



William Smith Monroe

September 13, 1911 - September 9, 1996

Rosine, Kentucky

William Smith Monroe - Bill Monroe to every picker who ever tuned a mandolin sharp - died on September 9, 1996, in Springfield, Tennessee. He was eighty-four. Born on September 13, 1911, near Rosine, Kentucky, he grew up in a house where fiddles and gospel were as ordinary as chores, and where a younger brother's poor eyesight pushed him toward the mandolin because the fiddle seats were taken.

He worked the Midwest factories and the radio barn dances, then built the Blue Grass Boys into a band so distinctive that the music took the name of his home state. Mandolin chop, high lonesome tenor, driving banjo, and a repertoire that treated tradition as clay rather than a museum piece: that was the template. Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt passed through his band; so did dozens of others who left carrying the sound like a trade.

Monroe was exacting and proprietary about the form. He could be hard on a bandmate and generous to a young player in the same week. The Grand Ole Opry was his long home; festivals and highway miles filled the rest. In later years the white hat and the upright posture became as recognizable as the tremolo on "Blue Moon of Kentucky," the song Elvis would later turn into something else entirely while still tipping the hat to its author.

Bluegrass outlived the man who named it without softening into nostalgia alone. Players still argue about tempo and taste in his shadow. Rosine keeps the grave. The mandolin keeps the attack.

Services

Died September 9, 1996, in Springfield, Tennessee. Interment at Rosine Cemetery, Rosine, Kentucky.

NN-OBIT-2026-H039

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