

A Transforming Voice in a Changing Genre
- Alison Krauss

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PREFACE

If you asked me to guess, I would have said that it happened last week. It was one of those defining moments, which feels like days and at the same time a lifetime ago.

My dad had picked me up from school and we were in the car on our way home. My dad (one of the few country- and bluegrass fans who had survived the 80s and 90s) put on a CD; The Cox Family. This group wasn't new to me, but this particular CD was. I wasn't paying too much attention to the bluegrass gospel music coming out of the car stereo, other than the usual humming along to the slightly predictable melody and harmony. Suddenly; all the clichés I knew involving voices and angels popped into my head when Her voice hit me like a ton of bricks. With an impact with consequences not far from a head injury: Everything around me went blurry and I had no sense of where I was or what had just happened. All I could hear was Her voice and I remember saying: "Who is that? Who is that voice?" My dad quickly answered: "That's Alison Krauss!" and smiled. I suspect he knew what was about to happen. Right there and then, in that car, Alison Krauss triggered two miracles: First of all she made a car stereo sound like something I had read to be the sound of heaven. Secondly, she managed to get a completely self-centred 16-year old to be obsessed with someone other than herself.

Just as much as I loved her voice, I was also equally fascinated by the effect her voice had on me. I have always been the analytical type, and I couldn't rest until I knew: What was her secret? Why do I love this? What is she doing right? And being 16 years old I quickly moved to questions like: How can I sound like her? How can I do what she has done? How can I touch somebody with my singing the way she does so effortlessly? My fascination with her grew even more when my dad told me her age on this recording, and that she didn't just sing on this album, she had also produced it. When he continued by telling me how she had been a child prodigy on the fiddle and hadn't even been that interested in becoming a singer, the scenario of a world not having heard her voice startled me. That would have been nothing less than a tragedy! I started gathering everything I could find of recorded tracks and albums by or with Alison Krauss. I quickly realised that I loved it all! Her voice had definitely changed from project to project and from year to year, but I didn't care! I loved it!

This happened in the late 90s, only a couple of years prior to the movie, which would put bluegrass back on the charts in the States and the rest of the world. The movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, by the Coen-brothers, premiered in 2000. I remember clearly how, in the late 90s and early 2000s, I was made fun of when putting on a bluegrass CD. I once had a friend burst into laughter when hearing the banjo-picking intro on one of my favourite songs. That hurt. What hurt even more: Two years later that same friend bragged about how she had loved and listened to bluegrass for years, and was the one who introduced me to the genre. Along with the rest of the world who had seen *O Brother*, she felt that she had stumbled across the purest form of authentic music, and now everybody wanted to be a part of it. Everybody! My jazz-playing friends. My RnB singing friends. My gospel fanatic friends. Every pop singer in Norway suddenly had a mandolin in his or her line up. Dobro and banjo could be seen and heard on Norwegian Idol. Jazz musicians released embarrassing “bluegrass albums” which completely lacked the energy and authenticity I loved. While all this went on around me I was grieving. I wanted to move on, to another form of pure and believable music that no one could ‘steal’ from me or commercialise, but I couldn’t. My heart was set on bluegrass, and Alison Krauss still had a hold on me.

I travelled the world to see her perform with Union Station. I survived heartbreaks with her *Forget about it*. I felt safe while singing along on *Palm of your hand*. I prayed for miracles while singing *Down in the river to pray* and I danced and sang along to her cover of *Oh Atlanta*. The set list of my own concerts always included *A Living Prayer* and before I knew it... I was 33 years old. The car incident happened 17 years ago and the *O Brother*-phenomenon has since cooled down. In contrast to this; I have, through digging deeper into this genre, visiting Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival and chatting with her closest friends, grown even fonder of bluegrass and Alison Krauss. I can see clearly now how Alison Krauss, somewhat mysteriously, has been there through all my ups and downs in life, faith and music throughout almost half of my life.

Despite my efforts to contact her these last few years she is living her life completely oblivious of the impact she has had on mine. Although she is blissfully unaware, Alison Krauss has shaped me in so many ways, and I somehow feel that I owe her for the person and singer I am today. I also owe it to myself (the 33 year old me and the 16 year old me) to find the answers to some of the questions that have lingered in the back my head since that day in

the car. On behalf of both myself, and other fans who went through a musical and identity crisis in the early 2000s, I need to find the reason for my strong feelings when being ridiculed for my choice of music, only to be dragged against my will into mainstream music just a couple of years later.

Alison Krauss and bluegrass have not stood still for the last 17 years. Her music, her voice and the genre have all changed. Because of *O Brother*? Because of the music industry? Because of personal preferences and growth? Even if change is inevitable you will still today find the hard-core bluegrass purist, who (like me) find that everything is moving just a little too fast with the mainstream sometimes. What amazes me is this: Just like myself the purists still seem to love Alison Krauss. This takes me back to the question: How does she do it? So here it is, my thanks to Alison Krauss and (hopefully) the answers to some of my questions:

A Transforming Voice in a Changing Genre - Alison Krauss

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements...</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>vii</i>
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Alison Krauss - A transforming Voice in a Changing Genre	1
1.2. Chapters, methods and literature	2
1.2.1. Bluegrass – the history	3
1.2.2. Alison Krauss’ voice and story	5
1.2.3. Bluegrass: The authentic genre now and then	7
1.2.3.1. The Authentic past	8
1.2.3.2. The Authentic present	9
2. BLUEGRASS – THE HISTORY	13
2.1. History is being made	13
2.2. Branching out	14
2.3. The Bluegrass Girls	17
2.3.1. ‘Man’s music?’	17
2.3.2. The 40s: Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Girls	20
2.3.3. The 50s: Even more women swimming against the tide	23
2.3.4. Slow, but steady, through the 60s	27
2.3.5. The women of the 70s and 80s	31
2.3.6. Paving the way for the queen	36
2.3.7. Worth fighting for?	37
3. ALISON KRAUSS – HER VOICE, HER STORY	39
3.1. Alison Krauss	39
3.2. Alison Krauss – Her story	40
3.3. Alison Krauss - Her voice	50
3.3.1. The old recipe – The genre rules	50
3.3.2. Her transforming voice – The analysis	57
1: <i>Too Late to Cry (1987)</i>	<i>61</i>
2: <i>Every Time You Say Goodbye (1992)</i>	<i>67</i>

3: <i>Forget About It</i> (1999)	72
4: <i>New Favourite</i> (2001)	75
5: <i>Paper Airplane</i> (2011)	79
3.3.3. Concluding the analysis	83
4. AUTHENTICITY: PAST AND PRESENT	84
4.1. The authentic past	84
4.1.1. High and lonesome vocals	87
4.1.2. Lonely and even higher lyrics	88
4.2. The authentic present	90
4.2.1. So what is authentic?	90
4.2.2. Perceived authenticity	92
4.2.3. Progressive purists	95
5. CONCLUSION: AN UNLIKELY AND RELUCTANT QUEEN	101
SOURCES	104
APPENDIX	109

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ALISON KRAUSS - A TRANSFORMING VOICE IN A CHANGING GENRE

In 2016 Alison Krauss is being described both as a *bluegrass queen* and a *pop¹ artist*. Back in 1987 she was criticized for having a voice, which was “too forceful”, and with a tendency “toward shrillness (Henry 2013:319).” Today she is praised for her “controlled whispery delivery (Henry 2013:319).” The description of her voice in the 80s fits the title of a bluegrass queen much more than her current whispery approach does. In spite of this, or I might argue because of this, she is to this date the most Grammy award winning singer ever and ranks number 3 as the most winning artist of all time, with her impressive collection of 27 awards (alisonkrauss.com).

Although her attributes are impressive, she is far from the typical pop star when it comes to fame and lifestyle. She is working hard to keep herself and her only child away from the public eye, and like few others before her, she has succeeded in keeping her private life private. The way she is portrayed in interviews, music videos and by colleagues as down-to-earth, humble and shy is an image miles away from other female pop artists of our time. This might be one of the reasons why I find myself explaining over and over again who she is, and people normally don't nod until I mention Robert Plant or perhaps *O Brother Where Art Thou?* Being a huge fan of her bluegrass albums it always puzzles me that her amazing contribution to the bluegrass catalogue is not known in Scandinavia. I suspect that this is due to the fact that bluegrass as a genre has been stereotyped as hillbilly, low culture and too closely associated with country music. However, things have changed, in Norway as well, and in the last decade we have seen an increased interest in acoustic music and the bluegrass genre worldwide.

With a little help from the folk revival movement in the 60s and 70s and the *O Brother-*phenomenon early 2000, Alison Krauss' voice has travelled over the Atlantic. With her now

¹ I am referring to the wide definition of popular music found in the Oxford Dictionary (en.oxforddictionaries.com) when using the word 'pop' or 'pop music' throughout this thesis.

airy voice, accessible bluegrass and easy listening music (with many a reference to popular music), she has opened the floodgate for the huge variety we today call bluegrass. The question is what impact has the transforming of her voice and the changing of the genre the last decades had on the bluegrass community, its musicians and its fans? This brings me to the main question of this thesis: *How and why is Krauss perpetually perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist when she keeps disrupting the boundaries of the genre?*

1.2. CHAPTERS, METHODS AND LITERATURE

To address the main question of this thesis, I intend to present a historicization of the genre, an analysis of Alison Krauss' voice and person, and a discussion of the genre's authentic past and present. This thesis therefore comprises of three main sections:

Bluegrass - The history

Alison Krauss - Her Story, her Voice

Authenticity: Past and present.

To gain a deeper understanding of what changes the genre has seen, and the consequences of the changes, the chapter **Bluegrass - The history** will contain a thorough presentation of the bluegrass genre. I am presenting its history and some of its original genre features. How has the genre changed and who have taken on the role as pioneers? There will be a main focus on the women carving their way through a male dominated society. Next, is a chapter on Alison Krauss and an analysis of her voice: **Alison Krauss – Her story, her voice**. This section will contain a presentation of Alison Krauss as an artist and an analysis of her transforming voice to try to answer the question of her authenticity as a bluegrass artist. It will also contain a presentation of the original genre rules to which I will compare my findings throughout the analysis.

In the third and final section; **Authenticity: Past and present** I will discuss the evolution of the genre and my findings from history, fieldwork, interviews and the analysis of Alison Krauss in the light of authenticity in bluegrass and also the discourse of authenticity and genre in general. The discourse on authenticity is comprehensive, and I am only scratching the surface. I will focus my discussion on authenticity within bluegrass. To help me answer the main question of this thesis, another question surfaces in this chapter: What made the listener

perceive bluegrass as authentic in the past, and what makes today's listeners perceive bluegrass as authentic?

1.2.1. BLUEGRASS – THE HISTORY

Alison Krauss has from the very start of her career been pushing the boundaries of what we call traditional bluegrass. Yet, her fans, even some hard-core purists, perceive her as an authentic bluegrass singer. How does she pull this off? For a genre where the genre rules are so closely linked to authenticity this will be one of the main questions to answer in this paper. To tackle these questions, I need to take a closer look at the genre; how it came to be and how it has evolved. Where is bluegrass coming from and why are the genre rules so important for its authentic perception? I will present the genre's origin, history and genre features in an historical and theoretical overview. My main focus will be on the pioneers of the genre who, from the start, have made their own permanent marks by challenging Bill Monroe's strict rules. My main sources on the history of bluegrass and on its genre features are Murphy H. Henry (2013), Neil Rosenberg (2005), Robert Cantwell (2003), Jocelyn R. Neal (2013) and Stephanie P. Ledgin (2006). I have also turned to publications on bluegrass, which were part of larger works on country music as my sources, including Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann (2003) and Jason Toynbee (2000). It should also be emphasized that listening to bluegrass music has been a major source of my perspective. Findings through fieldwork (containing interviews, participation in classes/workshops and observations) done at The Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival July 2016 are also frequently used as a source throughout this thesis.

The men who stood up against the dictatorship of Bill Monroe to evolve the genre in the direction they felt was natural and necessary to achieve commercial success, or to be true to their own musical preferences, need to get their names mentioned in the historicization of the genre. Even Flatt and Scruggs, and the Foggy Mountain Boys, who are considered as representatives of original bluegrass today, were accused of having a progressive approach at the time. The band even split in the 60s due to musical disagreements. You also had The Osborne Brothers who were pushing the boundaries already in the late 50s with their 'commercial' sound, which provoked the most hard-core purists.

