



## BILL MONROE: FATHER OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC

Bill Monroe started the musical style called “bluegrass.” In fact, bluegrass is named for his band.

The youngest of eight children, William Smith Monroe was born on September 13, 1911, in Rosine, Kentucky. He was teased as a child because he had crossed eyes that were not fixed until he was a teenager. However, he listened closely to the music around him. Both his mother and uncle were talented fiddlers, while his brothers Birch and Charlie played fiddle and guitar. The only instrument left for Bill was the mandolin, which was known as a background rhythm instrument at the time.

By his teens, Monroe was earning money playing at dances. By age eighteen, he had joined Birch and Charlie in Indiana to perform country and folk songs on the radio. From 1934 to 1938, he made recordings with Charlie as the Monroe Brothers. In 1938, Bill formed his own band, the Blue Grass Boys, which combined gospel, blues, and country sounds to create his own musical blend. The band became very popular and often played on the Grand Ole Opry.

At first, Monroe mostly played existing songs for his shows and recordings, but by the late 1940s, he began writing his own songs—though he didn’t give himself much credit. “All that music’s in the air around you all the time,” he once said. “I was just the first one to reach up and pull it out.”



Monroe’s music quickly attracted imitators, or people who played a similar sound. At first, he considered them competitors. However, by the late 1950s, the musical style was named “bluegrass,” after Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys, and Monroe was honored as the man who created it.

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### LISTEN

“Blue Moon of Kentucky,” “Can’t You Hear Me Callin’,” “I’m on My Way Back to the Old Home,” “My Little Georgia Rose,” “Uncle Pen”



## BILL MONROE: FATHER OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC (CONTINUED)

In his later years, Monroe took pride in the nickname “Father of Bluegrass Music.” A member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, he died in 1996.



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What instrument did both his mom and uncle play?  
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2. Circle the phrase “imitators” in the fifth paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand its meaning.  
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3. Why is Bill Monroe called the “Father of Bluegrass?” Highlight evidence that supports your answer.  
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