



The New Holland Honey Eaters

present

On The Air

The Story of Early Country Radio

A 'conservative, eclectic and absorptive tradition', traditional Southern music has its roots in both Europe and Africa. As it evolved throughout the

19th century, it absorbed and processed the popular music of the minstrel stage and the genteel parlour, and at the turn of the 20th century its vitality helped to spawn ragtime, gospel, blues and jazz. But it was the communications revolution of the early 20th century that changed the very nature of the music forever, and over a few short years turned a rural traditional music into Country Music.

Although 'the wireless' had existed since the late 19th century, the first commercial broadcast license in the US was issued in 1920. From then the development of the industry was nothing short of phenomenal, and by 1924 stations with the power to serve large regions of the country were beginning to broadcast in a rural 'barn dance' format. Yet most of these early stations were genuinely 'local' - owned by local interests, and getting their content from local sources. In the rural South, this meant that local musicians could be heard throughout their region. And heard they were; radio was ideal for rural folk; unlike the phonograph, where varied entertainment depended not only on buying the hardware but also on continuing to purchase a collection of discs, the radio required only the hardware (and a crystal set or battery-powered unit meant mains electricity was not required) to open up a vast world of entertainment.

By 1926 America had chosen to let commercial interests dominate the airwaves and national networks were evolving. The advancing

technology of microphones meant that softer voices and more subtle harmonies could be played to audiences that had previously heard all their music un-amplified; stations were now interested in those musicians who could provide original (and copyrightable) material, and whom they could market with an image appealing to the nation at large.

Today *The New Holland Honey Eaters* will take you back to those remarkable times. In the first half of our presentation we will outline the history of early country radio, using tunes and songs drawn from a range



of traditional musical genres, as well as slides and readings from historical sources. In the second half we will go 'on the air' as station WYOY, and present our version of a live-to-air radio show as you might have heard it in the early 1930s on a small, limited-budget station in the Deep South.

The New Holland Honey Eaters would like to thank Michael Edgar for his opening voice-over, and to apologise to station WYOY 101.7 FM, Gluckstadt, Mississippi, to whom we are not in any way related.

Listen to [Ragtime Chicken Joe](#):