My research during my fellowship at the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives during July 2013 explored the role of instrumental virtuosity in the musical variety shows of the ‘30s and ‘40s, particularly those that featured “hillbilly” music or the barn dance format. My secondary research—exploring the role of racial and cultural otherness within these programs—produced some fascinating material, though not enough to become a separate project of its own. Some aspects could be incorporated into a future project, and many others became integrated within my primary research on virtuosity, as I will explain below. The discourse surrounding the nature, purpose, and value of musical skill within these programs was far more extensive and nuanced than I could have hoped.

Virtuosity as an aspect of musical performance has been most thoroughly treated in classical music and other genres where technical skill is sometimes overtly celebrated—like heavy metal and jazz. Yet classical music remains the genre in which virtuosity is defined, so much so that V.A. Howard’s *Charm and Speed*, a theoretical account of virtuosity, assumes that it occurs only within classical traditions.¹ I would argue that while the term “virtuoso” undoubtedly originated within the Italian Renaissance, the phenomenon of virtuosity is not limited to those traditions, nor should it be defined primarily by how it follows their standards.

Before proceeding further, I should provide a baseline definition of what I mean by virtuosity. Thankfully, this definition need not be overly theoretical, and can be drawn from within the programs themselves. On the program *Captain Stubby and the Buccaneers*, an accordionist and clarinetist tore through a version of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumblebee*, a composition that has

¹ V. A. Howard, *Charm and Speed: Virtuosity in the Performing Arts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008.)
been absorbed into American pop culture as a showpiece of sorts (and featured as the theme-song to the radio program *The Green Hornet*). As the applause subsides, the announcer exclaims, “That was fine, Jerry and Tony, simply fine,” to which the duo responds in unison, “Only fine?” The announcer chuckles and then expands his response, defining virtuosity in the process: “Well, I could say it showed extraordinary manual dexterity combined with unique musical interpretation.” The fact is that pieces like *Flight of the Bumblebee* are unlikely to be valued only for their sonic qualities; listeners are meant to value the means as well as the end. Virtuosity within performance, then, is both the performer’s display of skill along with the audience’s recognition of that skill. As the quote from the radio host shows, listeners who appreciate a performance partially for its virtuosity value the skilled body of the performer in the process of making music as well as the musical outcome itself.

Though I claim audience recognition to be so central to virtuosity, I do not allow myself to become the final judge of what is and is not virtuosity. While there is such a thing as a poor performance, performance in general assumes skill. So the question to ask of most performances is not whether skill is present, but whether it is highlighted as a meaningful feature. In my research, there were performances that did not strike me as particularly impressive that nonetheless garnered praise from the radio hosts specifically for the skill evidenced in them. Likewise, there were some performances that I thought were tremendous that the programs seemed to treat as unremarkable. My approach was to defer to the programs for the most part; I was drawn to some performances more than others and as a guitarist in particular can identify technical display when I hear it, but I treated all discussions and overt claims of skill (whether intended as serious or comical) as worthy of attention. With these points of definition and scholarly perspective set up, I can further explain the progress of my research. Looking to these early country music programs for instances of virtuosity was motivated by two lines of inquiry.

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2 *Captain Stubby and the Buccaneers*, c. 1945, John Lair Collection, JL DT 004-B, track 34, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
First of all, though I was confident that these programs contained technically gifted musicians, I was uncertain the extent to which these skills were showcased. To what extent and in what ways were audiences encouraged to recognize this skill and consider it as part of the value of the music? Most scholarly accounts expect country and popular musics to draw their appeal from a combination of the music’s perceived sonic qualities (up-tempo, lush), the music’s origins (old-timey, hillbilly), and the identities of performers (as authentic country folk, hayseed comics, etc.) My research in the Appalachian Sound Archives showed that the display of skill is a closely related but largely ignored component. While making any distinction between the sound and the skill that produces it might seem arbitrary, such a distinction is mirrored in the language used to describe many performances. I take seriously the fact that comments after a performance are regularly not directly about the sound (e.g. “that was beautiful!”) but about the necessary skill involved (e.g. “That’s what I call really pickin’ it!”)

