbeat. The melody then descends to the tri-tone double-stop of F natural and B, which is considered a dissonant interval. However, using those two notes over the IV chord, in this case, creates a dominant seventh chord. The use of the bluesy tri-tone interval is a cornerstone of this composition (see Appendix A.13 and Figure 1).

The tune is in the key of D, and the form is AABA with the B part acting as a bridge. This form is common to jazz and swing standards. The bridge travels down to the IV chord, which Jim plays as a bluesy G-arpeggio. The range of this song is very wide, going from an open G-string (the lowest note on the fiddle) up to a high D in third position, shifting up the neck of the fiddle on the E-string. Looking at the transcription, the signature melody lick in measures 9 and 10 walks from the double stop on the high D down through a series of four sliding, arpeggio double-stops and firmly lands on the tri-tone in measure 12. The transcription also shows Jim's push-pull use of timing, as many of the notes start before the downbeat and change between the beat. The song ends with Jim's creative tag beginning up the neck on the E-string, which slides down using chromatic intervals.

Lazy Man Blues

Jim Shumate

Swing 8ths

D G

5 D A

9 D G D

14 A D D⁷ G

19 D G A

24 D G

29 D A D Tag

33

Transcription by Natalya Weinstein ©2015

Figure 1: “Lazy Man Blues” Transcription

CHAPTER 4: JIM SHUMATE'S LIFE AND STORY

After an extensive musical analysis of early bluegrass fiddling, we now look to the life story of the musician. This chapter adds a biographical context for Jim Shumate and how his life circumstances influenced his exposure to music. This section also expands the canon of knowledge of Jim Shumate beyond the 1940s, when he was a touring performer, to his family life, his work, and his musical pursuits outside of Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys and Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys.

Up on Chestnut Mountain: 1921-1939

James “Jim” Shumate was born on 21 October, 1921, at his family home on Chestnut Mountain in Wilkes County, North Carolina. His parents were James Martin Shumate (1875-1943) and Artha Dorcas Teague (1892-1960). Jim was the fifth out of their seven children, beginning with his brother Mack, who was ten years older than Jim.¹ He had five sisters younger than Mack, beginning with Ella, Etta, Ila, Lucille and Austeen. Jim led a fairly carefree life on Chestnut Mountain. As one of the youngest children and one of only two boys in the family, Jim had plenty of attention. His favorite pastime was to wander around the mountain hunting squirrels and rabbits. Jim’s daughter Rita recalled that Jim would tell

¹ I acknowledge the standard convention of referring to authors or performers by their surnames, but in this chapter, which offers personal, biographical information on a family member, I will be referring to people by their first names.

stories about walking home up the mountain in pitch dark and have no trouble finding his way. She said, “he just knew his way around up there.”²

Jim attended Cane Creek School, a one-room schoolhouse off the mountain, through the seventh grade: “Growing up in the mountains of Wilkes County during the Depression was not a good time for anyone, especially as a seven-year-old boy beginning school. I walked one and a half miles over frozen dirt roads in the cold wind and ice. It was always good when the going home bell would ring.”³ The family’s church, Cane Creek Baptist Church, was also close to the schoolhouse, and Jim’s wife Naomi believes it was a Primitive Baptist church. Jim’s father used to sit around in the evenings and read scripture from the Bible. The Shumate family farmed and had livestock, although they also earned income by cutting timber and selling medicinal roots and herbs, such as sassafras, in the nearby town of North Wilkesboro.⁴ The chestnut blight was already exacting heavy casualties in the Southern Appalachians, and they would harvest the dying trees. Naomi remembered that Jim used to sell tanbark, which was made from the bark of chestnut and oak trees and used as an acid in tanning leather.

The Shumate family lived in a four-room house with two porches and two stone fireplaces and chimneys. They had a log barn with two stalls where they kept their oxen and cows. Jim used to help plow with the oxen. Around 13 families in total lived up on the mountain — only a few related to the Shumates, although pretty much everyone had moved

² Rita Miller, interview with Natalya Weinstein, October 2013.

³ Shumate, Jim, “Jim Shumate,” in *Wilkes County Memories—Possum Hunters, Moonshine and Cornshuck Dolls: A Treasury of 20th Century Memories*, ed. Bob Lasley & Sallie Holt (Hickory, NC: Hometown Memories, 2007), 32.

⁴ Naomi Shumate, interview with Natalya Weinstein, October 2013.

off the mountain by 1950. In the post-war boom of 1945, lots of good paying jobs in the towns and factories in Wilkes County, left little incentive for families to stay and farm on the mountain. Jim's father passed away in August of 1943, but his mother Artha stayed on the mountain with her youngest daughter Austeen. Jim's daughter Rita spoke about what Chestnut Mountain means to her:

Well, that's our roots, Daddy's roots... When we were little children we used to park and walk up, because there was no road to go up there. We'd walk up through the woods, and I remember we'd come out right there where the little graveyard is. It would always be so neat to come out in the sunlight there. And then we'd walk out to Grandmother's, "Grandma's" we'd say, and she had flowers blooming out there. It was just like a little paradise on top of the mountain... We loved going up there and my grandma would make big fat biscuits. We loved her biscuits... She's the one who taught mother how to make biscuits. She always had something good to eat. We'd go on Sundays. Another thing I remember there, in her yard, was mint. She had mint growing all around the backyard and when I smelled mint when I first moved here, we had some mint, it just took me right back over there because that's the first time I remember smelling mint. It just smelled so good.⁵

Music on the Mountain

Jim's first exposure to music came from family members on Chestnut Mountain. His uncle Erbie Shumate played the old-time fiddle, his brother Mack played the fiddle, and his

⁵ R. Miller interview, 2013.

sister Ella was a clawhammer banjo player. Jim remembered listening to his uncle play old time tunes on the fiddle on his front porch up the hill. “If the wind was coming the right direction I could hear him playing the fiddle. I thought it was very pretty. I listened to him every chance I got.”⁶ Jim’s older brother Mack had been performing with the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers up in Bluefield, WV and when he came home for a visit, he’d leave his fiddle lying around the house. Jim would play around on it when Mack was out. One Saturday night they were out at a music gathering: “A lot of people made music in the mountains in those days. Of an evening, Saturday night, they’d get together and have these shenanigans and just push the chairs back in the corner, and dance and carry on.”⁷

On this particular night, someone asked Mack if he’d heard Jim play the fiddle. Upon hearing him, Mack told Jim he’d make a better fiddler than himself and figured it was time to get Jim his own instrument. Mack ordered Jim a violin, bow, and case from Sears & Roebuck for \$17.50 when he was around 12 years old. Jim’s family used to walk down to a neighbor’s house to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights, as they didn’t have their own radio. After hearing Arthur Smith on the Grand Ole Opry with Sam and Kirk McGee, the young musician began collecting every record he could find by the masterful fiddler. Shumate wanted to make his fiddling sound just like Arthur Smith. Naomi remembers that Jim won his first music contest with a local band at Miller’s Creek School at the age of 14.

