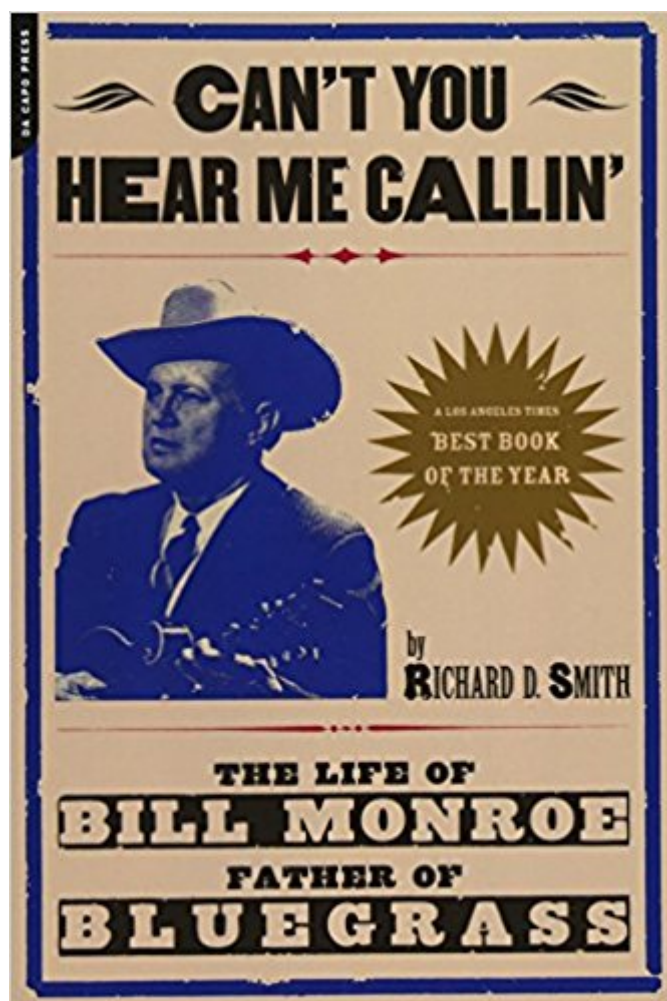


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Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life Of Bill Monroe, Father Of Bluegrass



Synopsis

Considering the range of stars that have claimed Bill Monroe as an influence—Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, and Jerry Garcia are just a few—it can be said that no single artist has had as broad an impact on American popular music as he did. For sixty years, Monroe was a star at the Grand Ole Opry, and when he died in 1996, he was universally hailed as "the Father of Bluegrass." But the personal life of this taciturn figure remained largely unknown. Delving into everything from Monroe's professional successes to his bitter rivalries, from his isolated childhood to his reckless womanizing, veteran bluegrass journalist Richard D. Smith has created a three-dimensional portrait of this brilliant, complex, and contradictory man. Featuring over 120 interviews, this scrupulously researched work—a Chicago Tribune Choice Selection, New York Times Notable Book, and Los Angeles Times Best Book of 2000—stands as the authoritative biography of a true giant of American music.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The legendary mandolinist and bandleader Bill Monroe wove his personal vision through more than 60 tireless years of recording and performing, inventing almost single-handedly the music that is now known—in a nod to his first band, the Blue Grass Boys—as bluegrass. In his thoughtful biography *Can't You Hear Me Callin'*, Richard D. Smith argues that "no single artist has had as broad an impact on American music." As evidence, he highlights dozens of country and rock & roll

musicians, both white and black, who were inspired by Monroe's powerful mandolin playing on the Grand Ole Opry's weekly broadcasts. (Chuck Berry's "Maybelline," for example, is an almost note-for-note copy of Monroe's instrumental "Ida Red.") Until now, however, Monroe's hesitation to reveal personal details has kept his personality as mysterious as one of the foggy mountaintops he sang about in his signature high lonesome tenor. Bluegrass audiences required a rural, Southern authenticity from the "Father of Bluegrass," and Monroe was slow to deny their exaggerations. Smith, however, dismisses many of the backwoods stories that grew up around the Monroe myth, instead emphasizing truer biographical elements: loneliness, fear of abandonment, compulsiveness with women. Perhaps the book's main scholarly step forward is the depth of interviews and research the author conducted with the women in Monroe's life. Indeed, Smith remarks that "without exception," none of Monroe's platonic or romantic women friends had been interviewed before. These women reveal a second Bill Monroe, relaxed and gentle in private despite his imperious manner onstage. Much of the book relies on the archives of the late Ralph Rinzler, a Smithsonian folklorist whose plans to write a Monroe biography were thwarted by his untimely death. Taking up where Rinzler left off, Smith employs solid scholarship and thorough fieldwork, yet he remains clearly in awe of his subject, ranking him as a "true giant of American music" on the level of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Hank Williams, and Charles Ives. *Can't You Hear Me Callin'* is the first published attempt at a comprehensive, critical biography of Bill Monroe. Surely, it won't be the last--a testament to the enigmatic genius whose every note extended one of our most emotive and demanding musical genres. --Edward Skoog --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

