

difficult to digest, but the practice goes on. This incredible, surreal music can be heard on Rounder Record's *Mbube*; its development well-documented by scholars such as Veit Erlmann and Dale Cockrell.

Siya Hamba is an essential collection which fills two more gaps in our knowledge of South African music, specifically the popular music of the 1950s. The disc consists of cuts from the vast archive of Hugh Tracey, founder of the International Library of African Music, who spent four decades recording African music. It has been compiled and selected by John Storm Roberts, in many ways his spiritual successor. It is divided into two halves, "Country Sounds" and "Small Town Jump," and both provide revealing surprises, as well as being delightful listening.

As the title suggests, "Country Sounds" are field recordings from rural areas. Often recorded at general stores on home-made or mail-order instruments, the selections demonstrate the durability of African structures and sensibilities. Frans Ncha's "Adiyo Jaxo Kxaja Nkwe [You Can't Kill a Leopard with a Stone]" (Track 7), for example, proves that the autoharp - which according to Tracey was the most popular imported instrument in the country in the 1920s - can function as an ad hoc *mbira*. Similarly, "Amazeyiboka [Some Socks are Real Costly]" (Track 5) takes western harmony and treats it as cyclical and heterophonic, in a manner similar to the Bibiyak pygmies or the Venda of the northern Transvaal. Other selections provide links, real or imagined, to folk forms on either side of the Atlantic. Track 2, "Suta Tseleng (Get Out of the Way)", performed solo by Jacquot Mokete on harmonica and voice, seems an arranged marriage: the harmonica comes from the Mississippi, but the singing is in a different melodic mode, and not in the same meter. The result is both disorienting and hauntingly beautiful. Track 11, "Pinda Zimshaya [Hit Him Again]" is a prototypical version of *mbube* harmony, gruffer and more grounded, an artifact pointing to the older, lost vocal styles that preceded it.

"Small Town Jump" is equally compelling and a lot more fun. The social aspirations of black South Africans are well-reflected in this music, in which one hears traces of Louis Jordan and American swing. Three vocal groups, all with backing rhythm and horn sections, are represented on nine tracks. Like many African vocal ensembles, each has a distinct tuning and flavor. The rhythmic sensibility is borrowed from swing but not completely assimilated, and the result is unique, unforgettable, and highly sophisticated. The title track, Track 14, is representative, but each track alters the recipe slightly, and all are recommended.

Mr. Robert's notes are terse but knowledgeable, and his selections work well, leaving the listener both satisfied and hungry for more. One hopes he will continue making more of Hugh Tracey's recordings available in the west.

Reviewed by Evan Ziporyn.

Bill Monroe - The Music of Bill Monroe from 1936 to 1994

MCA MCAD4-11048

The multiple-CD box set rivals the postage stamp as the highest form of validation a popular artist can currently receive in American culture. Mandolin master Bill Monroe - known popularly if inaccurately as the father of bluegrass - certainly deserves both honors. A first-class judge of talent and a consummate player and arranger, Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys forged a style out of an

amalgam of southern folk styles, white and black, and invented a sound that proved durable and instantly recognizable. This 4-CD set - four-and-a-half hours of music, 98 songs spanning almost 60 years - documents his accomplishment.

The sound of bluegrass, which essentially is the sound of Bill Monroe, is now a distinct part of the American musical landscape. Its high-speed broken chords on the banjo, high-pitched close harmonies, and sinuous fiddle lines are a synecdoche for an entire way of life, one that can be alternately romanticized and denigrated. This CD allows the listener to hear bluegrass as a sum of clearly distinguishable parts - British-American folk ballads and fiddle traditions, southern blues, gospel, and Appalachian vocal styles. It also shows the music to be highly cosmopolitan and knowing, referring to and emphasizing its various roots as a way of appealing to different aspects of its audiences' lives. Bluegrass is an invention, as American as the Model-T Ford.

Bill Monroe emerged at the Grand Old Opry in 1939, where he caused a sensation with "Muleskinner Blues", (Disc One, Track 3) which is released on this collection for the first time. His signature style, however, didn't develop until the early forties, when the guitar and banjo team of Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs (best known through their ubiquitous appearances on "Hee Haw") revved up his rhythm section. Scruggs single-handedly revolutionized the banjo, and clearly provided a spur to Monroe's virtuosic mandolin playing. A healthy competitiveness, reminiscent of the bebop that was going on at the same time, can be heard in such selections as "Blue Grass Breakdown" (Disc One, Track 10), from which the style received its name. The addition of Vassar Clements, who could make his fiddle sound both lyrical and harmonic, completed the picture in 1950. Monroe's popularity rose and fell, but his style remained largely unchanged for the next forty years.

"Muleskinner Blues" combined southern blues with Appalachian yodelling, putting Monroe in the long line of white American musicians who found a way to present a black idiom to a white audience. Monroe's brilliance was to find a way to combine the suppleness and expressivity of the black blues scale with white gospel harmonies and dance forms. He continued to play his version of the blues throughout his career, and it is revelatory to compare his 1957 version of "I'm Sittin' On Top of the World" (Disc Two, Track 20) with Howlin' Wolf's recording from the same period. Monroe's mandolin playing changes when he's playing the blues - it's the only time he doesn't play in *moto perpetuo* style, and he reveals an odd, not entirely convincing lyricism. "Blue Grass Breakdown," on the other hand, shows in its modal chord progression a clear connection to Scottish and Irish folk forms, something Monroe would later evoke much more self-consciously in selections such as "Scotland" (Disc Two, Track 22) and "Sailor's Hornpipe" (Disc Three, Track 12).

Monroe's popularity peaked in the early 50s, and his career was resuscitated by the folk revival of the early 60s. As the excellent notes to the collection explain, this audience revered Monroe as "an Appalachian mountaineer untouched by commercial forces instead of as a country professional." Too honest to deliberately perpetuate this misunderstanding, Monroe nonetheless showed himself to be a canny showman by subtly changing his style, de-emphasizing the urban elements of his music and lyrics.

The packaging of this collection is state-of-the art. The 96-page booklet includes intelligent commentary, names and dates of all recordings, a complete

discography, and lots of nice color photographs. Highly recommended. *Reviewed by Evan Ziporyn.*

Reviewers

James Fisher, Professor of Theater at Wabash College, has authored three books, *The Theater of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Commedia dell'arte on the Modern Stage*, *Al Jolson, A Bio-Bibliography*, and *Spencer Tracy, A Bio-Bibliography*, and is working on another bio-bibliography of *Eddie Cantor*. He has held several research fellowships and published numerous articles and reviews in varied periodicals, including the ARSC Journal. He currently edits book reviews for the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* and edits *The Puppetry Yearbook*.

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