HILLBILLIES WIN IN NEW YORK
Much Mazuma Found in
Mountain Music-Making

Records sell and sheet pubs find biz jumps as Manhattan customers go barn dance in big way—square dance venture sells out weeks in advance for large New York hall

by Wanda Marvin

NEW YORK, July 15 [1944].-The fiddle and the bow are taking bows on Broadway these days. Hillbilly music, long an institution in the hinterlands and Chicago, is now at home in the cabins of the cosmopolites. Steady upward curves on pubs’ and diskers’ sales charts point to what they say is a new market. Mountain music in the metropolitan area is taxing their present output. Manhattan’s newly developed interest in bucolic bounce is said to stem from demands of transient war workers and servicemen for hoe-down hi-de-ho. Biz seismographs first tabbed new movement about two years ago thru increased juke box requests for ridge-runner rumbas. Swing-shift disk jockeys were next to report the sorghum and sowbelly sentiment as mall demand shifted from swing to square dance.

City slickers, who first sneered at the corn, are now ordering it as a steady diet. Radio stations in other parts of the country have featured hillbilly shows and staged barn dances for several years, but it wasn’t till this month that a New York City broadcaster entered the field.

Barn Dance a Sellout

On Saturday, July 1, WOV inaugurated the WOV Broadway Barn Dance, taking over Palm Garden. at 52rd Street and Eighth Avenue, a stone’s throw from the Stem. They brought in. a cornhusker crew of musicians and singers for a half hour of live broadcast, followed by an old-fashioned barn dance. At 85 cents a head, the 1,200-capacity hall has been jammed both Saturdays and is again tonight. Station is taking ticket orders for several weeks in advance, and next two broadcasts are sold out.

WOV execs are still a little surprised at the public reaction to the ball shows. For the last seven months station’s platter program, Hill Country Jamboree, has been pulling well, with the mailbags growing heavier each week. From the interest in the platter program, station expected a lively interest in the Barn Dance but frankly was not looking for it to score so heavily.

WOV’s general manager, Ralph Well, believes that the hillbilly, folk, Western and cowboy music holds special appeal at this particular time because everybody wants simple. Understandable music. He says that New Yorkers have reacted like people in other sections when they have had a chance to hear good rural rag. Policy of station has been to include two hymns on each of Its programs, such as The Old Rugged Cross and In the Garden. Easterners are coming around to an appreciation of these and go in for the shouting hymns also.

They Buy Records

One incident that convinced WOV biggies that New Yorkers wanted backwoods music was the reaction to the transcription of Cool Water, written by Bob Nolan and sung by Texas Jim Lewis, backed by the Lone Star Cowboys. The first time it was aired
requests poured in for information about the song, a simple lament type of tune. The radio audience has expressed disappointment that there are no commercial recordings to be had. Arnold Hartley, station program director, had to insert an announcement that no disks were available to cut down on the mail load.

Station's decision to launch the hillbilly programs, both recorded and live, was based on the conviction that New York was ready for the type of music that has paid off handsomely in other parts of the country.

The National Barn Dance on WLS, Chicago, has become that station's right arm. WLW's Boone County Jamboree, Cincinnati, is one of this 50,000-watters' top shows. Grand Ole Operey, on WSM, Nashville, is also well established as a paying proposition. WOV's program is patterned after these hillbilly hit shows and looks like a natural.

Snag has developed as Local 802, AFM, ruled after the initial airing of the new program that the broadcast cannot originate in Palm Garden or a spot other than a regular studio. Station is attempting to iron out that wrinkle and emulate other outlets by charging admission to the broadcasts and letting the customers square dance afterwards. In the meantime Broadway Born Dance will continue whether or not the broadcast is aired from the hall.

Layman Cameron, emcee of WOV's show, was with WLW, Cincinnati, and WOAR, San Antonio, where he saw hillbilly exploitation. Cameron deserves credit for putting the Barn Dance over with a bang. He keeps the show at peak of fast entertainment and calls the square dancing.

Gully-Jumper Julie-B, Eddie Smith, Paul Anthony and Johnny Newton are featured in the vaude entertainment portion of the program, with special guestars such as Elton Britt, Chester and Lester Buchanan, Bill Brenner and the Circle-B Rangers and Chuck and Ellie Story.