⁶ Jim Shumate, Oral History with Herb E. Smith, (Owensboro, KY: The International Bluegrass Music Museum, November, 2004), DVD.

⁷ Shumate oral history, 2004.

Down the Mountain: 1939-1954

In addition to working with his family, Jim's wife Naomi recounted that one of his early jobs was working in the apple orchard on Chestnut Mountain. Around 1940, one of Shumate's first jobs off the mountain was when he was around 18, working for the Civilian Conservation Corps on the Blue Ridge Parkway at Camp Laurel Springs. The 1940 federal census lists him as living at home with his family but working as a government laborer doing roadwork.⁸ He was known as the "fiddler of the camp."⁹ After that, Jim worked in a furniture factory in North Wilkesboro. Jim eventually came to work in a hosiery mill in Hildebran, North Carolina (Catawba County) around 1941-1942.

Jim's wife, Naomi [Stephens] Shumate

Naomi Stephens was born on 8 January 1927, in Catawba County to Richard Franklin Stephens and Claudie Estelle Eckard. Claudie was Richard's second wife, and Naomi had a few half-siblings whom she was close with from her father's first family. She was born at home on the farm with a midwife: "The midwife was a good friend of Momma's and I thought she used to keep the babies upstairs at her house. Kids were so innocent then, they didn't know nothing."¹⁰ Naomi was the second child and her siblings were Bernice, Geneva (Jenk), and Richard (Junior).

The Stephens family also liked music, and Naomi had a half-brother who played the fiddle and piano, as well as a half-sister who played the organ at church. Her mother was a

⁸ "U.S. Census 1940," available at ancestry.com, accessed February 19, 2018.

⁹ Gary Reid, "Bluegrass Triple Threat," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 46, no. 1 (July 2011): 40.

¹⁰ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

Lutheran, but when she married Richard she was baptized and became a Baptist. Her parents were members of Wilkies Grove Baptist Church, but Naomi grew up going to Green Hill Church of God in Catawba County, as well as Mull's Chapel over in the country: "People got baptized in the river then... When Jim wrote that song, ["Old Country Baptizing"] that's the way they did over there... There was no such thing as pools at the back of the sanctuary."¹¹

Naomi had to grow up fast, as her father died when she was 14 years old: "When my dad died we had to move over to Hildebran, where my mother's people were from."¹² Naomi came across Jim for the first time while he was sleeping on her friend's couch at a millhouse in Hildebran. Naomi was 15 years old and was picking up a schoolmate in the ninth grade to walk to school. Her friend was the daughter of Albert "Ab" Hartsoe, who worked booking shows for musician Don Walker. Jim was performing with Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys at the time and was staying with Ab's family.

Don Walker and his wife Rachel also lived in one of the hosiery millhouses in Hildebran. It was the early 1940s and many young men were getting drafted to fight in WWII; however, Jim was classified as a 4F since he'd had severe sunstroke when he was a teenager while plowing on Chestnut Mountain. Don and Jim worked at a hosiery factory and also performed with their band on daily radio shows on WHKY and on the station's Saturday Night Frolic. "They done everything to make a dollar," said Naomi.¹³ The first appearance of the band on the WHKY radio schedule as found in the city newspaper, the *Hickory Daily*

¹¹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

¹² N. Shumate interview, 2013.

¹³ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

Record, appears to be on October 1st, 1941. The band performed at 6:15am on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturday mornings.¹⁴

An original songbook of Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys published in 1943, housed in a private collection, confirms that the band began playing on WHKY in Hickory in 1941. Under a photo of band members Dick Turner, Jim Shumate, Ralph Pennington, Fred Moody (brother of Clyde Moody) and Don Walker, the caption reads:

We wish to thank our many friends for the interest they have shown during our two years radio work over radio station WHKY... We all appreciate your cards and letters... There's nothing we enjoy more than answering your requests by singing your favorite request numbers. Sincerely yours, Don Walker and his Blue Ridge Boys.

WHKY was Hickory's first radio station and had gone on the air as a 250-watt station in 1940.¹⁵ With studios downtown at Hotel Hickory, they then affiliated with NBC's Blue Network in 1942, hence many of the photos in the songbook showing both a WHKY microphone and "The Blue Network" banner. In late 1942 WHKY started their Saturday Night Frolic, modeled after the popular variety barn dances of the time period, which broadcast from the auditorium of Hickory's City Hall. The show included local performers as well as more well-known regional acts.¹⁶ By the time the songbook was published, the WHKY's frequency had increased to 5000 watts by day and 1000 watts at night.

The cover of the songbook lists Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys' schedule as:

¹⁴ *Hickory Daily Record*, "WHKY Program Schedule," October 1, 1941.

¹⁵ Bob Carlin, "Don Walker: North Carolina Bluegrass Music Pioneer," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 45, no. 1 (July 2010): 42.

¹⁶ Carlin, "Don Walker," 43.

Broadcasting at

12:35 P. M. MONDAY Thru FRIDAY

12:45 P. M. SATURDAY and 8:15 on

“THE SATURDAY NIGHT FROLIC”

In a photo of what appears to be the Saturday Night Frolic in 1943, we see a stage holding 24 people, including Jim Shumate. There are 12 musicians standing in the back row with instruments (fiddles, guitars, mandolins and banjos, one saxophone and one upright bass), two black face performers holding a fiddle and a washboard, a row of seated gentlemen in suits and ties, and an announcer.

