

Bill C. MALONE, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers : Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens and London, University of Georgia Press, 1993, pp. x+158, foreword, preface, introduction, notes, index, ISBN 0-8203-1483- 8, U.S. \$24.95 cloth)

Jock Mackay

Volume 16, numéro 2, 1994

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083383ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083383ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Mackay, J. (1994). Compte rendu de [Bill C. MALONE, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers : Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens and London, University of Georgia Press, 1993, pp. x+158, foreword, preface, introduction, notes, index, ISBN 0-8203-1483- 8, U.S. \$24.95 cloth)]. *Ethnologies*, 16(2), 154–156. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083383ar>

Bibliography

- BABCOCK, Barbara,
 1987. "Taking Liberties, Writing From the Margins and Doing it With a Difference." *Journal of American Folklore* 100, 387 - 411.
- DIEPEVEEN, Leonard,
 1986. "Folktales in the Harlem Renaissance." *American Literature* 58.1, 64 - 81.
- RENWICK, Roger deV.,
 1980. *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Seana KOZAR,
 Memorial University of Newfoundland
 St. John's, Newfoundland

Bill C. MALONE, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers : Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens and London, University of Georgia Press, 1993, pp. x+158, foreword, preface, introduction, notes, index, ISBN 0-8203-1483-8, U.S. \$24.95 cloth).

Anyone who studies country music is deeply indebted to Bill C. Malone. The publication of Country Music U.S.A. in 1968 was a landmark, and its second edition in 1985 was a substantially refined history of America's most popular music outside of the hit parade itself. That book sits at the back of my desk in the reference section of my library. Built from Malone's dissertation in history, and originally researched from the early sixties, Country Music U.S.A. benefits from the historian's sense of narrative and detail. Between the 1968 edition and the revision of 1985, Malone developed a keener appreciation for the variety of approaches to the country music story, and especially for the contributions made by folklorists.

Malone brings a lifetime of interest, knowledge, and performance, his skills as an investigative historian, and plenty of imagination to his latest project on the early history, a pre-history really, of country music. Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers is an expanded version of his talks delivered as the 34th annual Lamar Memorial Lectures at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, in the

fall of 1990. Interwoven with illustrative musical performances by Malone and his wife Bobbie, those lectures were for Malone “a validation of my particular kind of scholarship and of the subjects that I have chosen to emphasize” (ix). The project’s aim fits easily within a recent academic renaissance around the culture and history of the southern United States, and perhaps not incidentally, Malone arrives at more politically correct conclusions than does the broad swath of received history.

Malone’s theme is the varieties of vernacular music forms in the American South before the arrival of commercial recordings in the 1920s. The title reflects the essential regional and stylistic distinction which has informed his historic portrayal from the beginning. Because there were no show-business role models for the early country performers, convenient stereotypes framed up quickly. The hillbilly and the cowboy already existed in the popular imagination, so a broad and deep river of tradition was presented through those two fountains. Yet this rubric of southeastern and southwestern styles, personified by the hillbilly and the cowboy respectively, is only the facade into which Malone pours a wealth of fascinating historical detail from the most varied and obscure sources. In the process, he provides a completely new take on the origins of country music, one which is partly elaborated in his revised history, but becomes the main theme of Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers:

“British” styles met and meshed with German, Spanish, French, Caribbean, Mexican, and African-derived forms. The result was the emergence of vigorous but localized musical expressions that retained distinguishing identities while also exhibiting the marks of their common crucible of development and interchange (2).

This explanation is some distance from that which emphasized Anglo-Celtic roots as the crucial source of country music style, the essential explanation which Malone began with over 25 years ago. The Anglo-Celtic explanation was an easy one to accept in New England and in Atlantic Canada, where it was perhaps more true than in the “fertile crescent” of the southern United States. Malone now sees both the Anglo-Celtic approach and the one which relies on hillbillies and cowboys as essential archetypes for country music performers as part of a convenient but ethnocentric mythology. Malone’s hugely democratic argument is that the plain folk have been largely overlooked in earlier portrayals, and these plain folk make a rainbow of cultural and musical diversity.

Malone makes it clear that much of the music itself is made up of songs “we forgot to remember” (citing Sigmund Spaeth), especially the homely themes and tragic laments which sometimes survived only through the hillbilly horn of dissemination. Along the way, he shares some historical footnotes, many of which would only be noticed, he observes, by someone interested in country

music. As with all innovative historical presentation, apparently marginal information becomes more central to the retold story. Malone recounts: a short history of the banjo in the south; the fascinating story of nineteenth-century Kentucky composer William Shakespeare Hays; the impact on southern musical culture of the hornpipe, minstrelsy, shape-notes, and northern composers; the social role of the fiddler; the influence of slave music on ante-bellum culture and of the Civil War on the "blighted" lives which survived it.

The entire project reminds me of the way in which certain information becomes available only when noticed, how the avenues of legacy come to be defined. When I re-read a book which I read and marked 25 years ago, I realize that, pencil in hand, I am often reading quite a different book today. It is that kind of awakening which is stirred by Malone's choice of detail and his elegant presentation of it. It does make one wonder what sorts of folkloric information lie buried in archives and historic documents while some of us complain about its absence.

Jock MACKAY
Vanier College
Montreal, Quebec

Robert H. LOWIE, *Myths and Traditions of the Crow Indians*,
Introduction to the Bison Book Edition by Peter Nabokov
(Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1993,
xviii + 303 p., ISBN 0-8032-7944-2).

Voici une nouvelle édition de l'ouvrage de Robert H. Lowie paru en 1918. Il s'agit d'un hommage par Peter Nabokov rendu à Lowie pour ses nombreuses recherches ethnographiques réalisées auprès des Crows du Montana.

L'ouvrage se divise en deux parties. La première constitue introduction et la seconde contient une sélection des mythes, contes et légendes crows recueillis par Lowie au début du siècle. Certes, le but de cette réédition est de rappeler aux ethnologues, anthropologues et autres spécialistes intéressés aux amérindiens en général, l'importance de travaux de Lowie. Toutefois, le lecteur ne peut ignorer l'introduction de Peter Nabokov, car l'objet du livre imposait une introduction à caractère biographique afin de présenter l'homme et son oeuvre.

L'introduction de 28 pages, qui prend l'allure d'une préface, porte sur Lowie et aussi sur l'histoire, les traits socio-culturels et les déboires politiques des Crows. Bien que Nabokov ait tenté de couvrir l'évolution des Crows afin de situer le contexte dans lequel Lowie a réalisé ses recherches, le produit contient