**Hillbilly Nitery Does Okay**

WOV's pioneering with hillbilly entertainment in the East is similar to the Village Barn's (New York nitery) 14-year successful operation with the hip-and-holler boys. During that period a galaxy of country talent has appeared, including Mack McCrea and Trio, the Lone Star Cowboys, the Barn Cut-Ups, Texas Jim Lewis, Tex and His Hillbillies, Denver Darling and His Cowboys, Royal Rangers, Zeb Carver, Polly Jenkins and Her Plowboys, Peppy Below, the Four Rouse Brothers, Sons of the Purple Sage, Radio Rubes, Schnickelfritz Band, Zeke Manners, the Rangerettes, and Tex Fletcher and His Westerners.

Owner Meyer Horowitz cashed in on the hillbilly biz and has cleaned up. During most of the time he has had a wire in his downtown nitery but wasn't on the air sufficiently long to influence music taste.

Hillbillies are not entirely new to radio listeners in the New York area. At one time Zeke Manners had over three hours a day air time on local stations, and occasional studio audiences were easily found, but only for smaller studios. Manners had a fan club (which is still active), and hillbilly records have been used now and again with varying success as part of commercial shows but rarely, with runs of more than a few weeks.

WOV feels that the mountain music's popularity is unquestionably established. Record stores verify this by pointing to the inroads made in the hillbilly disk sections of the shops within the last few weeks.

Dave Kapp, of Decca, says that the New York biz for the waxings is definitely up. Recent releases that Decca wishes it had more of are Louisiana Governor, Jimmy Davis's
Is It Too Late?, Ernest Tubb’s Soldier’s Last Letter, Jimmy Wakely’s A Tiny Voice and a Tiny Prayer and Patsy Montana’s Good Night, Soldier. Almost anything Roy Rogers records is a sure-fire seller also.

Kapp believes that his company could sell 300,000 of every backwoods record it put out if it could get the material for the pressings. He agrees with others in the biz that a new era of hillbilly popularity in the East is here.

Manie Sacks, of Columbia, points to the past 12 months as seeing the greatest New York demand for down-home disks in the history of the firm. Wishes he could press more of Columbia’s contractees, Gene Autry, Bob Wills, Al Dexter, Roy Acuff, Bob Atcher, Ted Daffan’s Texans, Smokey Mountain Boys, Louise Massey and the Westerners, and Memphis Minnie.

Jack Hallstrom, of Victor, goes on record that "sales in hillbilly records are up" and "there is a considerable demand for the disks that can’t be met today." He says that all juke box operators are crying for more records of this type that can’t be supplied till after the war. Hallstrom believes that the merging element—pops and hillbilly—has been instrumental in creating the new taste among those who never before went for farm fun.

Out of the Hills to Kilocycles

Hallstrom has watched the boys come out of the hills in the last few years to take over on radio stations. The Victor hillbillies are Elton Britt, Texas Jim Robertson, Montana Slim, Eddie Arnold, Zeke Manners and Carson Robinson, whose offerings come out under the Bluebird label.

Indie recording companies make like reports of upswing in hillbilly popularity in this section, and music pubs who have hillbilly numbers join in with statements of others in the biz that the country cousin has arrived.

And Sheets Sell, Too

Miller Music, with a good-sized hillbilly catalog, traces the growth of New York’s whole-hearted acceptance of the music back a year and a half. The influx of workers and soldiers from rural parts into the urban center is credited by the company as being largely responsible for the creation of the demand.

One of Miller’s tunes, The Lights in the Valley Will Outshine the Sun, is spotted on today’s Broadway Barn Dance. It’s a shouting hymn, a type of music until recently unfamiliar to most city dwellers. Miller sold 1,400,000 copies of sheet music of There’s a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere. The Victor (Bluebird) waxing by Elton Britt sold over 1,260,000 disks. This week the pub launched Zeke Manners’s A Teardrop Fell Upon My Purple Heart and expects it to become another classic in the field.

It appears that Turkey in the Straw is beginning to pay off in sliced white meat. Smart pubs and recorders are anticipating a gold rush in the canyons of the metropolis from the back-to-the-woods trend.