It is important to realize that Alison Krauss was not the first to challenge the genre rules. She would not be where she is today if it were not for the men and women who paved the way.

What is unique to Alison Krauss is that while she is pushing the boundaries of bluegrass, or featuring on projects way beyond the borders of the genre, she is still considered a bluegrass monarch (Ledgin 2006:88). How has it been possible for Alison Krauss to gain the position she holds today? How could a female musician and singer become one of the most successful artists to come out of this male dominated genre?

The women fighting her battle decades ago need to be acknowledged and given the space in history that they deserve. They had to endure discrimination, public humiliation and sexist remarks. If you take a close look at the history, you do find women present in the genre from the very beginning, but they are often left out of the history books. Why is that? One of the musicians playing alongside Bill Monroe the years when the genre was shaped was Sally Ann Forrester. I find it interesting that she was set to play the accordion, a non-bluegrass instrument. Is this why she is eliminated from the history books? Was the accordion even her choice of instrument? There are no records of her playing accordion before Monroe's band, so why wasn't she offered a spot as a singer, for clearly she was good at it (Henry 2013:13)? But when you read that Rounder Record's executive, Ken Irwin, in 2003 said that he still received letters saying: "Women can't sing bluegrass" (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:409) it is more than likely that the reason for Forrester not being the vocalist was due to anything but lack of talent, but had everything to do with her gender. Delia Bell is quoted in *Finding Her Voice* (2013) explaining one reason for women being absent in the bluegrass scene for several decades. Her theory is also closely connected to gender roles and expectations from society: "Women haven't had the opportunity men do. Men can just pick up and stay out a week, go to a festival, while women stay at home, take care of kids, keep house, and all of that. They don't have the opportunity to get out and learn... (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:395)" Hazel Dickens, of Hazel and Alice, shared the same experience as Delia Bell and is describing her married life as a musical dry spell: "...all my married life I wasn't that involved with my music... It was hard for me with the kids, it was always a huge problem about who was going to babysit (Henry 2013:124).

Fortunately one does find the strong women, such as Wilma Lee Cooper who, in many ways, reminds me of Alison Krauss. She also had a foot in two worlds, country and bluegrass, without losing credibility in either. In 1976, she was called "the most powerful, exciting, and enduring of all female singers of traditional country music (Henry 2013:25)." by the reviewer

quoted in Henry. This was in spite of the loud electric bass, drums or the backup singers from Nashville, and we are slowly moving closer and closer to women being accepted! But then you read about the mandolin player Gloria Bell. Jimmy Martin told her that he didn't want girls playing mandolin, so he offered her a position on the snare drum (Henry 2013:107). This was in the 70s, and maybe still to be expected and accepted. However, reading about Alison Brown's encounter with Bill Monroe in a hotel room in the 80s puts the women further back in line once again. When reading their history I get a sense that these women were pushing themselves hard to take two steps forward, but that they were somehow always forced to take one step back.

To sum up this first section: In the chapter on Bluegrass history I present some of the important genre features of this genre and the historic origin and evolution of bluegrass from its very beginning and up until today. I try to tell the story of the women pioneers and give them the acknowledgment they deserve. I also take a closer look at why the women were left out of the history books and why they haven't been given credit for their sacrifice and their contribution to the genre.

Another relevant topic concerning bluegrass is that of race. While I will not take on the task of discussing race in this thesis, I acknowledge its importance in today's bluegrass society, maybe as equally important as the issue of gender today. When visiting the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in 2016 I counted 8 (out of approximately 6000) people with an African-American background (which included two adopted siblings), and none of them were seen or heard on stage.² I have also chosen to steer away from the debate surrounding who named the genre and who it was that assigned the title 'Father of Bluegrass' to Bill Monroe. These are interesting parts of the origin of the genre, but I have chosen to not dwell on them in this thesis.³

1.2.2. ALISON KRAUSS' VOICE AND STORY

The main focus in this thesis will be on Alison Krauss and her transforming voice. I will emphasize her contribution to the genre, her artistic career and also focus on how and why she

² To read more on bluegrass and race I recommend Cantwell (2003) and bluegrassunlimited.com as good sources.

³ To read more on bluegrass history I recommend Cantwell (2003), Ledgin (2006) and Rosenberg (2005).

is perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist. Why is it that she can capture such a large range of audience with her voice, and that ‘everyone’, from the bluegrass purists to rock musicians, are captivated by her vocal approach? What is her recipe for a believable and authentic delivery of bluegrass music, when she sounds more and more like a pop singer? Another issue, which needs to be addressed when referring to bluegrass history and when talking about Alison Krauss as an artist, is the issue of gender. In chapter one I have attempted to situate the female pioneers historically, but in this chapter I place Alison Krauss within the history of bluegrass. Both as a female pioneer, but also as a musical pioneer. This will aid an understanding of why Alison Krauss has become the spokesperson for the genre in general, and not only for women in the genre.

My claim is that Alison Krauss has changed both her own voice and the genre without losing her credibility and authenticity as a bluegrass artist. To support this statement I have taken a closer look at her musical career and the development of her voice by analysing her changing voice and her musical choices. I have selected five albums where I am analysing the vocals on the title track. All albums are on the bluegrass label Rounder Records. Two out of the five albums are solo projects, and three of the albums are recorded as the band Alison Krauss & Union Station. I have chosen title tracks because they often ‘set the tone’ and send a strong message from the artists to the audience regarding the theme of the album. My goal with the vocal analysis is to detect what changes have occurred and try to analyse the results of these changes for that particular recording, for her career especially and the genre in general. Also, to find her authentic ‘alibi’ when she keeps moving away from the genre features of bluegrass. I have consciously omitted analysing her projects outside the genre, with artists like Robert Plant and Brad Paisley. I still recognize that these projects have been a part of her evolution as an artist and also had an impact on her changing voice, but I don’t find it relevant to analyse those projects for genre features or breaches regarding bluegrass. These recordings have other sound ideals in other genres and are therefore not interesting for this particular thesis with a main focus on Alison Krauss and bluegrass. The sound ideals and genre features of bluegrass will be thoroughly presented in this chapter, and used as a reference throughout the analysis to provide a guideline as to what extent Alison Krauss is pushing the boundaries and being innovative.

I have analysed Alison Krauss' voice with a focus on genre features or genre 'breaches'. This is an important focus with her constantly pushing the genre in a different direction and pushing her voice and career towards popular music. I will also mention vocal techniques that have to do with aging. I initially thought that this wouldn't be significant, or even relevant, when dealing with bluegrass and the evolution of the genre, but post analysis and fieldwork I find myself questioning my earliest reassertions. The questions I ask myself in this chapter are: How has she changed as a singer and artist, and how have these changes contributed to the evolution of bluegrass, and with what consequences? If her alibi for authenticity is no longer to be found in her voice, or not even in the music at all, where is it?

When writing about Alison Krauss as an artist my main sources are Ledgin (2006), Henry (2013), Bufwack and Oermann (2003), but also Internet sites like alisonkrauss.com. A main source is also her recorded albums with Rounder Records, music videos and concerts. My main sources on genre features and bluegrass vocals are Fred Bartenstein (fredbartenstein.com), Leda Scarce, (2016), Ledgin (2006), Cantwell (2003), and Rosenberg (2005). In addition to my own vocal analysis of Alison Krauss voice I have made a small series of qualitative interviews, when visiting the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in 2016. This is not to establish if there has been any vocal change, my analysis and my thesis has already concluded that there has been. The interviewees are colleagues and close friends of Alison Krauss, and they contribute with an exclusive angle that is not to be found in any other literature. There are obviously many factors to consider when doing qualitative interviews, and I am fully aware that the amount of interviewees does not, under any circumstances, give me scientific proof for my own findings (Kvale and Brinkmann 2012:179). Despite this, my interviewees' perception of Alison Krauss and her voice, as both friends and a part of the bluegrass community, has been a valuable asset for me and I am proud to include them in my thesis.

1.2.3. BLUEGRASS: THE AUTHENTIC GENRE NOW AND THEN

Bluegrass originated in the 40s and 50s, and because of its associations with rednecks and hillbillies it is often considered the 'stripped down cousin' of country music (Cantwell 2003:205). The genre has been low on record sales, radio time, and was often used in comical settings to caricature farmers and hillbilly life when on television. However, today one often reads how Alison Krauss is called both a bluegrass artist and a pop artist (itunes.com).

Knowing the history of the genre this description is both highly problematic and a huge contradiction. There is a major gap between the genre status in the 50s and 90s and where we find ourselves today. In the 90s it would have been unthinkable that one of the most Grammy award winning artists of all times was a bluegrass artist! The folk revival movement in the 60s and 70s and the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000) are both important contributors to the commercialisation of the genre. Throughout this thesis I will also argue that Alison Krauss, and the pioneers before her time, have played a huge part in this process. This narrow and 'low cultured' music now has a place in the popular music scene, but did the authenticity of the genre get lost on the way? This chapter on authenticity will also address questions like: Where is authenticity to be found now, as opposed to when the genre emerged? Is Alison Krauss a pioneer who pushes bluegrass further and further away from its roots, or is she a preserver in today's bluegrass scene? I will also revisit the analysis and continue on my search to discover how Alison Krauss can be perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist. When discussing the topics of authenticity and genre my main sources are Cantwell (2003), Simon Frith (1998), Stan Hawkins (2002 and 2011), Fabian Holt (2007), Anne Karppinen (2016), Ledgin (2006), Alan Moore (2012), Rosenberg (2005), Jonathan T. King (2015) and fieldwork done at the Grey Fox Bluegrass festival in July 2016.

1.2.3.1. THE AUTHENTIC PAST

Ever since Bluegrass emerged it has been closely linked to an authentic American way of life. Still today, when I was talking to artists at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016, they all mentioned the word 'authentic' when talking about the genre and their love for it (Appendix 1). Authenticity is important in any genre, and can be detected within all music (Moore 2012:272). What makes bluegrass authentic is to be found in its history and origin. It can be detected in the lyrics, in the techniques used when playing and singing, in the tempo, in the themes, in gender rules and in the choice of instruments. The lifestyle, stage outfits, and hairstyle also determine how authentic we perceive a bluegrass musician and artist to be. King (2015) even writes in his dissertation how authenticity could be ascribed the same purpose as a genre feature:

Today, due to its acoustic instrumentation, its extreme timbral palette (commonly employing high registers, tight harmonies and fast tempos), its emphases on instrumental technique and virtuosity, its widespread performance by passionate amateur musicians, and its highly-foregrounded adherence to its own aesthetic tenets, bluegrass has come to function as a vital marker of musical authenticity in the world

of country music more generally. This perceived authenticity is as much a part of bluegrass's identity as any of these sonic features (King 2015:9).

Alan Moore (2012) writes about how authenticity can be found in "...the maintenance of a performance practice associated with a particular tradition or through a maintenance of their own performance practice (Moore 2012:265)." The first part of this definition is suitable for bluegrass in its early days, but also for today's purists. Cantwell mentions that one main reason why bluegrass is perceived as authentic lays in the vocals and lyrics (Cantwell 2003:7). David Brackett (2000) mentions the importance of the voice and the lyrics, and writes how the lyrics are not only telling a story, but also giving us information of the genre, the audience and how voice and lyrics are crucial in how authentic we as listeners perceive a song (Brackett 2000:78). His views are evident in the work of Frith, who also emphasizes, how the language used in the lyrics gives us an indication of genre (Frith 1998:166). This is not only true in bluegrass, but as Brackett writes; this can also be heard in country music (Brackett 2000:78).

Monroe himself is one important reason for bluegrass being linked to authenticity. Being the father and creator of bluegrass, listeners took for granted that it was his 'traditional' upbringing that was represented in his music (Peterson 1997:214). The lack of a commercial image and sound also made audiences outside the Appalachian region detect bluegrass as an authentic link back to the 'good old days', (Cantwell 2003:69). In this chapter on authenticity I will try to sum up the 'ole recipe' for the traditional bluegrass sound, and try to make a convincing argument why sticking to this traditional recipe and ingredients was crucial if you wanted to be perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist. The genre of bluegrass has changed, and so has its audience. What used to be detected as authentic doesn't necessarily resonate with the progressive musicians and their young listeners. What will the consequences of this evolution, which we have witnessed since the folk revival, be for the genre of bluegrass? And while being true to tradition might have been the key to authenticity in the past (Karppinen 2016:137), where is the key to the authentic present?