Shumate’s bandmate Don Walker

Beth Walker Miller (born Julia Beth Walker) spoke about her father Don Walker, who was a longtime friends and musical collaborator of Shumate’s. Walker’s story is similar to Shumate’s, in that he moved off the family farm to pursue music and work in the textile mills in Hildebran, North Carolina. Lonnie Ray “Don” Walker was born in 1917, and he grew up on a farm in Dysartsville, in the southeast corner of McDowell County. Don was a self-taught musician. From photos, it is known that Don owned a herringbone Martin D-28 guitar, thought to be pre-WWII. His daughter Beth remembers Don taking really good care of his guitar. She said he’d take it out and clean it with a cloth, and she can still "hear the sound of the cloth squeaking on the strings."¹⁷ Don used to bring his guitar everywhere, to fish fries

¹⁷ Beth Miller, interview by Natalya Weinstein, October 2013.

and parties, and when someone would ask, “Did you bring your guitar?” He’d invariably answer, “Well I think I might have it in the car.” Beth said he just “loved to play.”¹⁸

“We’ll Meet Again Sweetheart”

Naomi Stephens had originally met Jim Shumate while he was playing with Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys but crossed paths with him a year later in downtown Hickory. Naomi had gone to school through the ninth grade, but then had to drop out of school and start working to support herself: “Momma didn’t have any income, other than my brother being in the service. She still had two children to raise, my sister Jenk [Geneva] and my brother Junior [Richard]. So I learned to loop [socks], I didn’t go back to school. I was making my own way.”¹⁹ Naomi was working boarding socks at Setz-Right Hosiery when she crossed paths with Jim again at age 16. She recollects the following about a former schoolmate named Catherine Martin and herself:

We went up town to have something to do on Saturday night because I was working, I was independent... We went uptown to see what was going on in the Jamboree [at the City Hall]. Well, lo and behold, there Jim was on the stage. And I said, ‘I know that fellow’ and she didn’t believe me. I said, ‘Well we’ll wait out here on the steps till they come out...’ After the show was over, they all came out the front... He and his friend Bob Van Horn, said they’d take us home, and so they took us home.²⁰

¹⁸ B. Miller interview, 2013.

¹⁹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

²⁰ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

It turned out that Jim was staying around the corner from where Naomi was living with her half-sister Mamie Percell in downtown Hickory. Jim lived at Mrs. Thomson's rooming house for boys. Naomi remembers that Jim worked with Don and also worked at Post Office Barbecue at that time. Once Jim found out that Naomi was working at Setz-Right Hosiery Mills, he switched over to working there. Apparently one day he had a show and didn't come to work, so he was fired.

I asked Naomi what her first reaction to Jim's music was. She said with a chuckle, "I wasn't that crazy about the music, but I thought he was good-looking! I thought he was the purtiest [sic] little feller I'd ever seen... and I liked his name, Jim."²¹ They courted for a few months and Jim gave her a diamond ring in August of 1943, "right after his daddy died."²² They were married on Saturday morning, 2 October 1943, in Gaffney, South Carolina. Don and Rachel Walker picked them up and drove them down to be their witnesses (Naomi was just sixteen and they weren't legally allowed to get married in North Carolina, although her mother had approved the marriage). They had to come straight home afterwards as Don and Jim had a show that night in Conover, most likely the Hickory Jamboree, which had moved to the Canova Theater in Conover in June of 1943.²³

They moved into the apartment that Naomi was living in as her half-sister had moved to Winston. Naomi remembers that she bought herself a nice blond bedroom set and paid for it all herself. Naomi felt really lucky to have met Jim. In her words, "The good Lord took care of me. He arranged everything."²⁴ She got pregnant soon after they were married, and

²¹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

²² N. Shumate interview, 2013.

²³ Carlin, *String Bands*, 43.

²⁴ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

their first daughter, Rita Kay Shumate, was born on June 16th, 1944. In early 1944, Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Boys moved to the WNC Farm Hour radio program on WWNC, "Wonderful Western North Carolina" in Asheville, and while Jim joined them at the beginning of their residency, he didn't stay long.

In many published accounts, Jim got the call from Bill Monroe to join the Blue Grass Boys in 1943, but Naomi remembers that it was in spring of 1945, when she was pregnant with their second child. She didn't want to move to Nashville since she was pregnant, and Jim's sister Lucille came to stay with her in the apartment when Jim decided to go to Nashville:

He [Jim] was boarding socks down at Whisnant's Hosiery Mill... It was 1945... It was warm weather... and she [Rita] wasn't a year old... Somewhere in April or May I'd say, but I think it was April... Well we talked it over, and I never did discourage him from what he wanted to do... Because he loved it and you like for somebody to [do what they love].²⁵

Jim also spoke about that decision in his 2003 interview with Wayne Erbsen. "Oh yes, we talked it over... It had to have been agreeable to her... Our wives mean everything to us. We talk about music, this that and the other, but when the chips are down, our wives, our people, is what this world is all about."²⁶ Jim left to play with Bill quite soon after he got the call.

Two photos in a Bill Monroe discography show Jim in the band with Bill Monroe circa 1945, confirming Naomi's memories.²⁷

²⁵ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

²⁶ Shumate interview, 2003.

²⁷ Monroe, Wolfe, and Rosenberg, *Blue Moon of Kentucky*.

Naomi remembers that Rita was just learning to talk at the time, and Naomi used to have her talk to her daddy on the phone. Rita was just learning to say “potato,” and she would say “potata.” Naomi and Jim would talk on the phone every weekend when the band would come back to Nashville for the Opry but during the week they were out on the road playing shows. Naomi said that Bill was good to Jim and let him come home when the war ended, and when their daughter, Judy Lorette, was born in September of 1945.

Jim Shumate recalled many humorous adventures with Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. The band traveled hard across the Southeast working the tent show circuit and Saturday nights at the Grand Old Opry. Jim recalled how he and Monroe used to pal around together a lot and walk around the new towns they would visit. Monroe loved to shop, and Shumate remembered a fancy pair of shoes he bought, (and promptly left on the roof of the car), as well as a beautiful dress for his wife, right off the store mannequin. The two men got along well, even though Monroe was ten years Jim’s senior. “He treated me just like I was his own son. He was a prince of a man as far as I was concerned.”²⁸

Everywhere the Blue Grass Boys traveled, they heard bands playing the very songs they had just performed on the Grand Ole Opry the weekend before.

I knew we were making some kind of history, when everybody was wanting to do what we were doing... We’d do something on the Grand Ole Opry on a Saturday night and next week when we’d be traveling around we’d hear these little groups, every one of them trying to do exactly what we did.²⁹

²⁸ Shumate interview, 2003.

²⁹ Shumate interview, 2003.

During the summer tent show season, Monroe had brought comedian Lew Childres along on one tour. One day Childres and Stringbean were fishing and got to talking about starting their own act. Stringbean handed in his notice, and Monroe asked Jim if he knew of any banjo players in Carolina. Jim responded, "I know one, he don't pick nothing like String, but he picks an awful lot of banjo."³⁰ Jim had met Earl Scruggs at the Hickory City Auditorium at WHKY's Saturday jamboree. He had admired his playing and filed away his name and number. He put in the call and invited Earl to his room at the Tulane Hotel to play for Monroe. Scruggs had been playing with Lost John Miller, out of Knoxville, and the job with Monroe offered a bit of a pay raise.

