

Fiddling Way Out Yonder: The Life and Music of Melvin Wine (American Made Music Series)

Drew Beisswenger



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From a small mountain town in West Virginia, elder fiddler Melvin Wine has inspired musicians and music enthusiasts far beyond his homeplace.

Music, community, and tradition influence all aspects of life in this rural region. *Fiddling Way Out Yonder: The Life and Music of Melvin Wine* shows how in Wine's playing and teaching all three have created a vital and enduring legacy.

Wine has been honored nationally for his musical skills and his leadership role in an American musical tradition. A farmer, a coal miner, a father of ten children, and a deeply religious man, he has played music from the hard lessons of his own experience and shaped a musical tradition even while passing it to others.

Fiddling Way Out Yonder examines the fiddler, his music, and its context from a variety of perspectives. Many rousing fiddlers came from isolated mountain regions like Melvin's home stomp. The book makes a point to address the broad historical issues related both to North American fiddling and to Wine's personal history.

Wine has spent almost all of his ninety-two years in rural Braxton County, an area where the fiddle and dance traditions that were strong during his childhood and early adult life continue to be active today. Utilizing models from folklore studies and ethnomusicology, *Fiddling Way Out Yonder* discusses how community life and educational environment have affected Melvin's music and his approaches to performance.

Such a unique fiddler deserves close stylistic scrutiny. The book reveals Wine's particular tunings, his ways of holding the instrument, his licks, his bowing techniques and patterns, his tune categories, and his favorite keys. The book includes transcriptions and analyses of ten of Melvin's tunes, some of which are linked to minstrelsy, ballad singing traditions, and gospel music. Narratives discuss the background of each tune and how it has fit into Melvin's life.

While his music is tied to community and family traditions, Melvin is a unique and complex person. This biography heralds a musician who wants both to communicate the spirit of his mountains and to sway an audience into having an old-fashioned good time.

Drew Beisswenger is a music librarian at Southwest Missouri State University. His work has been published in *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, the *EMIE Bulletin*, *Mid-American Folklore*, and the *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies*.

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