for what it tells us about the way in which our national culture translates an artifact of regional folk culture into a usable instrument of contemporary popular culture.

June Apple: Old-Time Fiddling & Clawhammer Banjo. Tommy Jarrell, Kyle Creed, Audine Lineberry, and Bobby Patterson.
11 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo, liner notes.

Reviewed by Thomas Adler

This record album is the second in a series produced by Kyle Creed, one of the best of the few well-known contemporary old-time banjo players. Sharing the limelight with Creed is his equally well-known friend Tommy Jarrell, a 72-year-old fiddler from Mount Airy, North Carolina. The banjo and fiddle are supported capably by the guitar and string bass of Bobby Patterson and Audine Lineberry; the eleven tunes on the disc are all played by the same four people on the same four instruments. Surprisingly enough, this lack of personnel/instrument change does not at all cause the listener to become tired or bored. Rather, one finds oneself becoming more aware and appreciative of the similarities, differences, and character of such tunes as "Policeman," or "Breaking Up Christmas." Somehow the aesthetic of Jarrell and Creed's music survives the impersonality and distance imposed by recording, and the result is at the very least delightful.

The album is not without flaws. The presence of a string bass on all the cuts may be questioned in terms of its appropriateness. Perhaps the use of a bass throughout is the result of influence from some other type of hillbilly music, such as bluegrass. Moreover, the level at which the bass was recorded is occasionally intrusive, and in these instances the fine claw-hammer banjo picking of Creed is almost drowned out. Though it is audible throughout most of the album's cuts, the banjo never comes to the fore and plays the lead. Perhaps the desire for an occasional banjo lead really only reflects my own taste, conditioned by bluegrass, and yet I do feel that these lovely old-time licks deserve to be more easily heard.

The jacket notes also make me a bit unhappy. I feel that it would be a marvelous thing if we could do away with the usual testimonial by the manager - in this case the assistant manager - of a nearby radio station. It would be a far, far better thing to have Jarrell's and Creed's own commentary on the tunes. I want to know much more about these men and their music than a carbon-copy encomium can tell me; the thoughts of each musician on each tune would be a more appropriate use of the limited jacket space. Note that I am not calling for the usual sort of scholarly trappings. It is not difficult for the academic to find the published analogues of the tunes on this record, for many of them appear to be "standards": the album comprises "Sally Ann," "Kittie Clyde," "Sugar Hill," "Reuben," "Rockingham Cindy," "John Brown's Dream," "Susanna Bal," "Ducks on the Pond," and "June Apple," in addition to the two already mentioned. Indeed, those who are familiar with the music of Jarrell and Creed may feel that they have chosen tunes that are too well and widely known. Had they chosen some of the rarer tunes in their mutual repertoire and interspersed these among the "chestnuts," those of us who love this music would have been given the added treat of some old-time novelty.

In this event, their own verbal
"documentation" of tunes would be even more a necessity. Another overlooked matter is that of the instruments and instrumental styles per se. It is not clear from the jacket whether or not Mr. Creed is playing one of his own handmade fretless banjos (which are distinctive in that he uses formica to create a perfectly smooth fingerboard). More importantly, how would Creed and Jarrell themselves describe the styles in which they play? One could imagine a very effective set of short paragraphs on this subject in the musicians' own words.

Taken as a whole, the album must be considered a success. The quality of the recording is nothing short of superb; it is what one should expect of the major recording companies, but what one rarely gets on any label presenting old-time music. The record is recorded in stereo, yet the amount of channel separation is, for once, not excessive. So often old-time music (as well as bluegrass and country-western) is subject to the "listen-to-the-ping-pong-game" school of production, which is wholly inappropriate to traditional music. Mountain 302 demonstrates that the small-label production of hillbilly music does not necessitate poor quality.

One other notable aspect of the album is the fact that every one of the eleven tunes has its respective vocal part. This should make us sit up and take notice as folklorists; we should, perhaps, be more aware of the vocal accompaniments to pieces which are usually thought of as instrumentals. The words to such tunes may be carried, at least passively, by many fiddlers who consider them secondary and not normally worth bothering with. If so, it has been our loss as scholars in every case where we have not taken the time to elicit such texts. We may have missed many such gems as these:

"Way back yonder, a long time ago
The old folks danced the do-si-do."

"Hooray, Jack, and hooray, John,
A-breakin' up Christmas all night long."

The value of these albums (for I feel I can speak of the whole series of which Mountain 302 is but a part) is great for the scholar, the instrumentalist, and the lover of old-time music; I commend June Apple to all most heartily.


Reviewed by W. K. McNeil

Although many of the types of American folk music available in the 1920's and 1930's were featured on major record labels one of the most intriguing sounds of that era, that of the Negro jug bands, was rarely recorded. Only a few groups, notably the Dixieland Jug Blowers led by violinist Clifford Hayes, Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers, and Will "Son" Shade's Memphis Jug Band, made more than one recording session. In recent years Origin Jazz Library (now known as Origin) reissued several early performances under the title The Great Jug Bands. The present Historical album, concentrating on performers from Memphis & Louisville, supplements the Origin reissue.