As the story goes, when Earl Scruggs joined the Blue Grass Boys, the rest is history. Jim did not have the chance to play with Earl Scruggs in the band, as Howdy Forrester came back from the war, and Shumate had tired of the road. Jim took a gig with Lost John Miller on the way home and played three shows in Kentucky with him in order to get a free ride back to Carolina. As soon as he got home he tuned in to hear Scruggs perform with Monroe on the Grand Ole Opry: "He really raised the roof on the Opry, so that made me feel good, to know that he took the job."³¹ When asked about how Scruggs changed Monroe's sound, he responded, "It changed the banjo but it didn't change the rest of it, of course. Because the timing and the rhythm was the same, it's just a matter of the banjo, was the only difference there was. He certainly added to Monroe's style."³² Shumate felt like the rest of the signature style of bluegrass was already in place prior to Scruggs' addition to the band.

³⁰ Shumate oral history, 2004.

³¹ Shumate oral history, 2004.

³² Shumate oral history, 2004.

Back in Hickory, Jim got a job managing the boarding room at Holler's Hosiery. Naomi and Jim's third child, Jimmy Franklin Shumate was born on 21 January, 1947. Later that year, Naomi remembers that Jim helped to start a barn dance show called the "Ole Hickory Opera House." It was a Saturday night barn dance style show that took place in a cement block building at the end of 37th street in the neighborhood where they would later live. Jim led the house band, and Naomi remembers that Glenn Smith was another musician who played with him there. It was a way for Jim to continue playing music without traveling. "It kept him satisfied," said Naomi.³³

Based on a poster of the Ole Hickory Opera House, there was an "Opening Date" event that took place on Tuesday, May 27th, [1947]. Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys were performing with other "WSM Opera Stars" such as "Lew Childre -- Boy From Alabama" and "String Beans [sic] -- The Kentucky Wonder." Also listed is, "Carolina's Own Pride Pauline and Earnest - - Lawing Duet, Fiddlin' Jim Shumake [sic], Don Walker & His Blue Ridge Boys." Jim probably had a hand in coordinating the show considering his connection to most of the folks on the bill.

Jim decided to try life on the road once again in the spring of 1948, when he joined the newly formed band: Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys. Jim was their first choice for a fiddler. Shumate recalled, "Lester, Earl, and Cedric Rainwater came over to the house and said they'd pulled out from Bill and were organizing their own show and were going to call it the Foggy Mountain Boys... and they needed me to play the fiddle.

³³ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

I debated around a while because I really didn't want to, but I thought well, since they went to all this trouble, I may as well. So we decided to just split down the board."³⁴

They got the show together in Hickory and worked for a couple of weeks on WHKY. "We debated on hiring a girl [to sing the tenor part], but decided since we was all married that wouldn't be a good thing to do, so we hired Mac Wiseman instead."³⁵ According to Mac Wiseman, he got a call from Earl Scruggs asking him to join the band. "I thought, what the hell do they need with me? But I joined them anyway, down in Hickory, North Carolina, to do a radio show."³⁶ A newspaper ad from April 2nd, 1948 in the *Hickory Daily Record* announced the "Blue Ridge Jamboree" at the Hickory Opera House with "Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt, Jim Shumate — the Foggy Mountain Boys" along with a few other bands.³⁷

After not finding many opportunities in the Hickory area, Mac Wiseman suggested they move up to WCYB in Bristol, VA, which was a powerful radio station broadcasting at 5000 watts. In their new location they met with great success, and sold-out rooms wherever they went. "Frankly, this is my own personal opinion, and I've had a lot of higher ups to tell me the same thing, I think when Lester and Earl and myself and Howard Watts started in Bristol, Virginia, in my opinion, that's what really put bluegrass on the line because there wasn't nobody in the country that could touch us. We couldn't find a place big enough to take care of all the people... then I think is when bluegrass really took hold."³⁸ Mac Wiseman helped book shows, and the band members would take turns driving to the gigs.

³⁴ Mac Wiseman, *All My Memories Fit to Print* (Nashville: Nova Books, 2015), 55.

³⁵ Shumate oral history, 2004.

³⁶ Wiseman, *All My Memories*, 54.

³⁷ *Hickory Daily Record*, "Blue Ridge Jamboree," April 2, 1948.

³⁸ Shumate oral history, 2004.

Wiseman and Flatt would alternate leads during the sets, and Wiseman sang tenor to Flatt on the vocal duets and in the quartets. The band signed with a relatively new label called Mercury Records, and their first recording session took place in the fall of 1948, at the WROL radio studio in Knoxville, TN. Jim recalled on *Grassroots to Bluegrass* that it was a chilly morning in Knoxville the day they cut the record, possibly eight below freezing. The tracks they cut were "My Cabin in Caroline," "We'll Meet Again Sweetheart," "God Loves His Children," and "I'm Going to Make Heaven My Home." These four tracks have become classics in the bluegrass repertoire.

This time Naomi decided to take their three young children and move with her husband to Bristol:

We rented a furnished apartment and put our furniture in storage. Jim's brother and his wife took us up there. The first car we had, Jim bought up at Bristol [1941 Chevy convertible]. It was a pretty little thing... But he wrecked it, not when we was in Bristol, we'd come back to Hickory. He was playing a show date in Lincolnton, I think the Shuffler boys was with him... and he went to sleep at the wheel.³⁹

Naomi liked living in Bristol; they had good neighbors and they went to a little Methodist church. They would spend time with Gladys Flatt (Lester's wife) and Alice Watts (Howard Watts' wife) and their children. Rita was young at the time, but she remembers riding the bus across town: "Judy and I would sing songs. I remember Mother saying we'd

³⁹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

sing 'Tennessee Waltz.' Two little girls sitting on the bus just singing as loud as we could sing!"⁴⁰ Naomi said fondly of her children, "They were like my baby dolls."⁴¹

Rita said she vaguely remembers living in Bristol: "I remember we had a little cat, a little kitty... I think we were just supposed to keep it outside, and it came in the house and went under the bed. Mother had a fit cause she didn't want that kitty in the house."⁴²

Apparently, their little brother Jimmy also got into some trouble in Bristol. Once he got stuck up on a ladder, and another time he was playing with a black widow spider until Naomi saw him and pulled him away.

During 1948, Jim Shumate traveled to Richlands, Virginia for the National Fiddler's Convention, where he competed against Leslie Keith, Chubby Wise and Buck Ryan to win first place with his rendition of "Lee Highway Blues." Mac Wiseman backed all the competitors up on guitar, so there would be no haggling about fairness, but Shumate had an advantage since he played in a band with Wiseman: "Mac was working with us at the time, and he knew that 'Lee Highway' up one side and down the other. Every time I'd turn, he'd be right there. So that was a lick in my favor, too."⁴³

Late in 1948, Lester Flatt came to the members of the band and told them they were going to go on salary. This rubbed Shumate and Wiseman the wrong way as they'd been splitting the profits equally and everyone had been making good money. Both men decided to hand in their notice. Shumate had been tired of all the hard traveling and moved his family back to Hickory for good. Multiple musicians such as Roy Acuff and the Stanley Brothers

⁴⁰ R. Miller interview, 2013.