My second line of inquiry within my research on virtuosity concerned the scope of what might be understood as virtuosity. Rather than assuming that any virtuosic display harkens back to some classical (i.e. nineteenth-century European) model, how might different genres conceive of and value virtuosity in different ways? By using the same word I emphasize that there are similarities between different types of virtuosities, but I resist the tendency to understand all virtuosity as a derivation or departure from a canonic classical model.

One similarity between virtuosity in classical music and in these variety programs was that it is almost always held in tension with other values. In classical music, discussions of virtuosity are regularly balanced with the concern that it might overshadow the musical work that it creates. Virtuosity in these

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3 Clayton McMichen and his Georgia Wildcats, March 3, 1941, WHAS Radio Historical Collection, WS ET 41078, track 4, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

variety programs is held in tension with both the rural personas of the musicians and the domestic, familiar tone of the programs themselves. In the 1930s—perhaps even today—displays of technical mastery carried associations with the public, urban, sophisticated, and modern. To practitioners and promoters of early country music, these were the opposite values of their industry and artistry: the domestic, rural, down-home, and old-time. Rather than respecting these binaries, however, programs featured performers who claimed musical skills that were formidable and yet could be presented as distinctly “hillbilly.” These virtuosos kept it down home, still able to fit within the domestic spaces and not alienate the “friends and neighbors” to whom these programs were addressed.

Programs were careful to highlight skills that were different—and perhaps even beyond—those necessary for performing music that was urban or European. When the “Girls of the Golden West” performed “Two Cowgirls on the Lone Prairie” on the program Pinex Merry-Makers, it prompted an anecdote from Whitey Ford that enacted this very strategy. Ford highlighted their cowboy yodeling, saying, “I knowed a feller once that studied voice over in Europe and he studied three years and he couldn’t even do one yippee-ki-yi like that.”

5 The fact that yodeling was a tradition carried to the U.S. via European immigrants did not deter Ford from claiming this difference in ability.

As a side note, and an avenue for further research, it is worth noting that female performers like the Girls of the Golden West were far more likely to be praised for their skill in singing than anything else. It is true that there simply were more female vocalists than instrumentalists, but vocal skill also falls more within the boundaries of the gender roles of the time. Technical skill as a singer was mastery over one’s own body—similar in many ways to moral virtues—but technical mastery on an instrument was mastery over the external world, and this perhaps threatened to impinge upon the more masculinized terrain of technological adeptness.

5 *Pinex Merrymakers*, 1938, John Lair Collection, JL DT 001-A, track 18, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
Aside from these gendered aspects, yodeling garnered praise for its difficulty more than any singing of actual text. A 1939 Broadcast of the *Kentucky Play-Party* on WHAS praised the dedicated rehearsal of two vocalists who worked on their yodeling until it was “50% better than perfect.” Texted singing offered its own explanation of the music’s value in terms of a story or a nostalgic sentiment, but yodeling, it seems, was in danger of sounding like mere play. Framing it as an impressive and well-rehearsed feat of vocal agility avoided this pitfall.

The functionality of fiddling on a program often determined whether or not it would be highlighted as virtuosity. On those barn-dance programs that featured square-dance callers and an actual stage production, the tunes were often played fairly straightforwardly and fiddlers rarely garnered much comment. While the speed and execution was often impressive, this was dance music. Even as programs realized that audiences at home were *not* dancing, it seems that the image of performers dancing on stage occupied imaginations while providing a clear value and purpose for the music. Some listeners found this picture inadequate and complained about the repetitiveness of fiddle tunes, and instrumental pieces often became background to a commercial. On programs that did not feature such “live” dancing, like the early *Kentucky Play Party* programs or *Pinex Merry-Makers*, fiddlers are far more likely to be praised for their technical abilities and their performances are sometimes less “plain-spoken.” Removed from the context of dance music, they become breakdowns in the sense put forward in the 1944 publication *Hill Country Tunes*. No longer accompaniments, they are ‘broken-down dance tunes meant to be both sonically exciting and technically impressive.’

