

## Masters of Bluegrass-Lecture 9 – King of Bluegrass - Jimmy Martin

Jimmy Martin was from Tennessee and played guitar and sang lead for Bill Monroe in 1949 replacing Mac Wiseman. He recorded *Sitting Alone in the Moonlight*, *I'm Blue*, *I'm Lonesome* and *Memories of Mother and Dad* with Monroe. He left Monroe and worked briefly with the Osborne Brothers before forming his own band, *The Sunny Mountain Boys* in 1955 including banjo player J. D. Crowe and tenor singer, Paul Williams. Among Martin's biggest hits of the 1960s were *Hit Parade of Love*, *Sophronie*, *Stepping Stones*, *Tennessee*, and *Widow Maker* (a popular truck driver's song). His songs were often humorous novelties. His instrumentals (with the Sunny Mountain Boys) such as *Theme Time*, *Bear Tracks*, *Big Country* and *Red Rooster* featured ultra-crisp playing by a series of banjo players including J.D. Crowe, Alan Munde and Bill Emerson, and powered by Martin's guitar runs, set a standard for bluegrass instrumentals that was highly influential.

Many of his recorded songs have become bluegrass standards including *20/20 Vision*, *Walking Shoes*, *Mr. Engineer*, *You Don't Know My Mind*, *Freeborn Man*, *Don't Give Your Heart to a Rambler* and *The Sunny Side of the Mountain*. His unique vocals included instantly identifiable swoops, leaps, and octave jumps. Martin's exuberant and sometimes brash, personality as well as problems with alcohol affected his success. He was never made a member of the Grand Old Opry despite his desire.

In 1971, *The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band*, a successful rock band of the period, recorded a 3 volume tribute album to authentic country music in Nashville and Martin was asked to participate. Several of his best-known songs were included. His career received a boost as a result. Martin died in 2005 at the age of 78. He was known as "The King of Bluegrass." It is unclear whether this title was bestowed by himself or his record company, but a movie (2003) and a book (2004) about Martin's life and bearing that title were produced.