⁴¹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

⁴² R. Miller interview, 2013.

⁴³ Wiseman, *All My Memories*, 57.

tried to get Shumate to come perform with them over the years, and Monroe came back for him three times, but Shumate never went back out on the road again with a traveling band.

The Shumates moved in with Naomi's half-sister in Claremont, NC for almost a year, before they moved back up to the Long View neighborhood of Hickory. After a couple of years of renting, they bought their current house at 253 37th St. SW, in 1952. Jim and Naomi also joined Penelope Baptist Church in their neighborhood in 1951, which was to become their lifelong congregation. Jim got a job at Fuller Furniture, and in 1949 started his band The Sons of the Carolinas, which broadcasted over the new radio station in Hickory, WIRC. A newspaper photo and caption of Jim and his band states:

Here are Jim Shumate and his newly-formed band, 'Sons of the Carolinas,' whom the Fuller Furniture Company proudly presents for your musical enjoyment in a new program starting Monday afternoon, February 21st, over Radio Station WIRC, Hickory — 630 on your dial... Those in the picture... are: Clarence Har[?]od, Don Walker, Bandleader Shumate, Jean Smith and Glen Smith.⁴⁴

There is another promo photo from the Sons of the Carolinas showing a different line-up including Cranford Starnes, Yates Hamby, and Ivey Heavner along with Jim and Don Walker. The photo is circa 1949-1950 based on notes from bassist Cranford Starnes. There is a 78rpm labeled "WIRC Acetate," with Jim and Don, and Sons of the Carolinas, including two songs: "Little Red Shoes," and "Angels, Rock Me To Sleep," likely from the early 1950s.

⁴⁴ Source unknown, private collection, probably from the *Hickory Daily Record*.

Jim and Don, and Sons of the Carolinas, released a duet 78rpm on Blue Ridge Records in late 1952 or early 1953. The A side is listed as “Don’t Be Mean to Me,” a song that is sung solo by Jim Shumate and credited to him, with Don on guitar. The B side is “What is Life Lived Alone,” with lead vocal by Don Walker and tenor vocal by Jim. Blue Ridge Records was a small, regional label based in North Wilkesboro and run by a father-daughter team, Noah and Drusilla Adams. The Shumate family has a copy of the original 78 as well as a digitized copy from the Starnes family.

Sadly, Don Walker’s wife Rachel passed away suddenly from a brain aneurysm in the summer of 1954, and Don had to give up performing to take care of their two young daughters. Naomi fondly remembers a vacation with Don and Rachel and their family in the summer of 1953. They all went out to Cherokee, and Don and Rachel rented a wigwam while Jim and Naomi decided to get a hotel room in Sylva. Then they all went on to Knoxville for Jim and Don to play a show.

A New Chapter: 1954 - mid-1960s

Around 1954, Jim began playing with Dwight Barker and the Melody Boys. He may have met Dwight on WSIC’s Saturday Night Jamboree at the Mulberry Street School in Statesville. Dwight Barker and the Melody Boys appear in a couple of newspaper ads in 1954-1955 in the *Statesville Daily Record*. A family scrapbook photo shows Jim and the band at WSJS Television in Winston-Salem around 1956. Rita remembers going to see Jim

play with Dwight Barker when she was about ten years old. “We would go down to Winston when Daddy was on TV. We’d go sit in the studio. We were still pretty young.”⁴⁵

A quote from Dwight Barker illustrates the variety that was necessary in the music business during the 1950s: “Back then, you needed more than just bluegrass. And so we did country, and some gospel duets, trios and quartets. Bluegrass wasn’t all of it then, it was part of it.”⁴⁶ On a recording of Jim playing with Dwight Barker and the Melody Boys, the first two tracks are gospel singing songs, the next four are traditional bluegrass songs or instrumentals, and the last three are country songs with electric instruments and drums. The music industry was going through rapid changes at the time, with the advent of rock and roll and long-play records and musicians at that time had to be very versatile. Disc jockeys were becoming more popular and were playing records instead of having live bands on the radio.

By this time, Jim had also landed at Better Homes Furniture Company, which is where he would stay for the rest of his career working as a salesman. The family had settled into their comfortable 3-bedroom home in Long View with a large vegetable garden behind the house. Jim and Naomi’s fourth child, Randy Dean, was born on 6 January, 1955. In addition to performing with Dwight Barker, Jim was a disc jockey for a bluegrass radio show on WIRC in Hickory at noontime. Rita recalls a humorous story from this time.

One time I was in a class at school, and Daddy was emceeing that show on the radio in Hickory, I guess it was WIRC. And he was announcing something, and somebody in the class had a little pocket radio and turned it on and Daddy’s voice came out. I

⁴⁵ R. Miller interview, 2013.

⁴⁶ Carlin, *String Bands*, 203.

was so embarrassed because that was my daddy and I didn't want them to know that was my daddy on the radio because they were playing country music! Because that was when we were liking all that rock and roll music... I was probably in the seventh grade... But it just happened for a minute, and then I was sort of proud that my daddy was on the radio... [Bluegrass] wasn't popular at that time.⁴⁷

After ten or so years with Dwight Barker, Jim decided to stay closer to home and began booking and emceeing for a venue called Cat Square in Hickory in the 1960s. Naomi remembers that he "had different groups to come in there, some of them from Nashville, some of them local... I remember he had the Carter Family and a he had a lot of well-known people, [like] the LeFevres."⁴⁸ It was a nice building out in the country near the Vale neighborhood and it was a pretty popular place. Naomi said that he helped put Rita through college with Cat Square. She stated, "after he [Jim] did that Cat Square thing he kind of slowed down. He didn't do much because the kids were grown and away from home and it was just the two of us and Randy. We started having grandchildren and taking care of them on the weekends, so it slowed down a lot."⁴⁹

The Legacy Years: 1970 - 2013

Despite slowing down after the 1960s, Jim still performed occasionally, played for pleasure around the house, and taught the occasional fiddle lesson. He also spent more time

⁴⁷ R. Miller interview, 2013.