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6 *Kentucky Play Party*, 1-2-39, WHAS Radio Historical Collection, ET 39006/007, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

complex version of “Arkansas Traveller” on the *Kentucky Play* is one of the most clearly virtuosic fiddle displays in the collection.\(^8\)

Instrumental skill could be more or less highlighted for overtly commercial reasons, depending on a program’s sponsorship. The domestic personalities of these musicians lent themselves to selling the domestic goods that were the primary sponsors of hillbilly radio throughout the depression. In contrast, sustaining programs that lacked sponsors were far more likely to feature spectacular playing and to include scripts that made sure listeners were aware of the talent in-house. Designed to promote the musicians themselves, their songbooks, or the overall quality of musicians on a particular station, these programs often feature undeniable virtuosity that is likewise aggressively promoted, as when Harry Adams is described as “Rippin’ off a bit of one of the toughest numbers ever written for execution.”\(^9\)

After listening to the entirety of the relevant audio collections, I turned to the scripts in the John Lair Collection, many of which were older than the recordings. These earlier programs began in 1930 and often took a different approach to musical skill, attempting to distance themselves from any air of professionalism or musical mastery. They encouraged listeners to have parties of their own to dance and play games along with the musicians on the radio, hoping that the imagined radio barn dance or play-party might accompany actual dances across the country. As it became clear that this was not how the majority of listeners were approaching the programs, they increasingly encouraged listeners to instead recall what it was like “back then.”

A script from October 1931 urged listeners to remember “the most important thing in the regler old-timey parlor—the little ole parlor organ we usta

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all gether around Sunday nights an sing—not sing because we thought we wuz good at it an wanted to kinda show off, but jest because we felt good an actually enjoyed singin—jest the way we’re gonna all sing this ole song right now.”

Showing off, the script implies, would ruin the community atmosphere that the shows were attempting to nostalgically capture and recreate through radio. Another script from the era mentions the “good old religious songs we’ve been tryin’ to sing” and actually apologizes for the musicians’ lack of skill, saying “we’re jest sorry we can’t sing ‘em better.” The more nostalgic the sentiment, the less likely the program was to call attention to the skill of its performers.

One area that I unexpectedly encountered many dealings with musical skill was in the comedy of these programs. As with any variety show, comedy played a large role in programs of “hillbilly” or “folk” music—the two terms were often used interchangeably depending on the context—and many jokes played on a musician’s perceived ability (or lack thereof). In a script depicting a farcical fiddle contest, one competitor apologizes, claiming that he “missed the fiddle with the bow” on account of his poor eye-sight. Other routines included a judge sentencing fiddling Slim Miller to 30 days of practice for disturbing the peace with his apparently poor playing. After Slim finishes the first piece of his sentence, a cast-member shouts out “better make it 60!” The effectiveness of such jokes—and most humor—lies in their ability to cut both ways. For listeners who recognize Slim Miller as a fine fiddler, they are funny because they are so far from the truth; it’s good-natured ribbing amongst friends. For those that do not

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10 John Lair Collection, Box 31, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

11 John Lair Collection, Box 31, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

12 “Poultry Service” Program, February 11, 1933, John Lair Collection, Box 32, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

13 “International Oil Heating Company” Program, February 2, 1934, John Lair Collection, Box 33, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
appreciate his skill, they confirm that Slim really was the character that he played for most of his career: a loveable comedian but a mediocre musician. As Loyal Jones has written, though humor on these programs *could* serve to level the ground between the “country bumpkin” and the “city-slicker”, it could also serve to confirm negative rural stereotypes.¹⁴

These themes were carried over into the printed materials of radio stations, especially in the cartoons from the radio magazine *Stand By!* put out by WLS-Chicago. In one cartoon about Lillie Mae Ledford, Pa’s description of jazz can be taken as ignorant dismissal or as homespun horse sense (Figure I).¹⁵ Lillie Mae’s appreciation and excitement about the music might encourage the dismissal of Pa’s viewpoint, but the humor remains “oblique,” as Loyal Jones puts it.

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¹⁵ *Stand By!*, February 13, 1937, John Lair Collection, Box 25, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
In this cartoon from same issue of *Stand By!*, Pokey Martin displays his lack of musical knowledge through his complete befuddlement with the more elevated world of the piano (Figure II).
There is less room for ambivalence here—Pokey is clearly the hopeless hayseed. The fact that he displays this to another rural character—one that is more musically and socially competent—keeps it from becoming outright ridicule, and makes it clear that Pokey’s stereotype does not encompass all rural folk.

