

Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia.
By Ivan M. Tribe.

(Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984. Pp. xiii, 233. Foreword, preface, notes, bibliography, discography, index, illustrations. \$20.00.)

Mountaineer Jamboree is a description of commercial country music in West Virginia and a portrait of its practitioners, summarizing the accomplishments of hundreds of artists who flourished from the late twenties to the present. It also concerns cultural and geographic categories and boundaries.

Ivan Tribe begins by inveighing against the musical boundaries drawn by the Anglophile scholars who gathered folk songs earlier in this century, including West Virginia collectors John Harrington Cox, Louis W. Chappell, and Patrick Gainer. These men felt that commercial country music was antithetical to and destructive of the folk music derived from the British Isles. Tribe, like the more recent generation of folklorists, argues that country music is a part of a continuum with noncommercial domestic folk music, and, in any case, it is the music actually produced and consumed by most of the citizens of West Virginia and its neighboring states.

Commercial country music dates from the twenties, when folk artists first appeared on the new medium of radio and were added to the roster of performers on phonograph records. Not all artists appeared on discs; many more limited their work to radio and personal appearances. Tribe reports that this latter category has been omitted from most of the written histories of country music, since these works have generally been based upon a study of phonograph records, the most durable documents of the art form. This book outlines the careers of such characters as Cowboy Loye and Cap, Andy, and Flip — artists still discussed by an older generation of West Virginians and virtually unknown to folk music lovers of a younger generation.

So far so good. Tribe's conception of folk and country music is properly broad. Ironically, however, he is trapped by a different, narrow boundary: the West Virginia state line. This is not entirely Tribe's fault. *Mountaineer Jamboree* follows two works by Charles K. Wolfe that celebrate the country music of Tennessee and Kentucky (*Tennessee Strings*. Knoxville, 1977; *Kentucky Country*. Lexington, 1982), and there have been earlier works on the folk music of single states. This category reflects demand from publishers and the reading public.

Tribe's own text quickly instructs us in the shortcomings of this approach. He describes the sequence of artists and programs heard on West Virginia's major radio stations from the twenties to the fifties and we learn that the stations were part of an informal multistate (international, if one includes the Mexican border stations) network. During this heyday of live country music programming, artists born and raised in West Virginia might be heard first in Charleston or Bluefield, then later in Chicago, Des Moines, and Shreveport. Artists with a West Virginia following may have come from Ohio, Kentucky, or Pennsylvania. This is not to say that these performers had Bing Crosby's national popularity; the informal network had a regional character. An examination of it as a world of its own would be welcome, and would probably cohere better than a state-based study like this one.

The West Virginia limit, of course, does not prevent the book from instructing us about topics like the impact of Fairmont's radio station WMMN in the forties and fifties, striking since the present-day station is insignificant as a cultural force. And Tribe describes the less-than-successful attempts to broadcast live country music on the state's first television outlets. He also connects contemporary outdoor festivals with earlier radio as a vehicle for the presentation of local music.

The book, like Tribe's other articles and album liner notes, views history as a system of objective facts and a web of specific dates and places. These works are valuable, for their accounts are often our only reports of certain people and events, but I found myself wishing for a fuller expression of context and meaning. Tribe's research is based upon extensive interviews, and I am sure that he recorded many tales rich with feeling and implication — richness that is absent from the printed page. Here and there the author hazards an interpretation, as in the characterization of latter-day WWVA's sorrowful treatment of Doc Williams and other Wheeling Jamboree artists. But the book fails to interpret such phenomena as the widespread adoption of cowboy costume and image, and there is only the slightest reference to the important American Federation of Musicians recording ban in the late forties. For many readers, the book will best serve as a reference work; one may use the index to locate helpful summary descriptions of artists, radio programs, and festivals. ■

Carl Fleischhauer *American Folklife Center*
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.