⁴⁸ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

⁴⁹ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

with his grandchildren. Jim's grandson John Cloyd Miller grew up hearing the soulful music of his grandfather:

I have a very vivid memory... I was pretty young and I was spending the night on the couch one night. They had this light in the living room that gave off this wonderful 1970s style glow. I can see him sitting in that chair just playing the fiddle by himself. I remember the tone of his old fiddle... it was a deeper tone. That's the sound that I associate with him growing up.⁵⁰

In the late 1970s, musician and historian Wayne Erbsen did a series of interviews with Jim and encouraged him to record a solo album. In 1980, Jim got together with L.W. Lambert of the Blue River Boys and released an LP called *Bluegrass Fiddle Supreme*. In 1988 Jim was invited to perform with a select, all-star lineup at the first MerleFest in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, a festival honoring the late Merle Watson, son of Doc Watson.

In the 1990s, Jim recorded a series of five cassette tapes at Heritage Records in Galax, Virginia. His first cassette, titled *Up and at 'Em*, was voted "Outstanding Folk Recording" of 1991 by the Library of Congress. He also released *Buckle up the Backstrap* (1993), *Whing Ding* (1994), *Goin' to Town* (1996) and *Tribute to Bill Monroe* (1998). These five recordings have subsequently been reissued on two compilation compact discs. Jim wrote quite a few songs on his recordings, including his most famous song, "Old Country Baptizing." Jim also wrote many of the instrumentals on his albums including "Chestnut Mountain Rag," "Boston," and "Callahan." Jim has been featured in films on bluegrass music including *High Lonesome* and *Grassroots to Bluegrass*. He was honored with the North

⁵⁰ J. Miller interview, 2013.

Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1995 and was inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame in 2011.

Jim is also well known for his heartfelt rendition of “Touch of the Master’s Hand.” This is a song about how the value of an old violin at an auction increased greatly once a fiddler, touched by the hand of God, plays a beautiful melody on it. He performed this song regularly, and it was the only one that he willingly performed at his church. Jim didn’t think it was appropriate to play secular music in a religious setting, despite his firm belief that his music was directly related to God. As John stated in his interview, “Jim was a deeply religious man, he went to Penelope Baptist Church for sixty-some years. He always said that his playing was a gift from God, there’s no question about it, and that’s definitely the truth. He had a real deep faith, and a great attitude. I think that really helped to keep him grounded.”⁵¹

Jim’s legacy has also extended to future generations, with his grandson John Cloyd Miller and granddaughter Holly Russ Johnson both playing and teaching music professionally. John loved listening to his grandfather’s music growing up, especially Jim’s recordings:

I had a 1986 Jeep pick-up truck and I had all the cassettes in the car. They were just in there with all my other Led Zeppelin and you know, whatever. But I listened to them constantly. I love bluegrass music, I always have. I think I soaked up a lot more of the

⁵¹ J. Miller interview, 2013.

music then I maybe had thought that I did, because later on in life when I started playing it I really understood the music.⁵²

John first jammed with his grandfather in the early 2000's at family gatherings. He remembers his first performance with Jim at the Carter Family Fold in Virginia; "I got up and sang 'High on a Mountain' ... and that was really fun."⁵³ John and Jim were able to share the stage a couple of times, including Jim's last public performance when he was inducted into the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame in 2011. Jim played his signature tune, "Katy Hill," at age 89, and John sang "High on a Mountain," at Jim's request.

Homecoming

Jim was able to retain 40 acres of the family land on Chestnut Mountain in Wilkes County. During the housing boom of the early 2000s, a developer bought up most of the land for a gated community, and Jim and his sister Lucille were the only holdouts who refused to sell. Currently, there is a large gate, paved roads, and site markers (almost none of the home sites actually sold), contrasted with the Shumate family land with dirt roads, the old chimneys, a sloping field speckled with dogwood trees, and two neatly maintained trailers. Most of the mountain is now wooded, with the exception of the old apple orchard.

In their later years, Jim and Naomi used to spend a week at a time over at Chestnut Mountain to enjoy the quiet and beauty. Wild turkeys and deer roamed the mountain and Jim would feed corn to the deer. Naomi reminisced about sitting outside and watching the

⁵² J. Miller interview, 2013.

⁵³ J. Miller interview, 2013.

animals “come of an evening and of a morning.”⁵⁴ Jim would still hunt occasionally, but never killed anything. They would hike down to the old springhouse or walk the dirt roads circling the property. Many family gatherings have taken place on Chestnut Mountain, from birthday celebrations to christenings. Music has become an integral part of the family traditions on the mountain, much as it was when Jim was growing up.

⁵⁴ N. Shumate interview, 2013.

CHAPTER 5: JIM SHUMATE'S CREATIVE LEGACY IN BLUEGRASS

Jim Shumate was an improvisational and adventurous musician who was constantly exploring. In the eight years that I knew him and played with him, he loved to get the fiddle out and experiment with tunes and licks. He credited his talent as a gift from God and was always humble but confident about his abilities. His tone and style were very recognizable, even in his final days, as this story highlights: A day or so before Jim passed away in 2013, his grandson (my husband) John and I played music for Jim in the hospital. I started fiddling one of his original tunes called "Up and at 'Em" and John's father Frank said, "Hey Jim, do you know who wrote that tune?" Jim was a little woozy and replied that he didn't remember who wrote it. But halfway through the song, he leaned over to Frank and said, "I believe that's one of my tunes." When we finished the song, Jim said in a clear and energetic voice, "Why that had Shumate written all over it!"

Bluegrass history has the stamp of Jim Shumate as well, with licks that he created enduring in the styles of bluegrass fiddlers today. His contributions to the first Flatt & Scruggs recordings are already highly revered by bluegrass aficionados, but his innovations during his time with the Blue Grass Boys deserve more attention because of stylistic innovations he brought to the developing genre, such as bluesy, sliding double-stops and off-beat syncopations. With the advent of the digital age and the ease of file sharing, it is my hope that Jim Shumate will become more widely recognized as a highly influential musician by generations to come.

As a fiddler myself, I understand patterns of musical transmission. When I hear another musician play a lick or a tune, and especially if I hear it repeatedly, I internalize that sound and often consciously or unconsciously incorporate into my playing if I like the sound of it. For example, I have spent a lot of time with Jim Shumate’s music and incorporated many of his swingy, off-beat licks into my own style. Shumate’s laid-back personality and relaxed demeanor were similar to his approach to music — arriving at notes at the last possible second as well as a loose sense of form and timing. His grandson John, who grew up listening to him, has a comparable approach to music.

Many musicians played with Jim Shumate over the years, and recently, I spoke with two of them about their recollections of working with him. Steve Kilby lives in Mouth-of-Wilson, Virginia, and was the sound engineer and guitar player for the recordings that Shumate made in the 1990s at Heritage Records. Kilby remembers setting up the tape, then rushing over to the microphone to record the guitar parts. He said it was an “honor and a privilege” to record with Shumate, as he felt like he was “recording with a legend.”¹ He thought that for Shumate, it was his last chance to record some of his original music. Recording with him was a bit of a wild ride, as Shumate wasn’t a very structured musician. Kilby said he never played “Katy Hill” the same way twice, and since he’d jump into his tag endings whenever he was ready; “you had to be on your toes.”²

Steve Kilby also believes that Shumate was highly influential fiddler to fiddle players that came later:

¹ Steve Kilby, interview with Natalya Weinstein, October 30, 2017.

