

= Wade Mainer =

Wade Echard Mainer (April 21 , 1907 ? September 12 , 2011) was an American country singer and banjoist . With his band , the Sons of the Mountaineers , he is credited with bridging the gap between old @-@ time mountain music and Bluegrass and is sometimes called the " Grandfather of Bluegrass . " In addition , he innovated a two @-@ finger banjo fingerpicking style , which was a precursor to modern three @-@ finger bluegrass styles .

Originally from North Carolina , Mainer 's main influences came from the mountain music of his family . In a career that began in 1934 and spanned almost six decades , Mainer transitioned from being a member of his brother 's band into the founder of his own ensemble , the Sons of the Mountaineers , with whom he performed until 1953 , when he became more deeply involved with his Christianity and left the music industry . After working at a General Motors factory and attending gospel revivals , Mainer was convinced that he should restart his career as a Christian gospel musician and began to tour with his wife in this capacity . He continued to release albums until 1993 .

= = Personal life = =

Mainer was born near Weaverville , North Carolina , on a mountain farm in Buncombe County on April 21 , 1907 . His family was poor during his childhood and they lived in a log cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains . Mainer credited his father who was , in Mainer 's words , " a good singer ? real stout voice " , as of one of his influences . During his career as a musical artist , Mainer would perform many of the old songs that he had heard from his father .

Mainer grew up listening to traditional mountain music and was largely influenced by his brother @-@ in @-@ law Roscoe Banks . He first learned to play the banjo at square dances , where he would pick up instruments left by performers and practice on them . After moving to Concord , North Carolina and working in a series of jobs at cotton mills , he became a part of his brother J.E. ' s band , known as J. E. Mainer 's Mountaineers . His entry into the band in 1934 marked the beginning of a nearly six @-@ decade career in music . J.E. played the fiddle while Wade performed on the banjo for the string band , and they played at fiddlers ' conventions and other gatherings .

Mainer married Julia Mae Brown at the end of 1937 , shortly after forming his own band . Brown was a singer and guitarist popularly know at the time as Hillbilly Lilly . She had performed from 1935 until 1937 at WSJS Radio in Winston @-@ Salem . Brown is considered to be a pioneering female musical artist and later joined Mainer during his performances .

= = Musical career = =

Mainer 's first recordings came in 1934 and are compiled on Ragged But Right : 30 's Country Bands . Mainer performed with The Mountaineers on tracks such as Maple on the Hill , Seven and a Half and Johnson 's Old Grey Mule . Also included on the compilation are Mainer 's later collaboration Short Life and It 's Trouble with Zeke Morris , his solo effort Riding on That Train 45 and a sample song Mitchell Blues from his band the Sons of the Mountaineers . Throughout his career , he was noted for his unique and innovative two @-@ finger banjo fingerpicking style , which some view as a precursor to three finger bluegrass banjo styles . Mainer took jobs at local radio stations to increase the visibility of his relative 's ensemble , recording classics such as Take Me in the Lifeboat . During this time , he appeared on many regional stations including WBT in Charlotte , WPTF in Raleigh , WNOX in Knoxville and WPAQ in Mount Airy .

Mainer performed in a series of live radio shows with The Mountaineers , sponsored by Crazy Water Crystals laxatives . In 1934 , J.W. Fincher , the head of the company , observed their popularity at the first gig , the Crazy Water Crystal Barn Dance , a radio program out of Charlotte . Under the name J. E. Mainer 's Crazy Mountaineers , they toured the American South on live radio shows and recorded fourteen songs for Bluebird Records . Maple on the Hill , which according to the National Endowment for the Arts was their biggest hit , had originally been composed in the 1890s

by Gussie L. Davis .

Mainer was in his brother J.E. 's band for two years , until he left for more traditional work , which at the time was far more profitable than his musical career . Making only five dollars a week under sponsorship , Mainer found that he could earn up to three times as much working at a yarn mill , which he described as being " gold " for the era . After leaving his brother 's group in 1936 , he began to perform duet work with Zeke Morris , who was a band mate from The Mountaineers . After a time working on this project , Mainer left to form the short @-@ lived " Smilin ' Rangers " which later became " Sons of the Pioneers " . Zeke Morris then got together with his brother Wiley to form The Morris Brothers .

= = = Sons of the Mountaineers = = =

Mainer named this new band Sons of the Mountaineers . Its initial lineup included Jay Hugh Hall and Clyde Moody as guitarists with Steve Ledford as a fiddler . Among the musicians who would join the group later were Jack and Curly Shelton , Tiny Dodson , Red Rector and Fred Smith . The band got its start performing on the radio and recording songs for Bluebird Records and their first hit , entitled " Sparkling Blue Eyes " was recorded in 1939 . From 1935 through 1941 , Mainer recorded over 165 songs for the record label RCA Victor in various lineups , ranking him among one of the most prolifically recorded country music artists of that period .

The Sons of the Mountaineers briefly stopped playing during World War II because Mainer could not afford to squander the valuable gasoline required for the journey to the radio stations . One notable exception , however , came in 1942 , when they were invited to the White House by Eleanor Roosevelt . There in Washington D.C. , they played several tunes , including " Down in the Willow Garden " , a song personally requested by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt . During this time , they also appeared in a version of The Chisholm Trail in New York . At wars ' end , the band was reorganized and once again began to play at stations across North Carolina . Recordings at this time were sporadic , due to the declining popularity of the genre . In 1953 , after having renewed his commitment to Christianity , Mainer left the group and exited the industry for a time .

= = Later life = =

In 1953 , Mainer and his wife settled in Flint , Michigan , where he found work at a General Motors factory . Although renouncing both the music industry and his trademark instrument , the banjo , he and Julia did continue to sing at gospel revival meetings . In the early 1960s , Molly O 'Day convinced him that he could use the banjo in gospel recordings , which spurred a series of religiously themed banjo albums beginning in 1961 . He also began to record and tour with his wife .

Mainer retired from General Motors in 1973 . Mainer has been credited with bridging the gap between old @-@ time mountain music and Bluegrass and musicians such as Bill Monroe , Ralph Stanley and Doc Watson have all cited Mainer as a source of influence . He has also been called the " Grandfather of Bluegrass . " His influence was not limited to the United States . Pete Smith , of the British newspaper The Advertiser , in a report for Mainer 's 100th birthday , cited Mainer as " one of the most influential figures in the development of modern bluegrass , " noting his picking style and his efforts in bringing bluegrass closer to the mainstream . In addition , Smith also credits him for making the banjo , an instrument previously described as " satanic , " acceptable for spiritually @-@ themed music . Mainer continued to live with his wife in Flint , where he celebrated his centenary in 2007 and performed at a concert for his 101st birthday in 2008 . Mainer died of congestive heart failure on September 12 , 2011 . He was 104 .

= = = Awards and honours = = =

In 1987 , president Ronald Reagan bestowed upon him a National Heritage Fellowship for his contributions to American music . In 1996 he received the Michigan Heritage Award and the

Michigan Country Music Association and Services ' Lifetime Achievement Award . In 1998 both he and his wife were inducted into the Michigan Country Music Hall of Fame , while Mainer received North Carolina ' s Surry Arts Council Lifetime Achievement .

= = Original discography = =

= = = Wade Mainer / Zeke Morris = = =

= = = Wade Mainer 's Smilin ' Rangers = = =

= = = Wade Mainer and his Sons of the Mountaineers = = =

= = Other discography = =