By the time of his death, Bill Monroe (1911¹-96) was a major icon of American music, revered as the man who singlehandedly created an entire musical genre, bluegrass. Smith, the author of the excellent *Bluegrass: An Informal Guide* (1995), offers a thoughtful, somewhat subdued account of Monroe, tracing his life from a music-rich but isolated childhood in the pastoral backroads of Kentucky to his early years as a struggling professional musician to his well-deserved status as an acclaimed elder statesman and musical ambassador. Forging a style that was both traditional and sophisticated, Monroe appealed to urban and rural audiences with heart-on-sleeve confessional lyrics and dazzling displays of instrumental virtuosity on his own mandolin, complemented, at a minimum, by banjo, fiddle, guitar, and bass. His influence can be heard in the music of everyone from Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly to Jerry Garcia and Ricky Skaggs. Smith mutes potentially sensational matters, such as that Monroe was an incorrigible womanizer, to paint a sensitive, tasteful, well-balanced portrait of a complicated man. June SawyersCopyright © American

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Bill Monroe's life and career are endlessly fascinating for bluegrass enthusiasts and this book does not disappoint. It not only chronicles his life, the ups and downs of his long career, but also many of the songs he recorded and the background to them. The sad breakup with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs is chronicled here along with his rocky relationship with his older brother Charlie, with whom he partnered in the early days. While idolized as a larger than life figure by many, including those who worked with him, Bill Monroe also had his foibles, particularly in how he handled money and related to women, and these are not glossed over. Highly recommended!

"Can't You Hear Me Callin'" is a fascinating biography. There's so much more information in it about Monroe than one finds from most sources. I know half a dozen men who worked for Monroe. They tell great stories, but I wish I'd heard the stories in the context of this book. I would have seen more facets. It's especially nice to have a better sense of the importance of women and being appreciated by women and sex in Monroe's life. This is a drive found in many famous men, and the average person seems not to understand that it should not be used against them--it's partly a part of them and partly apart from them. Not that Smith gives us any juicy details. I for one am glad for these women who shared themselves with Monroe. Even though Smith has drawn together a large amount of information most of us don't have access to, he could not include everything. Will there ever be a greater Monroe biography? Probably not. But, as an example of what there is around that might have been included, Bob Black's interesting hagiography "Come Hither to Go Yonder" is an entire book by a banjo player who worked with Monroe for two years about their relationship, yet Smith doesn't even mention Bob Black. So may there will be many more books. I for one would love to read a book by Julia LaBella about their life together. She was twenty-one, he sixty-five. Go Bill! And if you question whether Bill Monroe's music is significant enough to transcend Monroe's faults (and there were many, and he paid for them all), buy the MCA four CD set that Monroe approved and listen to it a few times. Monroe was more of "the real thing" than anyone else ever in bluegrass. Not a mediocre cut in sight.

Who was Bill Monroe? Everyone who knows anything about country or bluegrass music knows the name but do you know the man? Most likely not. This book sheds light on who he was. What made the man tick from his childhood and throughout the hardships of his adult life. A fiercely proud man and an extremely hard worker who demanded as much from his band as he did himself. This book

points out the reasons behind many of the stories and the roots of the legends. It also shows Bill Monroe in all his glory as well as all his shame. It points out his faults as well as his strengths. Addressing many of the events of his life with candor. Overall this was a really good book. If there was one thing keeping me from giving this book five stars it was the fact that the author was found of making statements like "i'm sure Bill must have felt.....". Of course he had done extensive research but I felt at these points he inflected too much of his own opinion. Does he really think he knew what Bill Monroe was feeling? Most of his relatives didn't. Beyond that, I recommend this book for good reading on the subject of Bill Monroe. Read it with a few more books on the subject and get a well rounded opinion of this great man.

Great gift for an uncle who loves Bill Monroe!

This book is amazing. The author has done exhaustive research and gives Monroe's life a dramatic quality that is often missing in musician biographies. A must-read book for any bluegrass fan or blues/rock aficionado for that matter. Kudos to Mr. Smith

Get book to get some insight into the man. Sad, awesome, disappointing. The real man. Not a shine job. Should be required reading for Monroe disciples!

Having been listening to Bill since the late 40's it's like going back in time and getting the full and complete story of all his ups and downs. Very well researched and reported.

Great book! I knew nothing about Bill Monroe. Now I feel like I have known him my entire life. We'll done.

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