² Kilby interview, 2017.

I think some of those guys that played with Flatt & Scruggs after Jim Shumate like Benny Simms and Paul Warren probably listened to Jim Shumate and tried to pattern the stuff they did after what Jim Shumate did because you can hear some of those same phrases. Of course, in “Cabin in Caroline” you can hear it’s exactly the same — just about everybody does it like he did.³

Indeed, Shumate’s ascending and descending lick on the intro and break to “My Cabin in Caroline” appears over and over again in live performances and on recordings to this day.

Allen Mills is another musician who fondly remembers Jim Shumate. Bass player and founding member of Lost and Found, from Danville, Virginia, Mills thought he met Shumate around 1982 when Lost and Found was performing at a bar in Hickory, North Carolina, called Harmony Road. They’d play on Friday and Saturday nights, and on Saturday mornings Mills would go into Better Homes Furniture, where Shumate worked, and spend time with him. He remembered him as a kind, humble gentleman who was a consummate showman. Lost and Found invited Shumate to the Carter Family Fold to play, and Mills recounted his performance of “Katy Hill.” “He absolutely owned that stage and the crowd went wild.... Every time that man went on stage with a fiddle, he would destroy an audience.”⁴

While the scope of this project has been limited by time, many areas deserve further research. To fully understand the influence of Shumate’s fiddling, more interviews with bluegrass musicians would be helpful, as would an analysis of modern recordings which demonstrate his stylistic innovations. Another area for further research would be a complete

³ Kilby interview, 2017.

⁴ Allen Mills, interview with Natalya Weinstein, October 19, 2017.

search for his name in online newspaper databases to find out more about where he was performing and who he was playing with. Transcriptions of Shumate's solos and fiddle tunes would better illustrate his syncopated and bluesy style.

Without a more in-depth look at musicians in the Wilkes, Burke, and Catawba County regions, and without asking Shumate himself, it is hard to say how he picked up his bluesy and jazzy sense of timing. There is evidence of white musicians learning directly from blacks in upper Western North Carolina around the early twentieth century, as referenced in Cecilia Conway's book, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*. Looking at three white musicians from around the Sugar Grove region in old Ashe County: Tom Ashley, Frank Proffitt, and Hobart Smith, Conway proposed that they had learned their banjo styles either directly or indirectly from African American musicians such as Dave Thompson:

All the Sugar Grove evidence, then — the early presence of slaves in this region, the African-American musical traditions of the Thompsons and the Piedmont they left, and the lack of documented early minstrel performances — strongly argues that mountain whites acquired their banjo traditions directly from blacks.⁵

This pattern occurred in other Virginia and North Carolina mountain regions beyond Sugar Grove. The Round Peak region of North Carolina near Mount Airy, just south of the border with Virginia and close to Wilkes County also was the “scene of black influence upon mountain whites.”⁶ Due to the geographical proximity, a similar pattern could have happened in Wilkes County, considering its location between Ashe County and the Round Peak region.

⁵ Cecilia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 146.

⁶ Conway, *African Banjo*, 149.

While Jim Shumate did not acknowledge any direct influence from African American musicians, he could have crossed paths with black musicians working in the furniture factories in Wilkes County or the hosiery factories in Burke County.

As Conway argued, good musicians tend to be open to other musical influences, even across ethnic lines, giving examples such as Joel Walker Sweeney, Dan Emmett, Tommy Jarrell, and Fred Cockerham, as musicians with Scots-Irish descent who learned African American banjo and fiddle styles.

Like the Celtic Americans, who are widely settled in the mountains, the African Americans, who are fewer in numbers, are especially musical folks. The small numbers of blacks may even have eased race relations, for both Celtic Americans and African Americans highly influenced each other and participated in extensive musical exchange.⁷

This was not a one-sided exchange, as Southern, black musicians had been absorbing songs and tunes from European settlers in America for hundreds of years, as proven by the shared repertoire of black and white Southern string band musicians.

However, Shumate was a part of the generation of musicians who weren't limited to learning directly from other musicians because of the advent of new media sources. He grew up in a family and community of musicians, but he was also exposed to many outside sources of music through radio and recordings. He may not have had any direct contact with black musicians but was still influenced by African American musical forms such as jazz and blues. Jim Shumate surely picked up new musical influences through the medium of radio. A

⁷ Conway, *African Banjo*, 153.

more thorough exploration of what kind of music he would have been listening to on the radio and in live settings throughout the 1930s and 40s would be useful in understanding the music he was exposed to as a young adult. Jim Shumate's musical output was the sum of his exposure to other music, the expectations placed on him by bandleaders such as Bill Monroe and early bluegrass audiences, as well as his own personality and physiology.

Drawing on the popular music of the time such as jazz, big band, blues, Western swing, country, and string band music, Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys synthesized a new type of American music, which spread all around the globe. Despite the fact that bluegrass is played by primarily white musicians in America, this musical style drew heavily on African American musical traditions, as well as Scots-Irish and British repertoires. While it is difficult to trace the exact sources for Jim Shumate's unique fiddle style, as well as the other characteristics present in early bluegrass fiddling, the virtuosic players of the 1930s and 1940s set the foundation for generations of bluegrass fiddlers to come.

Bibliography

Books

- Cantwell, Robert. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
- Carlin, Bob. *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004.
- Conway, Cecelia. *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995.
- Erbsen, Wayne. "Jim Shumate: Bluegrass Fiddler Supreme." In *The Bluegrass Reader*. Edited by Thomas Goldsmith. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Gardner, Charles. "The Origins of the Texas Style of Traditional Old-Time Fiddling." *2001: A Texas Folklore Odyssey*. Edited by Francis Edward Abernathy. Denton: University of Texas, 2001, no. 58.
- Goldsmith, Thomas, ed. "Introduction." In *The Bluegrass Reader*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Hasse, John Edward, ed. *Ragtime: Its History, Composers and Music*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1985.
- Jamison, Phil. *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.
- Malone, Bill C. "Music." In *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*. Edited by Richard A. Straw and Tyler Blethen. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Malone, Bill. *Southern Music: American Music*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979.
- Milnes, Gerald. *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Pecknold, Diane, ed. *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Pitchford, Gayel. *Fiddler of the Opry: The Howdy Forrester Story*. Tehachapi CA: Viewpoint Press, 2007.