1.2.3.2. THE AUTHENTIC PRESENT

Paradoxically, albeit inevitably, bluegrass has changed during the last 40 years, and it has been moving further and further away from the ideal sound created by Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys in the 40s and 50s. One might argue that bluegrass is therefore moving away from its authentic nature. Alison Krauss has been one of the main contributors in this

evolution the last 20 years. Ever since her first album in 1989 she has been pushing boundaries of what we call bluegrass by challenging the genre rules and by being a woman of her position. However, Alison Krauss has not been revitalising bluegrass all on her own. She has had help from other pioneers, both female and male. Faith and luck (or perhaps a highly calculated commercial strategy) gave bluegrass a huge commercial boost in the year 2000, and as a result you could suddenly hear banjo and mandolin on ‘every other’ pop album. A huge amount of bands calling themselves ‘bluegrass’ popped up in every corner of the world, including Norway. This leads me to the situation today, which also needs to be discussed in this chapter.⁴

The publicity the genre has experienced these last years, and that it is by some even being labelled mainstream⁵, leads me to discuss the consequences this new status has had on the genre and the bluegrass community. What did these huge changes in popularity after the year 2000 do to the music, the old fans, the purists, or what Holt calls the Center Collectivities (Holt 2007:21). Would ‘pure’ bluegrass ever have made the hit lists, or even survived to this day, if innovation or commercialization didn’t take place? It is easy to draw the conclusion that the genre is alive because of the folk revival or *O Brother*, but does the modern listener detect the High Lonesome Sound, the devastating lyrics, the stylistic approach to both playing and singing as authentic and believable in their culture?

What strikes me while reading the history of the allegedly rigid genre of bluegrass is that none of the well-known bands following in Monroe’s footsteps are ‘pure’ bluegrass bands doing it the ‘right’ way. However, you do have the occasional purist throughout history and even today, and where would Alison Krauss (or bluegrass) be today if we didn’t have someone holding back and being restrictive when it came to change and innovation? With that being said: What would have happened to bluegrass if the Stanley brothers, Hazel and Alice or Alison Krauss didn’t make bluegrass ‘their own’ and approachable to the masses?

As a result of the evolution and commercializing of the genre, we now hear the term

⁴ I will only concentrate on the history and situation of bluegrass in The USA, although I recognize that bluegrass has a life of its own in several countries in the world, including Norway.

⁵ As defined in the Oxford Dictionary as: ”The ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional (en.oxforddictionary.com)”.

‘Bluegrass’ used as a headliner for music that actually can be divided into three ‘sub’ genres (Rosenberg 2005:340): First you have the *original bluegrass*, ‘created’ by Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. These musicians (some of them still alive today) and fans are what Holt would name the Center Collectivities (Holt 2007:21). Secondly you have the *purists*, whose goal is to recreate the original sound. These musicians are also a part of the hard core of traditional bluegrass musicians and would place themselves within the center collectivities. Third, and also the largest sub genre, you have *progressive bluegrass* or *new grass*.⁶ This is where you find Alison Krauss, Nickel Creek, Bèla Fleck, Sierra Hull, Chris Thile, and Sam Bush, just to mention a few.

Original bluegrass and the purists have the same sound as their goal. The ideal sound lies in the past, and their mission is to preserve the sound of pure original bluegrass for the future. The history and genre features are crucial for this group of musicians, and why their audience perceives their music as authentic. The third and largest sub genre, the progressive, is more complex and one might argue, not without challenges. Within this category you will find a wide range of musical expressions. Musicians and fans in this category might feel that they are a part of the bluegrass community, but they are often accused of lacking understanding of the genre’s history and that they are in it for the money. Amongst artist labelled new or progressive bluegrass today you will for instance find Rhonda Vincent. Her voice is ‘text book’ bluegrass (except for the fact that she is a woman), but as an artist she reminds you more of a country music star. You also have Sierra Hull, who can play bluegrass standards on mandolin that would impress the most hard-core purist. At the same time her songwriting is ‘off topic’ and not ‘typical bluegrass’. You also have Alison Krauss who, from her album debut, has drawn the sound of bluegrass closer and closer to popular music. Krauss’ former band mate Alison Brown plays the banjo, but her latest records leans more towards jazz than bluegrass. The Dixie Chicks are another example; starting out as a bluegrass band, but hitting the charts with their country and rock sound and then merging with contemporary country. As a result of the evolution in bluegrass we now have; purists (playing the traditional music on traditional instruments) alongside an all girl pop group (with an occasional banjo or mandolin instrumental) calling themselves bluegrass musicians. The genre is moving so far away from its origin that an untrained ear might not be able to separate bluegrass from country, pop or

⁶ I do recognize that it is not uncommon to refer to *Bluegrass Gospel* as one sub-genre. I believe that bluegrass gospel is to be found within all of the three categories that I have presented, and which refers to Rosenberg’s (2005) work.

singer-songwriters from the charts. Where will this evolution end up?

In this chapter dealing with issues of authenticity I present different views and theories on authenticity, and how these have changed within the pop (as opposed to classical music) culture the last decades. The evolution seen and heard in bluegrass has left us with; original bluegrass, purists, and progressive bluegrass. These three main categories represent two different sound ideals, which again represent two different views on authenticity. One represents the importance of being true to maintaining a tradition, and the other represents the importance of the artists being true to their own musical vision (Moore 2012:265). However, in this thesis I will be presenting you with a third group of bluegrass musicians and fans, who I have chosen to call *progressive purists*. I will clarify how and why this group has emerged by using the works of Frith (1998), Karppinen (2016), Moore (2012), and fieldwork done at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in July 2016.

Together with the folk revival, Alison Krauss, and other pioneers, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* has been seen as one main contributor in changing the sound bank and the socially agreed rules (Frith 1998:87) of bluegrass. Several scholars question these types of changes within a genre, for instance Holt (2007) and Frith (1992). Holt mentions how the new audience emerging, as a result of these types of change, are lacking respect for history (Holt 2007:38) and Frith points out how difficult it is for these ‘outsiders’ to understand the importance of the genre rules (Frith 1998:86). My fieldwork and interviews done at Grey Fox (2016) left me with the impression that both preserving and innovation is highly regarded in all generations of bluegrass musicians today, but how is bluegrass balancing the importance of traditions alongside the progressive musicians and their audiences? I will in this chapter argue how the *progressive purists* represent both tradition and innovation, and how this group have made it possible for Alison Krauss to gain her position as the authentic bluegrass Queen, and also how this group can be a valuable asset to the bluegrass community in the future.

2. BLUEGRASS – THE HISTORY

2.1. HISTORY IS BEING MADE

Bluegrass is commonly perceived as being a part of the folk music tradition in the United States. Bluegrass has its roots in early string band music emerging from country music in the 1930s. The origin of country music is from the rural upland South, particularly the Appalachians, with influences from both African and European music (Rosenberg 2005:6). Like folk music it has traditionally been passed on orally (Ledgin 2006:2). Even though there are many facts pointing towards bluegrass being folk music, there are two reasons why this is historically incorrect: First, bluegrass is a modern-day form. Second, the birth of the genre can almost be pin pointed (Ledgin 2006:1).

Bluegrass had been (although not yet labelled), a part of the music scene in America from the 1930s (Ledgin 2006:1). Among the several string band musicians at the time, you would also find the vocalist and mandolin-playing Bill Monroe (1911-1996). The Monroe brothers, with their attention to close vocal harmony and instrumental virtuosity, toured the Midwest from 1932 to 1934. After a successful record with Victor Records in 1936, the band split in 1938 (Neal 2013:127). The years on the road provided Monroe with a tremendous amount of live practice, but also an exposure to a variety of musical styles. This is when he assembled the Bluegrass Boys (Neal 2013:129). October 1939, when Monroe and the Bluegrass boys auditioned for the Grand Ole Opry, is to many historians considered the birth of the Bluegrass genre (Neal 2013:130). Fans of the genre see Bill Monroe as the authentic genius creating this genre by drawing inspiration from life in the Kentucky hills, and the mechanisms that created the genre are often overlooked (Peterson 1997:214).

The years following would perfect the sound that would later be defining bluegrass music. By 1945 the most famous bluegrass line-up was in place: Bill Monroe (mandolin), Chubby Wise (fiddle), Cedric Rainwater (bass), Lester Flatt (guitar) and Earl Scruggs (banjo). Scruggs provided the sound and the technique that would be one of the most characteristic features for the genre, the ‘Scruggs-style’. This was a three-finger roll technique played on the five-string banjo. For many people today, when categorizing what is bluegrass and what is not, this is one of the defining features (Henry 2013:10).

Other features that were (and still are) an important part of the bluegrass genre will be presented below, but there is one more thing worth mentioning when talking about the Bluegrass boys; the Bluegrass Girls! If these girls hadn't been present in bluegrass at this early stage, although not too visible, it might have been even harder for the women following in their footsteps to enter this male-dominated world.

Genre breaches in bluegrass are almost as old as the genre itself. Already in the 50s we could see the beginning of what we later would categorise as progressive bluegrass. The rivalry between purists and progressive musicians also dates back to the genres early days. Thoughts on which direction the genre should be headed and how much new influence the genre should accept have been debated since the origin of the Bluegrass Boys. Bill Monroe was the bandleader, a leader who in another setting would be compared to a dictator, and he had the authority to replace band members he felt was pulling the music in the 'wrong' directions. However, in bands and duos where he was not represented and did not have a say, bluegrass depended on the hard-core followers to preserve the recipe. The conflict of authenticity and sound has broken up many bands and duos throughout history and it has become the foundation of the biggest branch on the bluegrass tree, progressive bluegrass, or new grass. It is paradoxical that a genre constructed on influences from a number of genres, such as jazz, European American and African folk music, rock and folk should later on be so wary of change and innovation. That a genre that drew inspirations from the minstrel shows in the early 1900s and the popular music of its time, jazz, would end up feeling threatened by rock music in its early years might seem strange to an outsider. It seemed strange and unnatural for some of the insiders as well.

2.2. BRANCHING OUT

The first to branch out from the bluegrass tree were two of Bill Monroe's own Bluegrass Boys; Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt. They were part of the few people creating the original bluegrass sound alongside Monroe in the 40s. Scruggs is even being held accountable for the famous bluegrass trademark: The Scruggs Style banjo. Scruggs and Flatt left Monroe and formed Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys in 1948 and shortly after they started altering the sound now familiar as Bluegrass (Neal 2012:137). To start with, they broke the familiar instrumentation; fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar and bass, by adding an additional guitar. In the mid 50s a new addition was thrown in the mix; the dobro. The dobro would

shortly after enter several bluegrass bands and become a standard instrument. Flatt and Scruggs did not only make musical changes, but they also brought in the old hillbilly tradition of bands taking on direct corporate sponsorships. In 1953 they teamed up with Martha White Flour Company. These changes did not go unnoticed by the father of bluegrass, and rumour has it that when Martha White Flour Company offered to sponsor them on the Opry programme, they stayed away because of Bill Monroe's hostile attitude towards the group (Neal 2013:140). Today, Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys are considered one of the original bluegrass bands, despite their progressive approach at the time. One of them turned even more progressive in the late 60s. As a result of musical differences, the successful group parted and Scruggs went on to explore rock, folk rock, and other hybrid styles that emerged in the 70s.

Another group, playing parallel with the Foggy Mountain boys, were the Stanley Brothers. They also helped establish the bluegrass sound that we now detect as the original sound. Their contributions to the genre, or their changes, were that they grounded the genre even more in the traditional sounds and styles (Neal 2013:140). This was due mainly to their upbringing in Dickenson County, Virginia, an area with rich mountain music traditions. The Stanley Brothers were big admirers of Bill Monroe, and they copied the sound of the Bluegrass Boys for many years. Because of this they maintained a more traditional sound than their bluegrass contemporaries, and they kept the High Lonesome Sound ('clear' and 'cutting' vocal) while other bands were moving in new directions.

To sum up so far, the changes that emerged already in the genres first years; The second guitar, the dobro, the voice pushing slowly towards a more comfortable register and also the link to more traditional folk music. It should also be mentioned that there were changes incorporated into the technique used on almost all of the instruments as well (Cantwell 2003:168-169). Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys, Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys and the Stanley Brothers are often mentioned as the ones creating the authentic bluegrass sound, and of course with Monroe in the driver's seat. Even with the changes and conflicts already mentioned, King (2015) describes a bluegrass community that appears to be stable and solid:

...a more-or-less stable canon of pieces, a bounded number of lyrical tropes, a graspable set of musical phrases and licks, and an acceptable level of variation

therefrom. It seems extremely aesthetically stable, posing few genre problems that don't resolve to issues of authenticity (King 2015:4).

