


Reviewed by Gary Stanton.

Kentucky Country is a compendium of all the white country musicians from Kentucky who have ever made a recording, and quite a few who only expended their talents on radio. Arranged modestly in an essay format, it could have as easily been encyclopedic, although the connections and contrasts would have been sacrificed to ease locating of your favorite musician.

Charles Wolfe is the most knowledgeable, diligent, and prolific writer on southern music today. In articles, and books he has chipped away at the void of scholarship
which separates recorded music from regional, local, and personal styles and repertory. Both through his own research and his diverse and widespread contacts he assembles a treasure of information which did not exist even five years ago. In fact this book could best be considered the liner notes that the recordings, original and reissued, never had. Dr. Wolfe has further strengthened that connection by releasing a companion recording also entitled "Kentucky Country" on Rounder Records (Rounder 1037), which presents the earlier country musicians, especially those associated with the Renfro Valley Barn Dance and the WLS National Barn Dance.

Aside from chronicling the good, great, and unsung, which well rewards our expenditure, Wolfe ponders the historical mysteries of Kentucky's commercial musical impact. Despite the large and rather successful coterie of musicians from Kentucky, most, if not all, have had to leave the state to achieve economic success. Two intertwined conditions affected this situation: that Kentucky remained a radio broadcast consumer until dominated by radio stations in West Virginia, Tennessee, Illinois, and Ohio, combined with a lack of significant recording opportunities within the state, especially with the major companies, Victor, Columbia and Okeh. More intriguing is the implication that local musical activity was so plentiful in Kentucky that ability was not considered unusual enough to support a career.

With information in Kentucky Country so interesting and well-researched, I found myself puzzled and bothered by the artificiality of the topic. Clearly people born and raised in Kentucky had and continue to have considerable influence on country music, but to emphasize the land over the music creates dangling histories, and tempting possibilities cut short under the knife of the question "What is germane to Kentucky?". How much about the WLS National Barn Dance in Chicago or Cincinnati can be included in a book about Kentucky music? I find the heavy hand of editorial limitations burdening this splendid essay and in the end making it less than it could be. One absolutely beautiful dichotomy which Charles Wolfe develops is the period of folk|popular ascendancy that he terms "The Age of the Song," opposed to the mass market country music decades aptly labelled "The Age of the Singer." I can agree
with the dichotomy without necessarily agreeing with the dating or reason. Songs and tunes live on, even today breaking away from the star to whom they were born. Who remembers the fiddler who popularized "Down Yonder"? Few remember who contributed "Florida Blues." The semantic morass of popular things transmuted to folk once more goes bump in the night. Unfortunately this book on country music, like all others before, consigns traditional music to the first chapter.

No one who sustains an interest in southern music will be able to resist Kentucky Country. The essay moves beyond the hype of the industry wherein every singer is born to poverty and refrains from creating a preciousness of tradition (some could claim) from folklore. Charles Wolfe has painted a broad picture of white musical history in Kentucky from the Civil War to the present, but with a very fine brush. Ideally having now delved into Kentucky and Tennessee, he will turn his energies and attentions on another question mark of the stars and bars; Georgia would seem to hold interest, but I would suggest North Carolina, if I could, not only for the early importance of Asheville, but also the strong radio contributions of the Piedmont, especially Charlotte. My experience is that what Dr. Wolfe writes I want to read.


Reviewed by Annette B. Fromm.

The study of Greek folklore is integrally tied to the affirmation of national identity. But then, the very foundation of the modern Greek nation was a continual reinforcement of that affirmation. Like her sister nations claiming national status in the 18th and 19th centuries, Greece searched her past roots, comparing them to the existent peasant culture in order to justify claims of descent from Classical, Hellenistic times. These theories did not go uncontested, especially by scholars from other European states. It is this ideologically-founded scholarship which