- Rosenberg, Neil V. *Bluegrass: A History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Shuller, Gunther. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Shumate, Jim. "Jim Shumate." In *Wilkes County Memories—Possum Hunters, Moonshine and Cornshuck Dolls: A Treasury of 20th Century Memories*. Edited by Bob Lasley & Sallie Holt. Hickory, NC: Hometown Memories, 2007.
- Smith, Cristopher. *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013.
- Smith, Mayne L. "An Introduction to Bluegrass." In *The Bluegrass Reader*. Edited by Thomas Goldsmith. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Townsend, Charles R. *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976.
- Weissman, Dick. *Blues: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Wiseman, Mac. *All My Memories Fit to Print*. Nashville: Nova Books, 2015.
- Wolfe, Charles K. *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling*. Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1997.

Articles

- Carlin, Bob. "Don Walker: North Carolina Bluegrass Music Pioneer." *Bluegrass Unlimited* 45, no. 1 (July 2010): 42-46.
- Daniel, W.W. "Chubby Wise: Dean of the Bluegrass Fiddlers." *Bluegrass Unlimited* 21 (April 1987): 32-35.
- DjeDje, Jacqueline Cogdell. "The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 1-32.
- Reid, Gary. "Bluegrass Triple Threat." *Bluegrass Unlimited* 46 no. 1, (July 2011): 40-44.
- Wolfe, Charles K. "The Odyssey of Arthur Smith." *Bluegrass Unlimited*, 13 (August 1978): 50-57.
- Wolfe, Charles K. "Fiddler in the Shadows: The Story of Tommy Magness," *Bluegrass Unlimited* 31, (May 1997): 52-59.
- Wood, Jim. "Modern Southern Fiddling: The Genius of Arthur Smith." *Strings* 4, no. 3 (1989): 32-35.

Online sources

Giddens, Rhiannon. "IBMA Keynote Address." presented at the International Bluegrass Music Association Conference, Raleigh, NC, September 2017.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/entertainment/music-news-reviews/bluegrass-raleigh/article175961601.ece/binary/IBMAFinal.pdf>

"Jimmie Rodgers." Mississippi Blues Trail. Accessed March 6, 2018,

<http://www.msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/jimmie-rodgers>.

"Osey and Ernest Helton." Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Accessed March 3, 2018.

<http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/osey-and-ernest-helton>

"Manco Sneed." Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Accessed March 3, 2018.

<http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/manco-sneed>

"U.S. Census 1940." Available at Ancestry.com. Accessed February 19, 2018.

Recordings

Flatt, Lester, and Earl Scruggs. *Flatt & Scruggs: The Complete Mercury Recordings*.

Nashville: Mercury Records, a division of Universal Records, 2003.

Grand Ole Opry Live Air Checks. *Prince Albert recordings*. Personal collection of Kilby Spencer, 1936-1946.

Martin, Marcus. *Marcus Martin: Old-time Music and Songs*. Croton, NY: Field Recorders Collective, 2004, compact disc.

Monroe, Bill, Charles K. Wolfe, and Neil V. Rosenberg. *Blue Moon of Kentucky: Bill Monroe, 1936-1949*. Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2002, 6 compact discs and liner notes.

Puckett, Riley. *Riley Puckett (Doxy Collection)*. Doxy Records, 2014, compact disc.

Shumate, James. *Jim Shumate, Volume 1*. Heritage Records, 1999, compact disc.

Smith, Arthur. *Fiddlin' Arthur Smith & His Dixieliners, Vol. 1*. Album notes. County Records 546, 1978. LP.

Videos

Grassroots to Bluegrass. Nashville: Gabriel Associates, 1999. VHS.

Shumate, Jim. Oral History with Herb E. Smith. Owensboro, KY: International Bluegrass Music Museum, November 2004, DVD.

Stewart, Ron. *The Fiddlers of Flatt & Scruggs*. Roanoke, VA: AcuTab Publications Inc., 2011. DVD.

Interviews

Blount, Jake. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. 2 February, 2018.

Kilby, Steve. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. 30 October, 2017.

Miller, Beth. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. October 2013.

Miller, John Cloyd. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. October 2013.

Miller, Rita. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. October 2013.

Mills, Allen. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. 19 October 2017.

Shumate, Jim. Interview with Wayne Erbsen. 3 January, 2003.

<http://dla.acaweb.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/Warren/id/3494/rec/44>

Shumate, Naomi. Interview with Natalya Weinstein. October 2013.

Appendix A. List of Audio Tracks on CD

1. “McMichen’s Reel” with Clayton McMichen and Riley Puckett (1929) — Doxy Records.
2. “Smith’s Rag” by Fiddlin’ Arthur Smith and His Dixieliners (Bill Monroe’s band) (1940) — County Records.
3. “Katy Hill” by Tommy Magness with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1940) — Bear Family Records.
4. “Back Up and Push” by Art Wooten with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1941) — Bear Family Records.
5. “Orange Blossom Special” by Art Wooten with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1941) — Bear Family Records.
6. “Fire in the Mountain” by Howdy Forrester with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1942) — Grand Ole Opry Live Air Checks.
7. “Rocky Road Blues” by Chubby Wise with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1945) — Bear Family Records.
8. “Rocky Road Blues” by Jim Shumate with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1945) — Grand Ole Opry Live Air Checks.
9. “Kentucky Waltz” by Jim Shumate with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys (1945) — Grand Ole Opry Live Air Checks.
10. “Katy Hill” by Jim Shumate (1997) — Heritage Records.
11. “My Cabin in Caroline” by Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys (1948) — Mercury Records.
12. “We’ll Meet Again Sweetheart” by Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys (1948) — Mercury Records.
13. “Lazy Man Blues” by Jim Shumate (1996) — Heritage Records.

Vita

Natalya Zoe Weinstein Miller (maiden name Weinstein-Roberts), was born in 1981 in Northampton, MA and raised in the nearby town of Leverett. She began studying music at age 5, taking classical violin lessons. Natalya attended Amherst Regional High School, graduating in 1999. She then lived in Boston, MA for one year to participate in City Year, an AmeriCorps program, assistant teaching and aiding in after-school programs in the South End neighborhood of Boston. In the fall of 2000, Natalya began her studies at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, graduating in May of 2004 with a self-designed, interdisciplinary degree in Social Justice through the Arts. Soon after graduating, she moved to Asheville, NC to pursue her passion for bluegrass and old-time music, quickly becoming a full-time musician and teacher. In 2013, she began her master's program in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University. After graduating, Natalya plans to continue teaching privately and at the college level. She also leads workshops and performs original and traditional music with her husband, John Cloyd Miller, in Zoe & Cloyd and Red June.