Bill Malone is perhaps best known as the author of the still definitive study of American country music, *Country Music U.S.A.* (University of Texas Press, 1968, 1972.) He is arguably the creator of the modern genre of country music scholarship. In this latest volume, Malone presents a highly personal, well-thought-out and revealing discussion of country music and its connection with the southern working class.

Malone begins his study with two basic assumptions: that country music is southern, and that it has an intimate relationship with working people. He discusses, in detail, six realms occupied by country music. These are home, religion, rambling, frolic, humor, and politics.

Southerners and country music fans will find much of interest here. Malone readily admits that his membership in both of these groups colors his observations, but also gives him perceptive insight. Readers will discover themselves thinking, "Oh, yes, I’ve noticed that and always wondered why."

The discussion of the mother figure in southern culture and music is especially intriguing. Southerners likely never question the special position of "mother" in the South. Malone contrasts the reverential, almost holy position of the Southern mother figure with that of the Southern woman - often characterized in country song as one who cheats and lies and is often murdered. It is an interesting paradox.

Also fascinating is the discussion of the southern male, the "rambler" character and the development of the concept of Southern "honor." One can readily see, in stereotypes of contemporary Southern men, the continuation of cultural themes that originated in Europe centuries ago.

Bluegrass music is often overlooked or undervalued in discussions of country music. Malone gives this music its due here and identifies bluegrass as a vital sub-style which still embraces the classic country music themes.

The field of modern country music scholarship, for which Malone is largely responsible, is filled with discussions of the music and its origins. This study of the people who developed, nurtured, and lived it, is long overdue. Malone debunks the popular notion that American country music is Celtic or Elizabethan in origin. Scholars who wrote early descriptions of rural Southern music (perhaps feeling the music was inferior) found it more palatable and deserving of attention if they could connect it to a more elegant past.

Malone makes no such apologies for country music and confronts it head on as it is, rather than how a lesser scholar might wish it to be. Indeed, American country music is deserving of serious study because of its origins and development among the American southern working class, not despite them.

Malone is at his strongest when he discusses artists and music from the early classic country music era. Historical perspective and his obvious love of the subject matter result in interesting and informative discussions of country music and southern culture from before the advent of recording to the 1970s. This reader is less comfortable with Malone's discussion of and conclusions about more recent artists and their music. Malone also may give too much import to performers on the periphery of mainstream country music, such as Iris Dement, Tish Hinojosa, and James Talley. Discussion of country music and southern culture since the 1980s is perhaps best left to future authors.

Despite these reservations, this work is highly recommended to students of southern culture and country music fans with an interest in the origins and culture of the music. It is a valuable addition to the literature of country music.

*Joe Carr*