This “Otto” comic from 1936 shows the same approach to musical ability, this time applied to the marginalized figure of the immigrant (Figure III). Playing to the urban head of a talent department, the humor here is not just that Otto lacks musical mastery, but that he fundamentally fails to understand the relationship between his actions and the sound of his instrument. This is the opposite of virtuosity, a total lack of control combined with a complete absence of understanding.

**Figure III. Stand By! 8-8-36, John Lair Collection, Box 25.**

![Comic Strip](https://example.com/stand-by-8-8-36.png)

Other programs handled these same stereotypes of ineptness in a more nuanced and fruitful way. In a 1934 script for the *Hamlin Wizard Oil* program (part of the Saturday night string of National Barn Dance programs on WLS-Chicago), John Lair wrote an extended sketch that discussed the relative merits and the differences between urban music and that of the hills. After a performance of

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16 *Stand By!,* August 8, 1936, Lair Collection, Box 25, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
“Old Joe Clark,” Lair asks the schoolteacher character, “How’dje like that’n Miss Sally? Course it aint fine music like you hear back in Cincynatty, but we think it’s purty good fer this neck of the woods.”¹⁷ This humble comment gives way to Miss Sally admitting that she is mystified by the musical skill of her students, saying, “They insist that they don’t know one note from another, yet they sit here with an air of unconcern and play the most stirring music I’ve ever heard. How do they do it? What’s the secret?” Lair goes on to explain that they “just do,” and the sketch continues to assert yet again the difference between learned, urban music-making, and the seemingly natural performance of the local school children. Miss Sally further opines about a specific pupil, “I spend a whole week trying to teach him the simplest things about music and finally gave up in despair, telling him that he was hopeless and would never know anything about it.” The boy responds by bringing “an old, dilapidated violin” to the school and playing tunes that baffle the teacher with their complexity, much to the delight of his cohorts.

This sketch calls to the fore many important themes that continued throughout the ‘30s and ‘40s, and here my discussion of virtuosity intersects with my interest in the function of cultural and racial otherness in these programs. This image of the natural hillbilly is strikingly similar to racist stereotypes that viewed African Americans as naturally musical. It sounds almost positive (at least to music-lovers), yet it masks an underlying prejudice that denies either group the ability to learn, make conscious decisions, or develop a skill.

The hillbilly image was one that was separate from the American mainstream yet non-threatening. It was also one that became very marketable for entertainers. Thus, despite John Lair’s recognition that his radio performers were just that—skilled performers—the industry encouraged a presentation style that emphasized a folksiness that bordered on stereotype.

¹⁷ John Lair Collection, Box 32, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
Lair himself clearly saw through this, and even publicly combatted the misconception, running a headline in *Stand By*! that read, “No Hill Billies in Radio.” He went on:

“The fact is that if a radio microphone actually could pick up a real hill billy singing back in the hill country of the south, most listeners would probably tune out. The Typical mountaineer who has never been out of the hills sings because he likes to. He’s not too much concerned with how it sounds.”

Lair’s comments are unusually blunt for an industry that depended so heavily on claiming authenticity. Lair himself also regularly emphasized (or embellished) the regional identities of his performers, but his comments undercut the idea that these performers were natural and straight from the hills. This is not to deny the important regional styles and variations that many performers brought to their music, but to emphasize that these had been learned through experience, not merely inherited through some “hillbilly” identity. While Wayne W. Daniel has written that Lair knew “just how much polish it took to turn a real mountaineer into an accomplished performer,” it seems that he more often knew how to add just enough grit to already ambitious musicians. In 1940, Lair wrote to a business associate to be on the lookout for “a good voice we can convert to hillbilly.” “Hillbilly,” it seems, could be performed and put on. Skill, on the other hand, was non-negotiable. It was all but impossible to fake.

I do not mean to imply too much similarity between hillbilly and African-American stereotypes, but the way they were received within the musical

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18 *Stand By*!, March 16, 1935, John Lair Collection, Box 24, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.


20 John Lair, letter to Keyes, September 23, 1940, John Lair Collection, Box 16, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
mainstream had important parallels. For the mainstream listener, the image of the Southern slave and the Appalachian mountaineer functioned similarly, as markers of a tranquil past. The notable difference is that Appalachian whites were often referred to at the time as “our contemporary ancestors,” while contemporary African were almost entirely excluded from the programs I studied.

