



Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia

Ivan Tribe

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Jamboree! To many country music fans the word conjures up memories of Saturday nights around the family radio listening to live broadcasts from that haven of hillbilly music, West Virginia. From 1926 through the 1950s, as Ivan Tribe shows in his lively history, country music radio programming made the Mountain State a mecca for country singers and instrumentalists from all over America.

Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, Little Jimmy Dickens, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Red Sovine, Blaine Smith, Curly Ray Cline, Grandpa Jones, Cowboy Loye, Rex and Eleanor Parker, Lee Moore, Buddy Starcher, Doc and Chickie Williams, and Molly O'Day were among the many who came to prominence via West Virginia radio.

Wheeling's "WWVA jamboree," first broadcast in 1933, attracted a wide audience, especially after 1942, when the station increased its power. The show's success spawned numerous competitors, as new stations all over West Virginia followed WWVA's lead in headlining country music.

The state also played an important role in the early recording industry. The Tweedy Brothers, Frank Hutchison, Roy Harvey, Blind Alfred Reed, Frank Welling and John McGhee, Cap and Andy, and the Kessinger Brothers were among West Virginians whose waxings contributed to the state's reputation for fine native musicianship. So too did those who sought out and recorded the Mountaineer folksong heritage.

As Nashville's dominance has grown since the 1960s, West Virginia's leadership in country music has lessened. Young performers must now seek fame outside their native state. But, as Ivan Tribe demonstrates, the state's numerous outdoor festivals continue to keep alive the heritage of country music's "mountain mama."

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