However, when moving into the late 60s and early 70s more change was inevitable.

The Osborne Brothers gave bluegrass enthusiasts headaches already in the late 50s. The biggest concern in the bluegrass community was their 'commercial' sound. Already in 1957 they had started using drums on their records. Recordings between 1958 and 1964 included electric guitar, pedal steel guitar, female vocalists and twelve-string guitar. In 1966-67 they added electric bass, but their most controversial step was made in 1969: They went electric! (Cantwell 2003:312) With the importance of the acoustic sound in bluegrass, this was a daring step. The debate boiled down to how far one should go to bring in new bluegrass listeners. The purists did not see how adopting the Nashville sound or pop and rock would make bluegrass more popular (Cantwell 2003:311). Lester Flatt is quoted on this issue at Cantwell

When we were doing Flatt and Scruggs music as what I call it... it's something that we helped to build, we could go fifteen or twenty miles out of Nashville and just stack the place. After we switched and did some of the other stuff, even though you jump to 100 000 on your albums, you could see the difference in the spirit of the country people, the people that made you. It was very easy to see it (Cantwell 2003:310).

The discourse around 'purity' is as relevant today. How far can bluegrass or new grass stretch and still seem authentic to the listener? Will we end up with popular and commercial music that *reminds* us of the long lost bluegrass, but changes whenever mainstream music makes a left or right turn? Another question that springs to mind is: Why does it matter? If it is good music, enjoyed by both listener and musicians, why is the label important? Is loyalty to fans and colleagues, the topic Flatt touches on in this quote, more important than loyalty to yourself? I will try to address this issue in a later chapter.

More and more bluegrass artists, especially recording artists, felt the pressure to move away from 'pure' bluegrass and closer to the music trends of the time. They wanted to reach a broader and more urban audience, and hopefully achieve crossover hits (Cantwell 2003:305). The reason was simple; money! Record labels, festivals and radio stations struggled to support bands on a fulltime basis and many bluegrass artists were forced to be innovative. New grass bands emerged, but you still had the older and more established musicians playing the traditional and "pure" bluegrass (Cantwell 2003:306). New grass got the name after the

band New Grass formed around Sam Bush, mandolin player, in the early 70s. New grass introduced the electric bass, which was a sign of the influence the rock evolution in the 60s had on bluegrass. New Grass musicians also had an atypical sound of ‘effortlessness’ when both playing and singing. This would, with Lomax’s words in mind, alienate them from pure bluegrass (Cantwell 2003:171).

Hence the tactic of innovation worked and crossover bands emerged, festivals grew in size, and bluegrass entered the college markets. Eclecticism and ‘doing your own thing’ was in the wind, and it became easier for bluegrass artists to move on into country, rock and roll and folk.

2.3. THE BLUEGRASS GIRLS

2.3.1. ‘MAN’S MUSIC?’

Bluegrass, a genre created and constructed in the 30s and 40s by one white man, Bill Monroe. Together with his Bluegrass Boys he established the sound we today call traditional bluegrass. Both playing and listening to bluegrass was soon established as a man’s privilege, and the genre was quickly known as ‘a man’s music’. The absence of women soon became one of the genre rules Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys fought so hard to preserve (Rosenberg 2005:7). When reading the history of bluegrass, women are not only absent, but their absence is listed together with other important characteristics like; instrumentation, number of band members, harmony, and tempo. Anne Karppinen (2016) was not merciful towards her male colleagues when addressing the fact that women are often both left out of history and how their contribution is met:

As many feminist music historians have shown (see, e.g. Citron 1993, Froth 1996, Green 1997), female musicians have been belittled by the music press as long as there has been such an institution; their efforts have been trivialised, their choice of instruments curtailed – all for that sake of some vague value structure calling for modesty and daintiness from its women (Karppinen 2016:130).

She continues with addressing what I have found to be a huge problem in the bluegrass community: “Yet, even more powerful than ridicule is the tactic of the total disregard: pretending that female composers and performers simply do not exist or do so in remarkably small numbers (Karppinen 2016:130).” Later in her book, *The Songs of Joni Mitchell* (2016),

she also states the obvious, but yet often overlooked, fact that: “For a considerable stretch of time, canon-builders have been (mainly white, middle-class) men, who have worked to neutralise the exclusion of women from music (Karppinen 2016:135).” But what puzzles me with the picture that the bluegrass historians and musicologists have painted of bluegrass and women are where we find ourselves today; with a woman reigning the kingdom of bluegrass! Alison Krauss is to this date the singer with most Grammy Awards and ranks number 3 as the most winning artist of all time, with her collection of 27 awards (alisonkrauss.com). The number of Grammys won by Alison Krauss is highly impressive, but you don’t need too much knowledge of the genre to know that her title; The Bluegrass Queen, is a bigger achievement than all of her awards.

Even though this genre has been described as “militantly opposed female participation (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:409).” The question asked by O’Brien (1995) in *She Bop* is pertinent: “...do women necessarily become victims of a system that militates against them (O’Brien 1995:2)?” The females found in bluegrass history and present answer this question in a highly dignified way. They show us, just as O’Brien’s (1995) findings do (O’Brien 1995:2), how sexism and prejudice can be the catalysts for effective strategies to “confront and bypass this issue (O’Brien 1995:4)” and develop musical integrity and find their own and unique way into this male dominated genre of bluegrass. Sadly, not without sacrifice!

When I started my research into bluegrass my first thought was: Where are the women? But despite the historians’ effort to leave the females out of the history books, the women and their contributions are to be found! Fortunately, we have authors like Murphy Hicks Henry addressing the topic of women in bluegrass. As the keynote speaker at the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) Trade Show in 1989 she mentioned how an unnamed author described the creation of bluegrass as Bill Monroe’s attempted to create a masculine music on an inherently feminine instrument (Henry 1998:murphymethod.com). She described it as an “unnecessary and unfair gendering of a bluegrass origin story involving the mandolin. She continued by saying: “Well, there’s nothing gender-related about that story (on how Monroe started on the mandolin). However, this author chose to inject gender into this little story (Henry 1998:murphymethod.com)”, indicating how historians might have played an even bigger part in keeping the genre male dominated than the founder and male musicians have!

While digging deeper into the history books it turned out that the women weren't completely absent, they were just not mentioned! The genre did have female musicians present from the birth of the genre and we do find women pioneers throughout the history. These women fought a battle on the behalf of every woman following in their footsteps. Hopefully these next pages will show you how their sacrifices were not in vain, but a huge inspiration for today's women in general and Alison Krauss in particular. O'Brien underlines how important female role models are in popular music (O'Brien 1995:2) and bluegrass is no exception. In an article by Andy Miller (2016) the impact Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerard have had on the genre and its females is emphasized, and this is just one example among many others (Miller 2016, thebluegrasssituation.com).

I know now that the women were present, but how and where? What was their contribution to the genre and their impact on the women following in their footsteps? Why were they left out of history, and what did they have to endure to fight their way back in? Using historical methodology I want to tell the stories of struggle, sacrifice, endurance, success and the integrity of these women! Hopefully I can help paint a slightly different picture of bluegrass history, one that includes the women hidden in the background. Maybe this new picture can help us understand how it was possible for Alison Krauss to gain the position she holds in today's bluegrass community.

Together with a presentation of genre rules like sound, tempo, vocals and instrumentation Rosenberg (2005) writes: "The band members were almost always men; in fact, in its formative years bluegrass was virtually a male music (Rosenberg 2005:7)." There was even a bumper sticker in the 70s with the phrase: "Bluegrass Is Man's Music (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:397)." Although the absence of women was almost considered a genre rule, what most historians leave out is that one musician who played with Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys during the first and defining years for the genre, was actually a Bluegrass Girl! And after the first bluegrass girl a few (but important) women followed in her footsteps. I want to tell you their stories, convey their struggles, and honour their contribution to what was described as an openly and unapologetically sexist 'boys club' (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:397). I am even going as far as to ask: Could Alison Krauss have become our Bluegrass Queen if it wasn't for the women before her paving the way?

2.3.2. THE 40S: BILL MONROE AND HIS BLUEGRASS GIRLS

Sally Ann Forrester (1922-) played with Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys from 1943-1946. She even sang and played on Monroe's recordings of bluegrass standards in 1945 (Henry 2013:13). The fact that one of the Bluegrass Boys was a girl, and that this is not mentioned in any other literature I could find on bluegrass, triggered me into writing this paper. Why wasn't she mentioned? What could the recognition of her role in bluegrass at this stage have meant for other women later in bluegrass history?

Forrester was playing with Monroe those important years when he was still striving to find the sound that would satisfy his musical vision. Staying with the band for three years make me certain that Monroe found her contribution important, so why wouldn't the historians? One answer to this question might be that Forrester played accordion (Henry 2013:13). Accordion is not a standard bluegrass instrument, and this might be why she is not mentioned. It is tempting to believe the real reason for her falling out of the history books is the fact that she was a woman. The fact that she played the accordion with the Bluegrass Boys seems strange in a bluegrass context but it also puzzles the one historian mentioning her. Murphy Hicks Henry writes in her biography on Sally Ann that she had never played the accordion until she started playing it with the Bluegrass Boys in 1943. She actually had a successful career as a musician before she entered into Bluegrass.

When Sally Ann was in sixth grade she played the piano, violin and guitar. She was (for a woman at the time) highly educated, and in College she also started to evolve as a singer (Henry 2013:14). In 1939 she landed a spot on a barn dance program called Saddle Mountain Roundup on a radio station. The show ran for eleven weeks and during this time she performed for thousands of live audience and radio listeners. This is where she met her husband, and ticket into The Bluegrass Boys, Howdy Forrester. Mr Forrester was one of the most famous fiddlers in southern music (Henry 2013:15). Through the Grand Old Opry tent show in 1942 the Forresters met Monroe. Sally Ann was at the show with a successful duo and Howdy was playing alongside a singer and comedy act. When Bill Monroe's fiddler was drafted Howdy was there to take his place. When Howdy was called into the navy in 1943 Monroe invited her to his own tent show. Why? She was a woman? At this point the genre was not yet that established, and Monroe was still on the search for the right sound AND money! Sally Ann was not only performing with the band, she also took care of ticket sales

and looked after the money, which often was a considerable amount. At this stage it was considered wise, from a business perspective, to have women in the act. Another bandleader at this time is quoted in Henry saying: “Men in the audience like to see a girl on stage (Henry 2013:16)!” The same man is also quoted saying: “Don’t ever headline a show with a woman... people just don’t go for women!” I do not know what changed his mind; maybe his earlier business tactic failed him, or maybe he used it as an excuse for his band’s lack of success?

The reason why Sally Ann played the accordion in the band might be because Monroe had not yet landed the bluegrass sound, and other bands at this time were also trying out the accordion with success. Monroe, looking for commercial success and Forrester looking for a way to stay in the band, might be one reason for her to settle with this instrument. Her playing the accordion was for decades the only accomplishment she was known for with the Bluegrass Boys. The story of women in bluegrass could have been completely different if Sally Ann’s vocal work with Monroe was released at the time. Two of the very first bluegrass vocal trios ever recorded by Bill Monroe were with Sally Ann on tenor! (Henry 2013:18). It is interesting to imagine how different the genre would have been if these recordings were released when recorded in 1945 and not in the 80s! We might never have had the debate of bluegrass being only ‘man’s music’ and whether women could sing bluegrass? We might not have condescending bumper stickers steering women away from the genre!

Historians might argue that the choice of instrument, the accordion, eliminated Forrester from the history books, but was this her choice? Why wasn’t she offered a spot as a singer, for clearly she was good at it? Was it because of her gender or that she wasn’t good enough? Maybe some of the answers can be found in this next question: What happened to Forrester after three years with Monroe? Yes, you might have guessed it; She got pregnant (Henry 2013:15)!

The accordion might explain why Sally Ann was left out of the history of bluegrass, but it does not explain why we rarely hear about **Bessie Lee Mauldin (1920-1983)**, Monroe’s bass player. Bass was, and is still, a bluegrass instrument, and for the Bluegrass Boys the bass player from 1952 to 1964, playing on their six first albums, was a woman (Henry 2013:46)! Where is she in the history books? There are a couple of reasons that come to mind:

First, she started out travelling with the band in 1941, as Monroe's girlfriend. There is nothing that indicates that she played any instruments before meeting Monroe, so it is likely to assume that she was in the band because it was practical for Monroe to have his girlfriend on the road with him. With this fact in mind it might not have been that inspiring to other female musicians to read that the only entrance to bluegrass music was being the bandleader's spouse (which actually throughout the history showed itself as the ugly truth).