Overtly racist or racially charged content was fairly uncommon within most of the musical variety programs—the largest exception being a 1931 Lair script written for WLS that featured a faux-amateur blackface show that was an overt tribute to the minstrel show tradition.\textsuperscript{21} The script is undated, and it is difficult to know if it ever aired. Perhaps the most persistent racial content was the casual racial slur in the theme song to the 1938 program “Plantation Party” produced by John Lair. The opening of the show including a portion of “Down on the Old Plantation,” which included the lyrics “I hear the banjos ringing / Those melodies that linger in my heart / I hear the darkies singing / Those good old songs that make the teardrops start.”\textsuperscript{22}

Of course, songs from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century often included such phrases. Years later, after Lair had an angry exchange with NBC executives regarding the network’s requests to discontinue the use of “darkies” in the song “My Old Kentucky Home,” the phrase was replaced throughout his repertoire. A 1945 performance of “Down on the Old Plantation” on \textit{The Renfro Valley Barn Dance} now proclaimed, “I hear the old folks singing.” The removal of the racial slur emphasized just what its function had always been: to create a stable marker of the past that lacked the mobility and (sometimes troubled) agency of contemporary listeners. The purpose of the racial slur had been to locate an idyllic past on the plantation, one that was more sentimental than contemporary life might allow. While sentimental nostalgia had always had a

\textsuperscript{21} John Lair Collection, Box 31, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

\textsuperscript{22} John Lair Collection, JL DT 004-A, track 1, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
place in these variety programs, it was these nebulous “old folks” who became
the primary sources and targets of nostalgia during wartime, as John
Lair’s *Renfro Valley* programs in particular became even more nostalgic and
semi-religious. Perhaps the Hillbilly image had been treated too theatrically and
stretched too broadly throughout the 30s, so Lair reverted to an image of
American ancestors that was more general and less questionable (in terms of its
potential to be fabricated).

In terms of virtuosity, it seems that the skilled hillbilly gained traction
moving towards the ‘40s. Programs in the mid ‘30s increasingly praised their
talent. Often going beyond polite compliments, they framed the performances as
displays of extraordinary skill that were very different from—and occasionally far
beyond—those found in classical music. One way to maintain this distinction was
by making these comments with extremely countrified expressions. One M.C.
responds to a performance with a jovial, “Them boys kin shore tromp on the
strings, caint they”?23 Another performance prompted an enthusiastic: “Did ye
hear ole Hugh Cross climbin’ around on that banjer then? Up one side an down
the other!”24 While such expressions seem to be far-removed from the
“extraordinary manual dexterity” with which we started, their meanings are
equivalent. Continuing in this same script, the announcer stops marveling at
Cross’s skill in order to provide a description and history of his instrument.

“He’s banjer is one of these here old-timey ones with five strings on em
instead of four—you know, one of the strings pegged in about half way
down the neck of the instermint an they call that the thumb string. Some
fellers kin git a right smart of music outa that string but about all a
beginner kin find to do with it is git his thumb caught under it an purty nigh
cut off. You know folks, the banjer is the real shore-nuff old Kintucky

23 *Poultry Service Time*, February 11, 1933, John Lair Collection, Box 32, Berea College
Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.

24 *International Heating Oil*, February 18, 1932, John Lair Collection, Box 33, Berea
College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
mountain instermint. More of them up an down the creeks an hollers than any other kinda music box I know of. One reason fer that is that nearly all the boys down their makes their own instermints an a banjer is about the easiest of all to git up.”

Combining claims of instrumental mastery with descriptions of old-time or homemade instruments is a common trope in these programs, almost as if one counter-balances the other. If the musicians’ mastery threatened to bring them out of the realm of the approachable and “down-home,” programs were careful to position that mastery in relation to a corn-stalk fiddle, a rusty tin-fiddle or a homemade banjo. Describing the difficulty of gaining such mastery guarantees that listeners understand it as an uncommon and thus valuable skill, while the script is careful to note that the mastery was acquired through three years of secretive practice in a barn.25

Such humble projections not only fit the self-effacing hillbilly image, they also mirror a changing approach to radio in the 1930s. Radio in the 20s had been the subject of many civically minded and occasionally utopian fantasies. Robert Bingham, the original owner of WHAS in Louisville, dreamed of his station reaching to the most rural portions of Kentucky, “where a man can string an aerial from his cabin to the nearest pine tree, and sitting before a fire, have a pew in church, a seat at the opera, or a desk at the university.”26 During the 30s, radio was still viewed as a miraculous technology that “conquers time and space”27, but it was also taking on a less grandiose role. Instead of transforming the home or homestead into a public space, it enhanced the domestic world without

25 International Heating Oil Program, February 1, 1932, John Lair Collection, Box 33, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.


27 Stand By! April 2, 1935, Lair Collection, Box 24, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
threatening it. Neither fully public nor fully private, stations like WLS-Chicago regularly described their relationships to listeners as neighborly. The 1936 WLS Family Album proclaimed “the thrill and mystery of radio,” for allowing radio acts to visit listeners as “friends and neighbors.”

Along with its domestic guise, the medium of radio provided several crucial elements to producing virtuosity (in the sense of having it recognized and valued by a listener.) First of all, radio allowed a sense of “liveness.” Whether or not a program had been previously recorded and then rebroadcast, the listener experienced something that was happening. Unlike a record, radio was irrevocably progressing into the future, and could not simply be replayed or paused by a listener at will. A record might be seen as only retaining proof of the skill—a sort of verifying sonic document—but a radio gave one the sense of hearing music brought into existence as it was executed in real time. If, as I argue, virtuosity is about valuing the skill that produces a sound along with the sound itself, then being in the presence of both—at least in a sense—is an important factor.

As I have already shown, radio variety programs could also provide both preliminary framing and subsequent commentary on a performance. Though these were sometimes formulaic introductions and responses to performances, they could serve the important function of guiding a listener’s attention towards the skill necessary for producing a particular performance. While the liner notes to records could relay the same ideas, they lacked the sense of immediate response that radio fostered. Likewise, the many listener letters printed in Stand By! and those included in the John Lair Collection show that listeners were responding to the framing of these programs, determining their own way of valuing the performers’ skill.

Additional Avenues of Research

28 WLS Family Album, 1936, Lair Collection, Box 34, Berea College Special Collections & Archives, Berea, Ky.
One unexpected path that opened up during my research was a potential project on the relationship between disability and virtuosity. This came through the performances of Emory Martin on the *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*, where he was almost always described as “the one-armed banjo player.” Martin was a good banjo player—that needs no qualifications—but his performances (and his skill) were almost always presented in relation to his disability.

Difficulty has always been part of virtuoso performances, and it can be primary (i.e. demanded by the notes one is going to play) or secondary (i.e. guitarists playing behind their heads, violinists playing an entire piece on a single string, pianists laying down on their backs in order to play upside down). Emory Martin’s disability led him to take what would have been secondary virtuosity (playing with feet, teeth, part of his arm), and make it his primary way of relating to his instrument. He created innovative ways to play that were demanded by his physical state, and yet the audience’s recognition of his skill often resembled the sort of reception usually given secondary virtuosity. His reception as a virtuoso is in some ways dependent on his disability, and his promotion on these programs hovers ambivalently between the celebration of an accomplished musician who overcame unique challenges and exotic, perhaps exploitative caricature. This issue is complex, and one that I am searching out critical models to help work through. Given the recent interest in music and disability studies, it could interact fruitfully with much current scholarship.  

**Conclusion**

This activity report has touched only the highlights of the materials I found during my fellowship in the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives. The quality and amount of materials was beyond my expectation, and I have a wealth

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audio and written documents with which to complete a full-length journal article. In preparation for that, I have completed two drafts of a conference paper currently titled “Hillbilly Virtuosity: Showcasing Musical Skill in a Down-Home Way,” and am in the process of determining which conferences will provide the best arena for presenting and receiving feedback on my work.

I am considering for this fall presenting at the Southeast Chapter of the American Musicological Society or the South Central Graduate Music Consortium. I will definitely be submitting a version of this paper for the meeting of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music that meets in March 2014, and I will likely submit it to the national meeting of American Musicological Society, whose deadline is early January 2013. Beyond this specific project, my general ideas about virtuosity have been shaped during this research, and will undoubtedly be reflected as I pursue dissertation work on the guitar, virtuosity, and technology in America during the twentieth century. After meeting with my advisor this fall, I will begin determining what parts of this research might be directly incorporated into that dissertation proposal.