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Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and Its Legacy

Tim Newby
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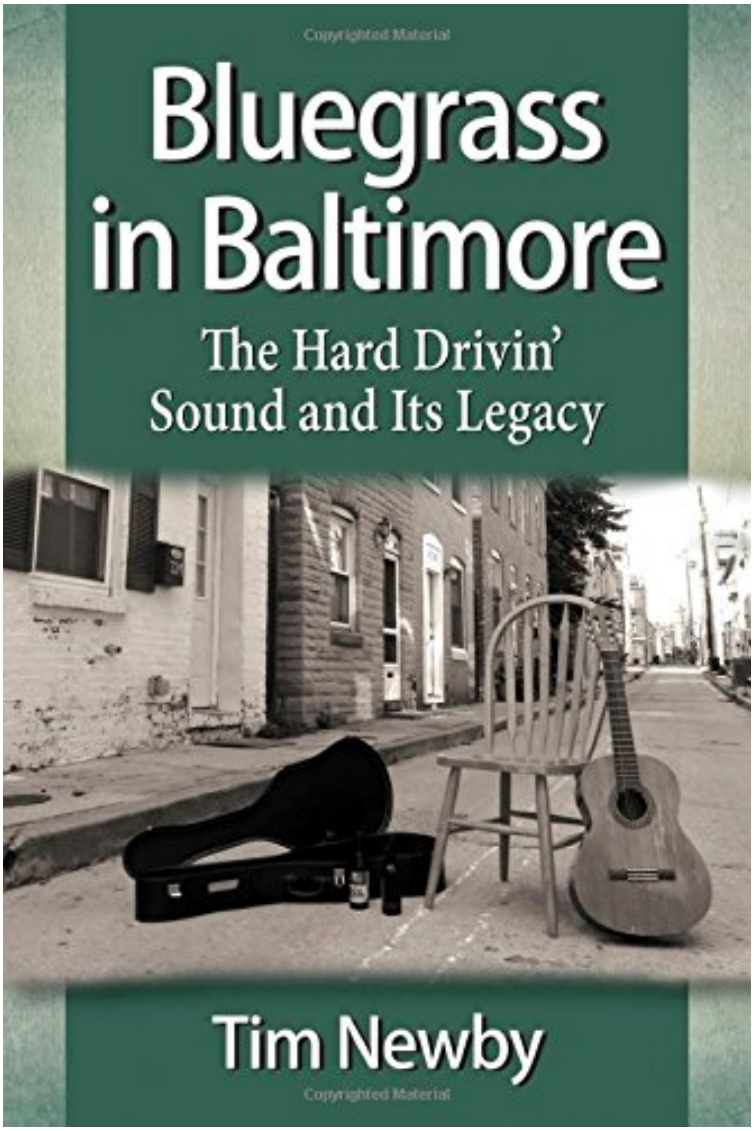

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Tim Newby : Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and Its Legacy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and Its Legacy:

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Not only did Tim capture the flavor of bluegrass in ...By JamesNot only did Tim capture the flavor of bluegrass in Baltimore, he conveyed its very essence. In a fluid style that captivates the reader from the preface to the final chapter, Tims passion and depth of knowledge regarding this rich and woefully under-documented history of bluegrass permeates every page. I couldnt put it down. I was especially

touched by the tribute this book pays to my friend and bandmate, Walter Hensley, as well as honored to be included in a work that is destined to be a bluegrass classic and must-have for any bluegrass historian.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Bluegrass HistoryBy Kevin BYou really get an inside look into the history of the music and the life of it's musicians. While the focus is regional the lessons like Baltimore's bluegrass influence is boundless. Highly recommended.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Regional Bluegrass History with National ImplicationsBy Ted LehmannTim Newby's Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and It's Legacy (McFarland Company, 2015, 244 pages, $35.00/9.99) should become a centerpiece for any person interested in the relationship between the growth of bluegrass from the mountains of Appalachia to the mills and factories where it found its form, to the important and lasting influence of this music as a part of the development of music in America. It all took place, in microcosm, in and around Baltimore which continues into today as an incubator and a storehouse of bluegrass excellence. Newby recounts, in amazing detail and vigorous prose, the growth of bluegrass music's second generation of great musicians, many of whom preferred to stay at home rather than assume the national stage in American bluegrass, folk, and roots music. Carefully researched and meticulously annotated, this volume is a treasure trove of interesting people and necessary knowledge. Baltimore's bluegrass history can stand as an example of regional bluegrass as a contributor to and an example of the more national music we see today.As the Great Depression of the nineteen thirties was followed by World War II in the early forties, industrial America grew, fueled by a work force which included a huge migration of poor people seeking to escape the poverty and lack of work in the mountainous spine of Appalachia who moved to industrial cities around the Great Lakes and along the coasts and riverways or the continent. Cities like Hammond, Indiana, to which Bill Monroe moved from his home in Rosine, to Cincinnati, Columbus, Lowell, Columbus, and Baltimore attracted workers, who brought their music and their culture with them. They settled in and went to work, but they continued to find their entertainment in the music they brought with them that developed alongside and within the new technologies and cultural influences that became available in the larger and more confusing urban world of heavy industry. In Baltimore, as in Columbus, for instance, the center of this entertainment became the small, smoke-filled, violent environment of the neighborhood bar, where many bluegrass second generation musicians developed.Alan Lomax, on of American music's great achivists, made Earl Taylor's Smokey Mountain Boys the first bluegrass band to appear at Carnegie Hall in 1959 and later sponsored a concert on February 8, 1963 at New York University which brought Bill Monroe to town with Del McCoury playing banjo in his band. This seems to have been the event at which David Grisman and Del McCoury met, leading to a lifelong musical and personal relationship. Monroe had added McCoury to his band after seeing him in a Baltimore dive. The Carnegie Hall concert had introduced bluegrass to the urban folk audience as a form of folk music rather than country music as well as seeking to put bluegrass into a context culminating in showing rock roll to be a culminating music combining folk, bluegrass, country and blues.The subsequent concert at NYU served to cement one of the crucial ideas in Newby's story, that bluegrass is an organic part of the growth of Americana music which continues to develop within the context of changes in America's developing technology, economics, education, and taste. The stories of Hazel Dickens, Alice Gerard, Del McCoury along with, more recently, Mike Munford and Patrick McAvinue's emergence from the Baltimore scene onto the national stage combine with the reluctance of many others to leave their comfortable environments, jobs, and families to take leadership in the music's development. Meanwhile, the nearby presence of Sunset Park and The New River Ranch provided venues for local and national music to mix and interact.Newby's prose is direct, and refreshingly free of academic or scholarly cant while still clearly being the product of thoughtful and thorough research. Fortunately, he was able to interview a number of the seminal figures in the Baltimore bluegrass scene still living when he began collecting material for this book. He interviews widely, talking to local Baltimore musicians while reaching far into the progressive end of bluegrass to quote the Infamous Stringdusters' Chris Pandolfi. His thought that the name bluegrass came from fans of Flatt Scruggs requesting songs they had played when they were in Monroe's band but not mentioning the founder's name. This suggests a breadth and subtlety to Newby's thinking that makes him stand out. He's a lively, interesting, and creative writer. Included at the beginning of each chapter is a Recommended Listening section at the beginning of each chapter. These recommended listening sections are easily achieved through accessing one of the streaming music internet sites like Spotify, Pandora, or YouTube. Newby has included extensive footnotes from a wide variety of printed sources and from his own interviews and correspondence. He includes sometimes chapter-long profiles of important Baltimore musicians who may be largely or entirely unknown to bluegrass fans in other regions of the country. Combining solid scholarship with sharp, incisive prose is no small matter, but Newby seldom gets lost in the weeds.Tim Newby graduated from Widener University with a history degree in 1996. Since then he has been working as a teacher and freelance writer. He has regularly contributed to a number of different magazines and web sites, including Paste, Honest Tune, Inside Lacrosse, Relix, jambase.com, jambands.com, Glide Magazine, Aural States, and others. He is also the Features Editor at Honest Tune. Bluegrass in Baltimore is his first book, though he contributed to the Phish Companion Vol 2 in 2004.While regional bluegrass music may seldom have reached the national stage or grabbed its attention, the story Tim Newby tells is one of local and regional achievements which often touch, collide with, influence, and nurture the larger world of bluegrass, while remaining a vital, growing, and often exciting local and regional force recognized and

treasured by those within its bubble or carefully watching from around the edges. Hazel Dickers, Alice Gerrard, Danny Paisley, Patrick McAvinue, and always Del McCoury, nurtured in Baltimore's bars, come quickly to mind, while Earl Taylor, Walt Hensly, and Russ Hoover more or less stayed home, contributing, but not gaining national recognition. In writing Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and It's Legacy (McFarland Company, 215, 244 pages, $35.00/9.99) Tim Newby has filled in a largely untold hole in the story of bluegrass development while explaining much of how those who stayed home have still enriched the genre. I bought Bluegrass in Baltimore in an electronic edition and read it on my Kindle app.

With an influx of Appalachian migrants who came looking for work in the 1940s and 1950s, Baltimore found itself populated by some extraordinary mountain musicians and was for a brief time the center of the bluegrass world. Life in Baltimore for these musicians was not easy. There were missed opportunities, personal demons and always the up-hill battle with prejudice against their hillbilly origins. Based upon interviews with legendary players from the golden age of Baltimore bluegrass, this book provides the first in-depth coverage of this transplanted-roots music and its broader influence, detailing the struggles Appalachian musicians faced in a big city that viewed the music they made as the "poorest example of poor man's music."

"Newby's work is momentous as it is the first compendium to examine this deeply rooted tradition." - Baltimore Magazine"Newby's book delivers solid contributions to the historiography of bluegrass music, offering a fresh investigation of urban bluegrass in a working-class city. The book effectively expands the biographies of both long-revered artists (Dickens, Gerrard, McCoury, Seeger) and those less recognized (Hensley, Hooper, Taylor). The in-depth profile of Taylor's career and contextualization of his group's historic Carnegie Hall concert in 1959 are long overdue. In addition, the chapter on Reed incorporates illuminating discussions of Sunset Park and New River Ranch, two rural parks just outside Baltimore that were critical venues in the early days of bluegrass." - Journal of Southern History"One hopes that there will be future editions, because this is an important book. The level of detail that Tim Newby has reconstructed is very impressive, as is the documentary contribution of his interviews with veterans of the Baltimore bluegrass scene.Bluegrass in Baltimoreis a notable contribution to the study of bluegrass music, the folk revival, and the Appalachian diaspora." - Association for Recorded Sound Collections JournalIn this fascinating work, Tim Newby meticulously lays out how Baltimore, a major industrial mid-Atlantic city, became a melting pot for bluegrass music. We follow the path of people from Southern, rural areas coming north to find work, bringing their music and sharing it with their new neighbors. The end result was the creation of a sound unique to the city and permanently woven into the fabric of bluegrass music as we know it today. - Ralph Papile on the Bluegrass Odyssey Radio Show"Easy-to-read journalism, this book takes a broader view of Maryland's string-band scene, both urban and rural, both past and present...Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and its Legacy tell[s] those stories in far more detail than they've ever been told in print before." - Baltimore City PaperFrom the Back CoverWith an influx of Appalachian migrants who came looking for for work in the 1940s and 1950s, Baltimore found itself populated by some extraordinary mountain musicians and was for a brief time the center of the bluegrass world. Life in Baltimore for these musicians was not easy. There were missed opportunities, personal demons, and always the up-hill battle with prejudice against their hillbilly origins. Based up interviews with legendary players from the golden age of Baltimore bluegrass, this book provides the first in-depth coverage of this transplanted-roots music and its broader influence, detailing struggles Appalachian musicians faced in a big city that viewed the music they made as the "poorest example of poor man's music."About the AuthorTim Newby is the features editor at Honest Tune Magazine and his work has appeared in a variety of magazines, both online and in print. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland where he is an active part of the city's thriving live music scene.