

Bluegrass

Bluegrass is a genre of American music that began in the mid-1940s with Bill Monroe and his band, the Blue Grass Boys, with a style of roots acoustic music played on mandolin, banjo, guitar, bass and fiddle. Monroe played the mandolin and sang high tenor, often called a “high lonesome sound.” Monroe’s band included banjo great Earl Scruggs and guitarist Lester Flatt. Bluegrass songs are often ballads and dance tunes played at fast tempos, and typically each member of the band takes a virtuosic solo on each song. Progressive bluegrass utilizes electric instruments and incorporate elements of jazz, rock and world music.

Bluegrass in Missouri

The bluegrass genre is strong in Missouri, as witnessed by the many well-attended bluegrass festivals around the state, many excellent local bluegrass artists and bands, and many visits from top national artists such as Ricky Skaggs, David Grisman, Del McCoury, Sam Bush, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and Chris Thile. The Dillards from southern Missouri brought bluegrass to a national audience via their appearances on the Andy Griffith television show, John Hartford who grew up in St. Louis helped start the “newgrass” movement, and Missouri’s own Rhonda Vincent is an award-winning national artist known as the “Queen of Bluegrass.”

Bluegrass Bios

The Dillards

The Dillards are a bluegrass band that began in Salem, Missouri, founded by Rodney and Douglas Dillard in the late 1950s and known for their television appearances as “The Darlings” on *The Andy Griffith Show* between 1963 and 1966. Their performance of “Feudin’ Banjos,” on an October 1963 episode was the first major airing of a song later known as “Dueling Banjos.” They were also part of the reunion show, *Return to Mayberry*. They have produced numerous albums and are known as one of the first bluegrass bands to electrify their instruments and incorporate elements of folk rock, country rock and progressive bluegrass.

Rhonda Vincent

Rhonda Vincent (born 1962) was born in Kirksville, Missouri, and raised in nearby Greentop, Missouri, Rhonda Vincent is a fifth generation musician from a very musical family. She began singing gospel songs at age five with her family’s band which was later known as the “Sally Mountain Show.” At age eight, she started playing mandolin and added the fiddle to her list of instruments at age twelve. The family travelled the Midwest in the 1970s and 1980s, and Rhonda recorded her first single, “Mule Skinner Blues” in 1970 and spent two summers playing at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri. She played country music in the 1990s and then returned to her bluegrass roots in 2000 with the release of her *Back Home Again* album. Rhonda is known as the “Queen of Bluegrass” and her awards include Female Vocalist of the Year several times, Entertainer of the Year, a Grammy, and she was made a member of the Grand Ole Opry in 2020.