

American★ Songwriter

the craft of music

Best of the Flatt & Scruggs TV Show: Classic Bluegrass from 1956 to 1962,
Vols. 1 & 2
(SHANACHIE)
Four stars

Before *The Ballad of Jed Clampett*, and long before their ascension to bluegrass royalty, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, and the Foggy Mountain Boys hosted *Flatt & Scruggs Grand Ole Opry*, a continuum of their Martha White-sponsored radio show, which aired throughout the South during the '50s and '60s. The boys have a demeanor for radio, as evidenced by fiddle player Paul Warren's goofy grins, Flatt's staid delivery and Scruggs' bemused expression as he works his three-fingered magic on the banjo. And that's the real treat here—savoring a rare, intimate glimpse of the Foggy Mountain Boys in their uninhibited prime. Now on DVD are the first selections from 36 master tapes (there are two half hour episodes per disc, with more releases to follow) that were discovered and donated to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Highlights include classic takes of *Earl's Breakdown* and *Foggy Mountain Special*, never released sacred numbers such as *Precious Memories* and *Are You Washed in the Blood*, and a mesmerizing rendition of *Wildwood Flower* with guest Mother Maybelle Carter. These black-and-white performances show a seasoned, hardworking band at their best, and preserve a candid moment in bluegrass music history.—TOM WILMES