Secondly, Monroe didn't just have his girlfriend on the road; he also had a wife at home. Bluegrass was part of a community with traditional values; many of the musicians and their fans were Christians. Having a mistress was maybe not that easy to explain. This might also be the reason why she was excluded from the band on big occasions, like playing at the Opry (Henry 2013:47). I am sure that lack of talent is not the reason why she is rarely mentioned or why she was left out of the Opry gig. Monroe's high standards, coupled with her band mates statements on her playing, tell me that she was not just "pretty good for a girl" (Henry 2013:47).

With Bessie Lee, as with Sally Ann, it is tempting to conclude that their absence in history is due to the fact that they were women. Especially when reading how rumours as late as the 80's said that while Mauldin was credited as bass player on recordings, it couldn't possibly be her playing. Suggestions such as her bass tracks being replaced after recordings or even that her microphone was turned off, while a male bass player in another room did the actual recording (Henry 2013:49). These stories says a lot about the conditions for women in bluegrass at the time, but it is important to mention that Bessie, throughout her 12 years with the band, got to show audiences all over the country that women could play bluegrass professionally, and that must have been an inspiration to women at the time and the female musicians following in her path (Henry 2013:53). Still, to this day, you can read 'facts' like: "The band members are almost always men (Rosenberg 2005:7)." Rounder's executive, Ken Irwin, said in 2003 that he still receives cards saying: "Women can't sing bluegrass (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:409)." It is a paradox that within popular music being a lead singer has been a natural position for women for decades. In *Frock Rock* Bayton writes: "So much has singing been seen as a woman's place that female musicians have often been steered into it (Bayton 1998: 13)." O'Brien (1995) writes that: "Because female artists have historically been steered into the role of decorative front-women, a disproportionate number of them are vocalists (O'Brien 1995:3). This was never the case in bluegrass, where women were placed

in the corner behind the bass. If it hadn't been for those very first women settling as 'unimportant' side musicians, it might not have been that natural for the women in the 70s to dig into the bluegrass history and heritage, and by doing so pave the way for artists like Alison Krauss in the 90s (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391).

2.3.3. THE 50S: EVEN MORE WOMEN SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

Even if few women played bluegrass in the early years from the 40s to the 70s, some of them did actually play an important part in the business side of the music. Many wives did the bookings, bookkeeping and promotions. This is also challenging the tendency seen in popular music. Sheila Whiteley addresses this topic in her book *Women in Popular Music*. She also mentions that women actually play a bigger part of this industry in USA, compared to the UK and also that it is more common for women to hold these positions outside the mainstream genres (Whiteley 2000:4). Maybe the reason for this is found in the bluegrass community, where women were excluded from playing, but family values were too important to completely exclude them from their husband's musical career?

One of the first women to enter the business part of Bluegrass was Earl Scruggs' wife, **Louise Scruggs (1928-2006)**. She was the business manager of the duo Flatt and Scruggs from 1948. Her husband has later credited her for being the reason why Flatt and Scruggs were so successful and the reason why they were not struggling like many other bands in the early 1950s (Neal 2013:137). On the country Music Hall of Fame's website you can read an impressive review of her work: "Louise Scruggs set new professional standards in artist management and played a key role in bringing the music of Flatt & Scruggs and the Earl Scruggs Revue to audiences well beyond the traditional country norm—a role she relished until her death in 2006 (Countrymusichalloffame.org)." Several women have followed in her footsteps, and my guess is that it was more or less voluntarily. I witnessed one of these early women behind their man this summer, at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016. The Del McCoury band was playing on the main stage one night. At the end of the crowd was a table the size of a writer's desk. On the table laid t-shirts, CDs and other merchandise for the band. On a chair behind the desk, with a cash box in front of her sat Del McCoury's wife, Jean McCoury.

Luckily, albeit stereotypically, one did find the occasional family bands and married couple duos as early as the 50s (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:392). Even if this was better than nothing, it didn't necessarily make it easier for women wanting to enter the genre on their own, as an equal band member like their male colleagues. Not only because they were not considered as equally good musicians, but in the society of bluegrass, where morals were as high as the church doorstep at the time, it was considered immoral for a single woman to travel alone with the male musicians of a band (Henry 2013:120). A woman was supposed to find a husband, then stay at home with the children, while the husband was out working or playing (Henry 2013:12). I interviewed Mike Compton at The Grey Fox Bluegrass festival in 2016, and he confirmed one of the most common perceptions on why women were left out of the bluegrass scene:

SS: I've been reading a lot, cause I'm an outsider so I'm sitting with the books. And read about the bluegrass community being negative and almost like hostile against female participation. Do you think this is a right perception?

MC: I don't know if... I think that maybe that it's not as hostile sounding as that. In the culture that created bluegrass music was predominantly male, outside the house. And the ladies had... everybody had their role in that point in time, and the ladies kept the house and took care of the children. And the men worked outside, so I think the men predominantly were seen and heard more than the women were. And that carried over into public functions. I don't think it wasn't necessarily meant as a hostile thing, I think it just was what everybody was used to.

SS: Practical reasons?

MC: Yeah, and the times change and women wanna have more of a voice. And, you know... Sometimes people are reluctant to go with the change (Compton, interview 15.07.16).

Compton's answer left me with another question. He explains the lack of female participation with people not being used to it, that it would have startled the gender roles in the 40s and 50s. At the same time he finishes off with: "Sometimes people are reluctant to go with the change." Does this mean that we still today, in 2016, have people within the genre who are negative to female participation? Maybe the situation today is not what I had foreseen? I will return to this question later in this chapter.

Delia Bell is quoted in *Finding Her Voice* stating her opinion in explaining why women seemed absent in the bluegrass scene for several decades:

Women haven't had the opportunity men do. Men can just pick up and stay out a week, go to a festival, while women stay at home, take care of kids, keep house, and all of that. They don't have the opportunity to get out and learn... When I started, there weren't many women in bluegrass, at least around where we lived (Bufwack and Oermann 395).

This was, and maybe still is, why most women in bluegrass had short-lived careers. They might have had success as musicians, but the pressure to have children and the stress of trying to combine music and family life kept many talented women at home (Henry 2013:12). This might be why many of the really successful women in bluegrass had one or no children (Henry 2013:11). Alison Krauss has only one child. Whether this is intentional or not, no one but she knows, but this certainly made it easier for her to travel with Union Station, Robert Plant and engage in the amount of projects she has had during her career.

'Single' women were almost invisible in bluegrass for several years, but you did have some important exceptions. I have already mentioned Forrester and Mauldin as women pioneers left out of history, but there are definitely more exceptional women worth mentioning. One strong and independent woman, who in many ways reminds me of Alison Krauss, is **Wilma Lee Cooper (1921-2011)**. A full-time musician at age 17 and with a business diploma from college after finishing high school in record speed, she is a woman who deserves a place in bluegrass history. She is mentioned in *Finding Her Voice* for being an inspiration for bluegrass women later on in history especially by choosing her own material (Henry 2013:25), and luckily Henry (2013) has devoted a whole chapter to her in *Pretty Good for a Girl*, although she is not found in any other history books on bluegrass.

Wilma started out in a family duo with her uncle, an entrance to the bluegrass world that was not uncommon, and when her uncle stepped down she replaced him with Stoney Cooper, who became her husband (Henry 2013:22). There was nothing ground breaking with her journey into bluegrass, but the way she ended her career was! When her partner in music and life suffered a heart attack in 1963, she kept on playing and singing and turned up at gigs alone with the attitude: "... he's not here, so I've got to do the best I can (Henry 2013:25)." Her husband's medical condition could easily have been the end of Wilma's career, but two years after her husband's death, she released her first solo album (Henry 2013:16)! Like Alison Krauss today, Wilma did choose all her own material (Henry 2013:25). She would never perform songs she didn't care for (Henry 2013:23), so I get the sense of Wilma as being a

woman who was true to herself, and thus was perceived as authentic by audiences of several genres. Like Alison Krauss, she had an eclectic expression but was still highly regarded by the bluegrass community.

Wilma, who died in 2011, had an unusually long career for a woman, and as a married woman this was not given! Wilma and Stoney did try to settle down in 1942. For around 6 months, after having their first child, they tried to live the 'normal' family life. They soon agreed that this was not for them, and their son was their only child. This allowed them to concentrate on their music, and they decided to go forth as a duo (Henry 2013:22). This decision and sacrifice must have been frowned upon at the time, but it was most likely necessary for the couple to be able to pursue a career.

Rose Maddox (1925-1998) was also challenging the norms of traditional family life by enrolling her only child, from a broken marriage, to military school already in first grade. This gave her the opportunity to have a career (Henry 2013:31).

Maddox had been playing and singing with her brothers in the band The Maddox Brothers and Rose, since she was eleven years old. She was originally the lead singer, but because of the war, she was forced to take on the role as a singing bass player. The band split in 1956, when Rose went solo (Henry 2013:13). As a solo artist she was never afraid to tell her band mates how they should play and she made bold moves when it came to instrumentation. She even had Monroe on one of her albums, but he mysteriously disappeared the second day of recording. Rumour has it that Monroe left in protest when Rose brought in a steel guitar player (Henry 2013:31). It is needless to say that it is beyond bold to stand up against Bill Monroe. This shows not only guts, but also musical integrity! And just as ground-breaking was Bill Monroe's replacement on mandolin; a 20-year-old girl named Donna Stoneman! This is the first record of a female side musician being hired for a recording session (Henry 2013:31). Sadly, it was going to be years until the next female side musician, that we know of, was hired. Maddox got the chance to help women out in another way as well: she took the liberty of changing the keys on the bluegrass standards she performed and recorded. This was unheard of, even if it seems like a given today (Henry 2013:32). It shows professionalism that she, time after time, made changes that fit her musical vision and talent even if it made her

unpopular. This must have been an important legacy for women later in bluegrass history to inherit.

2.3.4. SLOW, BUT STEADY, THROUGH THE 60S

During the following years there would surface the occasional female artist, but mostly in family bands or duos. Still the headline for the women was: Pioneering! Their gender made it difficult for them to fit into the bluegrass category, because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. That might be one of the reasons why it was natural for them to be innovative, because they felt that their mere presence was, so they had nothing to lose!

For instance **The Lewis Family trio** with Maggie (1926-), Polly (1937-) and Janis (1939), challenged one of the most important genre feature in bluegrass; The high lonesome, nasal and painful timbre! This was, and maybe still is, a prejudice that many women met. Bluegrass Unlimited wrote that: “The girl’s singing tends to take the music away from bluegrass (Henry 2013:65).” If this criticism was due to the fact that they were girls singing or because of the way the girls sang, one can only speculate, but the same magazine wrote in 1975 that their music was: “... highly professional, well engineered, and tastefully performed (Henry 2013:65).”

Also **Jeanie West (1933-)** broke ground when she in 1960 was the first woman who recorded a solo album (Henry 2013:96). The album was little known, and the reasons for that could be many, but her being a woman might have been what steered the reviewers away. Like Krauss, Jeannie chose material that was closely linked to folk and more on the ballad side of bluegrass, and never included the high-powered Bill Monroe originals on records. Sadly Jeannie was one of the many women whose career was marginalized because of family. She never became a fulltime musician; marriage and four children took her out of the game (Henry 2013:98).

Gloria Bell (1939-) could play the bass, guitar, mandolin, banjo and sing. She is one of the women in bluegrass who had to endure sexist remarks on a regular basis. Maybe she never should have left the all-girl-band she joined in 1966. The reason she did might be found quoted in Henry on her experiences in an all-girl-band: “Girls have a tendency to feel competitive with each other, while boys don’t feel that way towards women (Henry

2013:107).” This attitude toward female colleagues is also present in popular music in general. O’Brien (1998) has found that “Underlining women’s success are their ambivalence and competitiveness with each other...(O’Brien 1998:2).” Gloria Bell had also had encounters with men’s attitude towards women: “...The majority of men don’t feel threatened by a woman because they figure women can’t play my instrument or can’t play it as well as I do anyway. And in a lot of cases it is true (Henry 2013:107).” This was something Gloria experienced first-hand when she was hired as a side musician playing the snare drum for Jimmy Martin. She had originally been singing and playing mandolin with him part time, but he told her he didn’t want girls playing mandolin, so he offered her a permanent position on the snare drum. Jimmy was well known for sexist remarks during gigs and he had also on occasions got the audience to boo her when performing. Gloria never got to play on any of the recordings, there she would just be singing, but despite all of this she stayed with the band for eight years (Henry 2013:109). She left Jimmy in 1978, and during the following years she never settled in any band, but she recorded her third solo album in 1986. This album pleased Bluegrass Unlimited who wrote: “Gloria Bell still manages plenty of spirited bluegrass that makes for worthwhile listening (Henry 2013:111).”

Gloria did not care for the old way of entering bluegrass, through a family band or a partner, so she concisely chose not to marry within the business, and her husband (1989) didn’t provide her with any shortcuts. The career of Gloria Bell was her own doing (Henry 2013:112).

Hazel Dickens (1925-2011) and Alice Gerard (1934-), a female bluegrass duo active from 1962 until 1976, were ground-breaking in many ways, but also slowed down by family life like so many women before them.

Hazel Dickens played together with her brother Arnold and Mike Seeger when she met Alice. Hazel was singing tenor and lead on contemporary bluegrass songs. Later on she bought herself a bass, and kept on singing tenor while playing (Henry 2013:114-117). At the same time Alice Gerard had taught herself to play guitar and three-finger banjo and attended the same picking parties as Hazel. However, Alice felt that it was expected of her to stay in the kitchen with the rest of the women. In Henry she is quoted saying “... the women always ganged up in the kitchen, and I felt as though I needed to be with them.” Her next statement

shows us how both gender and the unspoken cultural rules set the tone for bluegrass; "... they would talk about you or they'd think that you were trying to steal their husbands." She continues saying: "I wanted to be out there listening to the music, I didn't want to be in here talking about whatever. But, I had to be here; it was my role as the accompanying woman (Henry 2013:120)." Hazel does not mention having the same problem, and this might have had something to do with her being at these parties with her established band mates and her brother.

Hazel and Alice were not the first female duo singing on a record, but in many ways they are considered the first female-led bluegrass band (Miller 2016:thebluegrasssituation.com). Hazel is quoted in Henry pointing out that their debut was the first time two women had selected their own songs and done them the way they wanted and their debut turned out to be a huge success (Henry 2013:122). Bluegrass Unlimited wrote: "That set of songs was the only recording of real straight-ahead Monroe- and Stanley-inspired bluegrass sung by women I had ever heard, and I was an instant fan (Henry 2013:1223)." It might seem offensive today to read that they were good considering them being girls, but I don't doubt that this was meant as a huge compliment at the time! A review from Broadside magazine was probably also meant as a compliment: "Now two young urban females have come to the forefront to show that you don't have to be a guy to interpret well and tastefully (Henry 2013:123)." Despite how rude it might seem. It is a small comfort to read Miller's (2016) article on Dickens where he gives the female duo credit for their huge contribution to a genre in crisis:

Hazel and Alice Gerard's impact on bluegrass music cannot be overstated. Good ol' boys dominated the field and the biggest names were quickly becoming caricatures—they drank too hard and they sang too high. The playing was getting so stale that the folk revival audience ignored it, making bluegrass a genre on the decline (thebluegrasssituation.com).

The same year as their debut Hazel married Joe Cohen, and shortly after she also experienced the difficulty of balancing music and children. "...all my married life I wasn't that involved with my music... It was hard for me with the kids, it was always a huge problem about who was going to babysit (Henry 2013:124)." They didn't tour much because of the situating of the children, and especially Hazel, who was single mom of four. Still, they managed to finish another album the following year, but for reasons unknown this album wasn't released until 1973. In 1966 Bluegrass Unlimited magazine began to publish, and Alice became a member of the staff, and ironically several of the early managing editors were women!

In 1969 Hazel left her husband, and around 1973 she started dating Ken Irwin, the founder of Rounder Records. She was in the room when Ken listened to the four-song cassette with Alison Krauss and her band at the time. It was Hazel who recognised her potential as not just a fiddler, but as a singer!

Ginger Boatwright (1944-) had a daughter from a short-lived marriage, when she met her new husband; Grant Boatwright. She sang, and sometimes played guitar together with her singing and guitar playing new husband. In 1969 they founded and named the group; Red, White and Blue(grass) (Henry 2013:153). The band became successful, and Ginger, like many women before her, experienced that being a woman was no advantage. She is quoted in Henry saying: “They did flip me some money but they gave him the credit. But I wanted the credit. It seemed like nobody wanted to give me credit because I was a girl (Henry 2013:153).”

When Bluegrass unlimited reviewed their second album they wrote: “the acceptance of their album will depend largely on how one feels about the role of the female voice in bluegrass (Henry 2013:152).” This was in 1974, and it strikes me as odd that the band having a female singer is more of a genre breach and a controversy than the changes they had made musically on this progressive album. Ginger also designed and made the album cover on this record without it even being credited to her, but to her husband. As Ginger states in Henry: “It kinda burned my bones (Henry 2013:153).” Ginger got a small revenge on their third, and last, album. This contained three of her own songs, and she took the lead on *Love the one you're with* (Henry 2013:153). In 1979 the love ended, Ginger and Grant divorced and the band dissolved. However, it didn't take long until Ginger was headhunted by Doug Dillard. She played, sang lead and fronted the Doug Dillard Band until 2003. It is tempting to speculate whether this could even have been a possibility if she didn't get romantically involved with Dough Dillard during these years.

Martha Adcock (b. 1949) and Eddie Adcock are another influential bluegrass couple that also had to make a huge, and one might think selfish, choice to stay in the business. Although Martha ended up marrying her band mate, she had made the way into bluegrass without the help of a family member. She had been playing different musical instruments and singing

since the age of five, but found the bluegrass community hard to enter. She is quoted in Henry saying: “It took a great deal of fortitude to approach bluegrass – a ‘man’s music’ then – as a player even if you were raised, as I was, to believe in yourself and admit to no boundaries (Henry 2013:170).”

Martha stayed with the band for decades, which we from history know to be rare. One reason why it was possible for her to live the busy life on the road and recording is the couple’s choice not to have children. This was a strong statement, and perhaps a disturbing message, to other women wanting to make it in the bluegrass world. Martha has stated: “I felt that a child-oriented lifestyle would require too much self-sacrifice on my part. You might call it selfishness, but I couldn’t see giving up my life and my time and creativity to have a kid or kids (Henry 2013:173).” Why do women have to choose between family and career, when men could seemingly have it all?

2.3.5. THE WOMEN OF THE 70S AND 80S

By 1975 the rigid bluegrass society, despite its fear of progress, had changed (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:394). Bufwack and Oermann write: “As if from nowhere, there were women fiddlers, singers, banjo pickers, guitarists, and band leaders at bluegrass festivals, on bluegrass albums, and in bluegrass clubs (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391).” With a little help from the feminist movement, the Folk revival, and the countrywomen returning to their roots of old-time gospel and bluegrass the climate was changing (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391 and 394). Suddenly bluegrass wasn’t just considered hillbilly or low culture anymore; it was genuine authentic American music and a contrast to the commercial and more vulgar country music from Nashville. Richard A. Peterson (1997) writes: As Rosenberg (1985) and Cantwell (1996) show, a number of young, musically educated, folk-oriented performers and musicologists saw bluegrass as a living link back to the older acoustic forms of country and folk music (Peterson 1997:213).” And suddenly, it seemed, everybody wanted to be a part of it! Men and women! Dolly Parton released several bluegrass albums and so did Emmylou Harris, The Carter Family and the Louvin Brothers just to mention a few (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:321). This opened the “floodgate”, as Henry calls it in *Pretty Good for a Girl*, of women entering bluegrass (Henry 2013:181). Suddenly you had women taking on the role as bandleaders, all girl bands that were not family bands and occasionally you could find a female musician not related to anyone in the band. All the women entering the bluegrass

sphere from other genres might have made it easier for the women already in bluegrass to gain more prominent positions. Henry (2013) mentions that one of the reasons for women gaining ‘flashier’ and more ‘noticeable’ roles in bands were due to the other women stepping forward as instrumentalists and bandleaders (Henry 2013:181). Also the ideal vocal sound went from being hard-edge, aggressive and associated with a male voice (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391) to a more “sweet vocal style favoured by commercial folk groups and losing some of its High Lonesome Sound of first-generation bluegrass” as Neal puts it (Neal 2013:146).

It is hard to believe that what happened to bluegrass in the 70s could have been a reality if it wasn’t for the women mentioned above. The women in the 50s and 60s did fight a battle, and I am hopeful that it wasn’t in vain. I would love to conclude with the fact that all these great women paved the way for the women in the 70s during the folk revival. I will never know if I’m right, but O’Brien’s (1995) findings in *She Bop* on the “crucial importance of women as role models (O’Brien 1995:2),” and statements from female musicians of today on how their idols and role models are found in the women of the early days (Henry 2013:105), makes me feel at ease.

Even if times were a-changing, it was not a given for women to enter, and stay in, the bluegrass genre. The few women who did still had to make sacrifices and stand up against sexist remarks. **Katie Laur (1944 -)** is quoted in Henry saying: “I wanted to be able to play, to lead the life of a merry road warrior, and yes, I always wanted to make a statement. I just never had any idea I was making it just by enduring (Henry 2013: 228).” Katie became one of the first women to lead an all-male bluegrass band, and in many ways a woman and musician who reminds me of the more modern bluegrass artist, like Alison Krauss.

Katie sang in a female family quintet when she was a child. When she married Jack Laur at 19, she already had a child and an ex-husband. She left her son with his father, quit singing and strived to be content as a business wife. She lasted five years before she realised that she had to do more. The couple separated and shortly after she heard Appalachian Grass, a band of musicians who had worshipped Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs (Henry 2013:223). She ended up playing with the band for several years. She is quoted in Henry when addressing one of the main arguments against women in bluegrass, saying: “Isn’t it odd that a man’s voice is

cherished for its High Lonesome Sound? Women have always sounded like that (Henry 2013:227).”

The 80s, in the wake of the changes in the 70s, became the decade when we saw more and more female bandleaders (Henry 2013:282). The biggest names were Laurie Lewis, Lynn Morris and Kathy Kallick. They all helped pave the way for Alison Krauss entering the business at the end of the decade. Even if the tendency was that it was easier for women to lead their own groups it was still not mainstream. Family groups were still the most common way for talented women to get a foot inside the bluegrass door (Henry 2013:282). It was still rare to find women as side musicians, so all-girl bands were also very important in providing jobs and stage time for women. You still had the wife-and-husband duos going strong and being an important part of keeping women in the business as both singers and musicians (Henry 2013:283).

Rhonda Vincent (1962-) is the woman with whom Alison Krauss is competing for her title, and definitely worth mentioning! She was called “the new queen of bluegrass” by the Wall Street Journal (Henry 2013:346), but has been commuting between country and bluegrass throughout her career. She entered bluegrass in a highly traditional way; through her family, and was not one of the women struggling to stay in the business. When Alison Krauss first heard Rhonda Vincent in 1984 she states that she went “cuckoo” and says: “I was thirteen and she was about twenty-one... She was so beautiful. I was just speechless, and then she sang... her singing was so feminine and I loved that. To see someone be very strong and yet incredibly feminine was so appealing (Henry 2013:317).” Rhonda was a huge inspiration for Alison Krauss when she started her career. They are both strong women representing their gender in the genre in impressive, but very different ways. They have widely different tactics when it comes to dealing with being women in this male dominated sphere, and they also represent different vocal approaches in bluegrass today.

Rhonda entered the business in a traditional way and she also has a ‘traditional’ vocal approach to bluegrass. As traditional as a female voice can be... She is known for belting it out (Henry 2013:348) and Hazel Dickens is quoted in Henry saying: “She’s one I really like a lot these days because she just went totally bluegrass, and she’s trying to get as much edge as she can – which is unusual for women (Henry 2013:346).

Rhonda Vincent might be Alison Krauss's rival for the throne, but the two ladies have chosen completely different approaches, not only vocally, but also artistically and as bandleaders. While Alison Krauss only flirted with the thought of entering Nashville and its country sphere, Rhonda made the plunge in 1985. Ironically, while she was in Nashville her family band replaced her with Alison Krauss, who literally had to fill her shoes and dresses while she was gone (Henry 2013:352). After the birth of her first child in 1987, she was back with the family band, but she never gave up her dream of a solo career and signed with Rebel labels in 1988.

After a couple of albums in both bluegrass and country she went back to country for a while. She experienced that she lost control of her career and was forced to take a different marketing approach than she was comfortable with: "I was not going to unbutton my shirt or my pants or what ever seems to be the marketing strategy... (Henry 2013:354)." This statement puzzles me, or maybe it is her choice of strategy in the early 2000 that makes my question this statement. Back in bluegrass and under Rounder's wings she suddenly appeared with a new and more sensual image. On the cover of her CD in 2001 she looked like a model! With glistening lips, heavy eye makeup and wearing a red strapless dress, she is a huge contrast to Rounder's other big star; Alison Krauss.

Rhonda has stated that the image change was for of marketing purposes, and that she had received comments on her 'boring' looks (Henry 20013:357). I have questioned the completely different marketing strategies of Alison Krauss and Rhonda, and I have played with the thought of Rounder not being able to market two young female bandleaders with similar images. Maybe it was Rounder who made her change? However, keeping in mind what I have read about Rounder and their traditional values; this seems unlikely (bluegrassmusic.com). Perhaps this was a conclusion drawn by Rhonda herself? I might not have the answer as to why, but the fact is that every part of Rhonda's image oozes femininity. Contrasting this is her vocal style and her tough leadership. Her voice is closer to the traditional 'High Lonesome Sound' we through bluegrass know as a 'man's voice' (Henry 2013:346 and Frith 1998:195). This is also a huge contrast to Alison Krauss's increasingly soft voice. Rhonda is also known for a leadership style close to the dictatorship of Bill Monroe (Henry 2013:358). An earlier band member has stated that: "There was never any

doubt to who was in charge (Henry 2013:358).” She has been asked the question of to what degree her leadership style has to do with her being a women. Her answer is both disturbing, but empowering for women: “I think some of it comes from that. I’ve had band members that don’t really consider what I’m saying is serious. But they eagerly accept the check when I write it (Henry 2012: 359).” It must be satisfying to see how her male musicians rely on her to pay their bills, but it is disturbing that it takes such a militant leadership to achieve this position. I do not know if Rhonda Vincent’s way of leading a band has to do with personality or if it is a part of her survival tactics as a female in the business, but you will find that Alison Krauss has chosen a tactic, or possesses a personality, with a completely different approach.

One of the very few women to make it as a successful side musician emerged in the 80s.

Alison Brown (1962-) was the first woman to win the Banjo player of the Year-award by the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). This was in spite of her parents’ effort of pushing her away from pursuing a career as a musician. Their reason for doing so was probably due to expectation from society combined with wanting their daughter to get a ‘proper’ job (Henry 2013:293). When knowing about the situation for female musicians in bluegrass at the time, this was clearly the right advice to give your loved one. She got herself a BA from Harvard, worked as an investment banker and did what society expected: became a mother of two! But luckily Alison Browns story does not end there.

Brown has played banjo and lead guitar with Alison Krauss and Union Station for three years, she was the bandleader for folk rocker Michelle Shocked and she is one out of three women included in Master of the 5-string banjo. She has released four solo albums on the Vanguard label and six on her own Compass label. She has also won a Grammy for Best Instrumental Performance and is currently the leader of her own band: The Alison Brown Quartet (Henry 2013:294). Her latest project won her another IBMA-award in 2016 (theboot.com). Maybe one of her greatest achievements was when Bluegrass Unlimited in 1981 reviewed an instrumental album she did with Stuart Duncan called Pre-Sequel: They never mentioned her gender! (Henry 2013:295).

The story of Alison Brown initially makes me think that bluegrass had to be less sexist and condescending against women and in the 80s than what I first assumed. However, in *Pretty Good for a Girl* she tells a disturbing story underlining the ordeals women in the business

have had to endure. She tells the story of herself, as a 19-year-old girl, trying to audition for Bill Monroe. Imagining the thoughts going through her mind when she thought he was taking her seriously when he, the Father of Bluegrass, asked her to meet him at Constitution Hall in Washington, where his band had a gig that night. She hung out back stage all night, eager to get a chance to play for him. Imagine what she was thinking when he asked her to join him in his hotel room for anything but a musical audition. This experience must have been devastating and disturbing to Alison Brown on so many levels. It is a miracle that the young girl declined his offer, played him a tune and left! To turn down the Father of Bluegrass shows both integrity and courage from teenage Brown, and the same courage must have come in handy when she decided to stay in the business! I suspect the story Alison Brown tells sadly enough isn't unique. This makes me so mad on behalf of the women in bluegrass. I feel so sad (but understanding) on behalf of the women who couldn't take it anymore, and left. I do also feel extremely proud on behalf of those who made it through with dignity and respect!

2.3.6. PAVING THE WAY FOR THE QUEEN

Historically, it was up until the 1980s that women in bluegrass were found in family bands or in duos coupled with a husband or a sibling. If one encountered a woman outside family bands, they had minor roles like playing the bass and they hardly ever sang (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:392). This trend changed in the 1980s, when women began to take on the roles as bandleaders. Although Alison Krauss, child prodigy on the fiddle and with the most important voice in bluegrass in modern time, was following in the footsteps of Laurie Lewis, Lynn Morris and Kathy Kallick it is Krauss who stands out as the biggest encouragement for women entering the genre the next decades (Henry 2013:281-283). She has recorded 12 albums, solo or as a part of the band Alison Krauss and Union station, and she is also featured on several soundtracks and other artists solo projects. She has produced records for herself and other artists. She has 27 Grammys; which makes her the most award-winning woman of all time (alisonkrauss.com). She has also been called 'the biggest thing' to happen to bluegrass since Flatt and Scruggs, and achieved what to many country- and bluegrass artist is a life long dream: she is a member of the Grand Ole Opry (Henry 2013:316). If this is not inspirational for other women, what is? But how did she get there? Because of Gloria Bell she can be a single woman travelling with male band mates with people no longer raising their eyebrow. Because of Wilma Lee Cooper she chooses her own material as the most natural thing in the world. Her soft whispery voice might be acceptable for bluegrass fans because of

the Lewis sisters. Her solo debut was not provocative and swept under the carpet like Jeanine West experienced. Perhaps Rose Maddox's bold move of hiring a female side musician is the reason why the two Alisons in today's bluegrass scene could play each other better for a few years without any condescending remarks.

2.3.7. WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

Many of the important female pioneers were not rooted in bluegrass throughout their careers. Most of them were in and out of country music, gospel or folk music as well as bluegrass. For instance Hazel Dickens who went from pre-bluegrass Appalachian music, to bluegrass, and ended up in stripped down folk music (Miller 2016:bluegrasssituation.com). Maybe this made it hard for them to be accepted in the bluegrass community? Or maybe it was difficult for them to feel completely at home in the male dominated bluegrass world, so it was easier to drift in between genres and not label their music? But when in bluegrass they all made bold musical choices; from choice of instrument, repertoire, key, instrumentation to vocal style. All of this shows us that the bluegrass women weren't only bold; they also made conscious choices when it came to their music. Knowing about the fights, the prejudice and the sacrifices they had to make I find it comforting that they chose to keep their musical integrity by being true to their musical vision. Whether this was a conscious strategy or just coincidental is a question only these women can answer, but it was undoubtedly an effective choice.

The first women in bluegrass challenged the traditions and morals of America and the genre by choosing not to stay at home with children, but rather live most of their lives on the road with male band mates. Hazel Dickens is quoted in Henry saying: "a woman stayed home and had babies and kept the house and did the cooking and generally kept her mouth shut if she knew what was good for her (Henry 2013:114)." All of these women's struggle and pioneering seems like it prepared the bluegrass world for Alison Krauss and her female colleagues in the 70s and 80s.

Because of the first Bluegrass Girls what used to be the biggest genre 'breach' in bluegrass is now a normal sight. The fact that women were absent in bluegrass turned out to be a lie, and might even seem like a cover up by the historians. Although not absent, they were few. A few strong, hard working, self-sacrificing women who did the opposite of what their families, the

society and their colleagues encouraged them to do. Why then have historians failed to mention their contribution, not only for the women but also for the genre? For a genre like bluegrass, where the genre rules are not only important but also defining for the music, the lives and the authenticity, moving away from such an important rule is not done overnight. Times have changed, and thanks to the pioneering women in bluegrass, so has the genre. It might also have made it difficult to make such huge changes while the father of the genre, Bill Monroe, still was alive to overlook them. His passing in 1996, combined with the women paving the way the early years, might have been two of the reasons why the world of bluegrass could open their arms, their ears and their hearts for Alison Krauss and her female colleagues.

The situation for women in bluegrass has finally changed for the better and Bufwack and Oermann write in *Finding Her Voice*:

It is ironic that a style that so militantly opposed female participation is now being so revitalized by its female performers. Many believe that women such as Alison Krauss, Claire Lynch, Laurie Lewis and Rhonda Vincent are the brightest new stars in the bluegrass firmament and are the very future of bluegrass music (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:409).

Finally, the early women get their ultimate revenge: The future of this ‘male music’ is now dependent on its females! But although the women before her time did a magnificent job preparing the community for women like Alison Krauss, she has continued doing the work that they started. This takes me back to the question Compton left me with: Does this mean that we still today, in 2016, have people within the genre who are negative to female participation? Although some of the veterans in the business like Compton (greyfoxbluegrass.com) don’t detect female discrimination as an issue in 2016, the women might feel differently. It is obvious that the situation would have been far worse if Alison Krauss hadn’t done her share to make important changes within the community. In an interview with mandolin prodigy Sierra Hull ⁷(1991-) at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival, she confirmed this when saying:

I’ve not experienced it in my lifetime. But, maybe that’s mostly because people like Alison Krauss, and you know, the ladies who sort of paved the way for young women like myself - Like the next generation of, you know, female artists to come out of bluegrass music (Hull, interview 17.07.16).

⁷ Winner of the IBMA Mandolin Player of the Year-Award in 2016.

This statement coming from Sierra Hull is reassuring, but I believe that we should not stop the discourse regarding female participation just yet, because at the end of the interview Sierra adds: “So I’ve not experienced that but you know, now I will say that it is somewhat rare to go to a festival and see a lot of women on the bill. It still is, even at this festival... It’s kinda just the reality of it (Hull, interview 17.07.16).” The women have come a long way, but there might still be a couple of miles to go. Although Alison Krauss has slowed down her recording and touring the last 5 years I have a source confirming that Alison Krauss will walk alongside these young women for years to come! But first, she needs a well-deserved break. Her close friend and band mate, Jerry Douglas, told me: “I talk to her about it all the time and, and we’re gonna do it again. We’re not broken up or anything like that. It’s just, she needed a rest (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).”

To date Alison Krauss has been singled out as one of the most important women in bluegrass, and has also been one of the genre’s most recognized pioneers since she started her career in the 80s. In the following chapter I am going to provide an analysis of Alison Krauss’s voice and vocal changes, as well as presenting her story. Despite the critics and purists not being up for all of the changes she has brought to the table, she is loved and respected both outside and within the bluegrass community. The main purpose of the analysis and telling her story is to search for her alibi of authenticity while moving further and further away from the original genre rules of bluegrass vocals and music.

3. ALISON KRAUSS – HER VOICE, HER STORY

3.1. ALISON KRAUSS

Up until the 1980s women in bluegrass were found in family bands or in duos coupled with a husband or a sibling. If you did find a woman outside family bands, they had minor roles like playing the bass and they hardly ever sang (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:392). This trend changed in the 1980s, when women began to take on the roles as bandleaders. Although Alison Krauss was following the path of the earlier women in bluegrass, it is Krauss who stands out as the biggest encouragement for the young women like Sierra Hull and Sara Watkins, who entered the genre the following decades (Henry 2013:281-283). She has recorded 12 albums, solo or as a part of the band Alison Krauss and Union Station, and she is

also featured on several soundtracks and other artists' solo projects. She has produced records for herself and also other artists. She has won 26 Grammys; which makes her the most award winning woman of all times (alisonkrauss.com). She has been called "the biggest thing to happen to bluegrass since Flatt and Scruggs (Henry 2013:316)." She has also achieved what to many country- and bluegrass artists' is a life long dream: she is a member of the Grand Ole Opry (Henry 2013:316). If this is not inspirational for other women, what is?

Alison Krauss's way into the business was a combination of family and hard work. She had the privilege of supportive parents, raised in the more liberal 70s, and she also had the huge advantage of having her brother as a band mate from early on. This, combined with a tremendous talent and impressive work ethic, was her ticket into the business. Talent was also the reason for her staying put, but as history has taught us; this in itself is not enough if you are a girl. Alison Krauss has somehow met and collaborated with an exceptionally open minded and loving group of musicians who have seen her first and foremost as a talented musician and vocalist. The story of Alison Krauss is a story of a genre, society, and people changing and opening up their minds to finally allow women to be appreciated for what they do, and not being marginalized by their gender. On iTunes you can read: "Alison Krauss helped bring bluegrass to a new audience in the 90s (itunes.apple.com)." Rounder executive, Ken Irwin, is quoted in *Finding Her Voice* backing up the description of Krauss: "Alison Krauss is the person who has done most in recent years to raise the profile of bluegrass music in the outside world (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:409)."

My assumption is that the reason why she gained this position is due to her vocal changes and musical choices combined with her character. In this chapter I will present her story and an analysis of her voice to gain a greater understanding of how Alison Krauss could change both her voice and the genre without losing her credibility as an artist. This takes me back to the main question of this thesis: How and why is Krauss perpetually perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist when she keeps disrupting the boundaries of the genre? Let us take a closer look at Alison Krauss – The person and the voice, in search of the answer to this question.

3.2. ALISON KRAUSS – HER STORY

Alison Krauss story starts in 1971 in Champagne, Illinois. She grew up with parents who did not take their roles lightly. They registered both their children into every program one can

imagine, which also included music instruction (Henry 2013:317). In an interview with Bluegrass Unlimited she explains her parents approach to parenting with their own background like this: “In my father’s family, it was nothing but academics, and in my mother’s family, it was art. So they wanted to make sure they gave us those opportunities (bluegrassmusic.com).”

When Alison Krauss was only five years old she started playing the violin, and she was classically trained until she turned 11. Even if she was relatively young when she started playing the violin, it would only be 9 more years until she was signed with the most prestigious bluegrass record company of all time. One might say that her parents strategy was pretty successful!

After playing the classical violin for a while she turned her attention from one rigid genre to another (Henry 2013:317). She started entering bluegrass fiddle contests when she was eight, and after a while she started studying the bluegrass fiddler Stuart Duncan, amongst others. When she was thirteen she took the first place in the prestigious Winfield, Kansas, fiddle championship. The following year she also won state championships from Illinois, Indiana and Tennessee (Henry 2013:317).

The child prodigy preferred a wide variety of music, and bluegrass had not yet become her favourite. She listened to Stevie Wonder, Huey Lewis & The News, and the soundtracks from Grease and Saturday Night Fever. Both her life and taste in music changed when she started playing fiddle with Silver Rail, a bluegrass band that also included the well-known songwriters John Pennell and Nelson Mandrell (Henry 2013:317). Pennell needed a fiddler for his band, so he called her up and asked her if she was interested, and she answered: “Well, my brother plays bass, and I sing, too. Can we sing?” Pennell answered: “Oh, that’s nice, but Nelson and I can cover the singing pretty well.” And continues telling the story by saying: “I wasn’t expecting much. I certainly wasn’t expecting anybody like...her (bluegrassmusic.com).” Alison Krauss was only 12 years old (1983) at the time, but Pennell set up an audition for Alison Krauss and her brother for his band. “She seemed a bit nervous and we played, and she played pretty good and Viktor played the bass.” Pennell says to Bluegrass Unlimited. “So we got done and then she said, ‘Do you want to hear me sing?’ And we said, ‘Well...sure. What do you want to sing?’ And she said, ‘Blue Kentucky Girl.’ So I kicked it off and she started singing, and I mean it was just like, ‘Holy...! You gotta be

kidding!’ Not only were we getting a fiddle player, but we were getting a lead singer that was obviously destined for stardom (bluegrassmusic.com).”

Alison Krauss’s obvious talent, combined with women before her time paving the way, made it possible for Alison Krauss to take on the role as a female lead singer. The man giving her this opportunity, John Pennell, was going to play a big part in Alison Krauss’s career and musical catalogue, and she has throughout the years recorded several of his songs. 15 songs have been recorded by Alison Krauss and Union Station (AKUS), and Dan Tyminski, including Tyminski’s solo debut’s title track *Carry Me Across The Mountain*.

It was John Pennell who introduced her to bluegrass, and mostly what we would call progressive bluegrass at the time (but what we today would detect as more traditional bluegrass). The New South, the New Grass Revival, Tony Rice, and Ricky Skaggs. In Henry (2013) she is quoted saying: “ I went nuts... I really didn’t listen to anything else for a while (Henry 2013:317).” To Bluegrass Unlimited she said: “I listened to Cold On The Shoulder (Tony Rice’s album) eleven hours straight one time, driving to Arkansas. And my dad let me play it the whole time. He didn’t say anything. I still can’t believe it.” (bluegrassmusic.com)

When talking about what inspired her in this time of her musical career, she answers

Bluegrass Unlimited:

John and Nelson both were just so passionate about music, insanely passionate. And John is still the same way. He’s so passionate about what he likes and it was really great for me to hang out with him like that. And he would be writing songs, and it was great to grow up with that kind of songwriting and to know the importance of original material. It had so much to do with shaping what we do now (bluegrassmusic.com).

Passion and god songwriting were certainly courses of inspiration to Alison Krauss at this point. I guess that getting to work with well-respected male musicians, who also had a huge amount of respect for her, must have been inspirational and encouraging. Knowing the history of women in bluegrass at this stage that was not a given.

Alison Krauss kept on playing with Silver Rail, but the band later discovered another group calling themselves the same, so they changed their name to Union Station. In 1985 Alison Krauss also joined a bluegrass band called Classified Grass, a decision that would turn out to be life changing for the young girl. She enjoyed playing with both bands, and said yes to whoever called first to book a gig. Her mother travelled with her on overnight gigs, but she

felt protected by all of the men she played and travelled with, and they all played the part of the bigger brother (Henry 2013:318). 1985 is also the year she made her very first CD with her brother Viktor Krauss and Bruce Weiss from Silver Rail (Union Station). The album was called *Different Strokes* and was an all instrumental album which included traditional bluegrass tunes, but also some more jazz sounding tunes, which Henry describes as "stretch far beyond traditional bluegrass (Henry 2013:318)." This shows how her musical contribution to the genre started early, and that she was never afraid to push the boundaries.

In 1985 *Classified Grass* sent an unsolicited tape to Ken Irwin and Rounder Records (Henry 2013:318). Alison Krauss was singing lead on the fourth track of the demo, and luckily Irwin found the first part of the demo interesting and ended up listening to the first three songs. "The tape I got wasn't an Alison Krauss demo, it was a band demo, and she was the harmony singer and the fiddle player. And it wasn't until the fourth song that she sang lead, and it was a gospel tune. That's what I was taken by." Irwin says to *Bluegrass Unlimited* (bluegrassmusic.com). After hearing Alison Krauss singing lead on the bluegrass gospel song he stated (or people who know the man insists that he understated): "I really, really liked her voice (Henry 2013:318)." He was so captivated by her voice that he called her up and asked for a new demo. Her parents once again played a huge part in Alison Krauss's career by helping her record a second demo (bluegrassmusic.com). To experience that kind of support by her parents was especially rare when we know the resistance other female bluegrass musicians met at home when trying to make it in the business.

When Irwin listened to the new demo, where Alison Krauss sang four Pennell songs, he was not alone in the studio. By his side was his girlfriend at the time, Hazel Dickens. Hazel had travelled to several auditions and listened to many demos with Irwin and knew how to spot talent. She could also hear the obvious talent Alison Krauss possessed (Henry 2013:128). She was signed, 14 years old, with the label of her dreams. This label had all of her idols on their merit list. Ken Irwin travelled to Nashville with Alison Krauss and her mother to find a producer for her debut as a solo artist. This must have been hugely inspiring and probably just as nerve-wracking for young Alison Krauss. Let us also remind ourselves; she was 14 years old at the time. She suddenly found herself in a living room surrounded by her biggest influences and idols. Her future band mate, Jerry Douglas, remembers the very first time he met Alison Krauss:

Ken Irwin brought her over to Béla's (Béla Fleck) house and Béla and Sam (Sam Bush) and I sat there and Alison Krauss sang for us, and mostly just wanted to play the fiddle. She wasn't that interested in being a singer at that point. And we were all like, 'You should be a singer!' I think all three of us knew exactly right then that something huge was gonna happen with her (bluegrassmusic.com).

Thirty-one years later I find myself sitting in a camping chair side by side Jerry Douglas. It must feel pretty good to have predicted the future the way he did back in 1985. In what seems completely genuine and in a loving tone he tells me: "I've played on all these records (over 2000 recordings, greyfox.com) with different people and... you know, Alison Krauss is my favourite singer (Douglas, interview 16.07.16)!"

In 1987 her first solo album was released on Rounder Records; *Too Late To Cry*. Ken Irwin himself produced it and some of the biggest names in bluegrass were featured on the album; Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, and Tony Trischka. The newly signed teenager chose all of the songs, and seven of them were written by her former band mate and mentor John Pennell (Henry 2013:318). Bluegrass Unlimited named her "...the dominating female voice of the modern era (Henry 2013:319)." Her debut album also revealed her talent for choosing the right material. I will return to her vocal and musical choices and how she separates the songs she feels has a 'timeless quality', as she calls it, from the ones that don't (Henry 2013:319).

Alison Krauss attended the University of Illinois in the fall of 1987, where she stayed for one and a half years. In 1988 she left school for three weeks when she was asked to travel with The Masters of the Folk Violin tour. The National Council for the Traditional Arts produced the tour and Alison Krauss was one of two women on it (Ledgin 2013:319). Alison Krauss made a huge impression on the other musicians, who 'adored' her, and so did the audience the two years she travelled with the show. The New York Times wrote that she had a "thin but attractive voice (Henry 2013:320)." The same year as the second tour with the Folk Violin tour she also toured with the Tony Rice Unit. She grew a lot as both a musician and person these important years with a huge amount of stage time and traveling, and in 1989 Alison Krauss and Union Station (AKUS) were ready to release their first album as a group (bluegrassmusic.com). *Two Highways* was a classical bluegrass album which included tracks with Alison Krauss on lead vocals and backing vocals, duets and instrumental tracks where the musicians, Alison Krauss included, got to show off their improvisational and technical skills. This variation on the record was going to be the standard recipe for the AKUS records

to come.

Rounder Records had already invested a lot in Alison Krauss, and had big hopes for her, so they wanted her name to front the band. At this point in bluegrass history the female bandleader was not unheard of, although not yet common. What was really unique with Alison Krauss being the bandleader (except for her being female and much younger than her band mates); she was not married to, or had no longer any family relations to anyone in the band. Her success, both with the band and as a solo artist, was therefore a huge inspiration to two other girls and women in the business and a catalyst for other female bandleaders (Henry 2013:320). The band was going to break ground for women in bluegrass a second time in 1982: When their banjo player, Mike Harman, left and Alison Krauss called up Alison Brown to step in on a couple of gigs. Brown accepted and stayed for three years. The two Alison's, both playing lead instruments, made bluegrass history. Outside all female or family bands, this had never happened before (Henry 2013:320). Alison Krauss's career was still a couple of records and years away from commercial success, but she had already received recognition from her colleagues and the bluegrass community. When The International Bluegrass Music Awards premiered in 1990, Alison Krauss was the only female with five nominations. She 'only' won Female Vocalist of the Year, but being 19 years at the time, this must have been a huge personal victory and a career boost. She was also nominated in the category Fiddle Player of the Year, but this is a category that hadn't had a female winner until 2016 (Henry 2013:320 and theboot.com).

The second solo album from Alison Krauss, *I've Got That Old Feeling*, was released in 1990, and was going to reward her with her very first Grammy. The album was also picked up by the national press and became her commercial breakthrough. *Newsweek* mentioned her impressive fiddling, and she impressed *USA Today* who wrote that Alison Krauss would: "surprise anybody who expects bluegrass to drone (Henry 2013:321)." The young artist also impressed *Rolling Stone* and she was profiled in the magazine's New Faces, and they stated that: "Krauss makes traditional bluegrass seem utterly contemporary (Henry 2013:321)." The reaction from the bluegrass community wasn't unanimously positive, but I will return to their opinions in the analysis. *I've Got That Old Feeling* was slightly ahead of its time musically, but what was really ground breaking was that the title track also turned into the very first video produced by Rounder, and the first bluegrass video considered for regular rotation on

CMT (Country Music Television). The video actually won the CMT award for Independent Video of the Year in 1991. