

WIBA - "What Is Bluegrass Anyway?" The question comes up all the time in Bluegrass Circles...

Scholars over the past few decades have argued over the definition. Even IBMA, the International Bluegrass Music Association refuses to adopt an official definition. I mean, now there's Bluegrass, NewGrass, JazzGrass, even SpaceGrass, etc. But when you mention Traditional Bluegrass...well, it leaves no doubt in the listener's mind as to what you're talking about. You know it's traditional with the very first lick. It's the closest thing to what the founders wanted us to carry on; so it is with Big Country Bluegrass' latest album. As a matter of fact, Big Country Bluegrass got its name from the Jimmy Martin instrumental, Big Country, recorded in 1966. Yes, the first generation pickers and singers would be proud to know that their music is definitely in good hands with Big Country Bluegrass.

The group was started by Tommy Sells and wife Teresa almost a quarter century ago. Tommy's mandolin playing and Teresa's fine lead tenor and, on occasion, high baritone voice moves this group along. Even if they're doing a slow three-quarter song like the Bailes Brothers' "I Guess I'll Go On Dreaming" or Grady Bullins' "High Alleghenies", the great harmonies and drive are still there. Whether Teresa is singing harmony or lead, there is still that drive, thanks to Lynwood Lunsford's banjo playing. He's one of the few banjo players today that still knows that the "backup" work is every bit as important as the "lead" playing. He also makes a fine contribution with his baritone singing as he carries a lot over from his days with Jimmy Martin. But it's not the individual singers or pickers (although I'm partial to Teresa's and Jeff's vocal combination), it's the combination of the six that gives the band its unique traditional sound. It's the "seventh member", that combination of all, that makes this band; the total sound which is more than the sum of its parts.

The title of the album, "Open For Business", should also carry the "Warning Label" that this album could be "Habit Forming". It's, as the album cover indicates, Authentic Hard Driving Bluegrass...No WIBA question needed here!

Tom Henderson, "This Is Bluegrass" 88.5 WMNF-FM, Tampa, FL



Tommy Sells

Mandolin; vocals

Teresa Sells

Rhythm guitar; vocals

Jeff Michael

Fiddle, rhythm guitar;
clawhammer banjo, vocals

Alan Mastin

Acoustic upright bass fiddle

Lynwood Lunsford

Banjo; lead guitar, vocals

Johnny Williams

Rhythm guitar; vocals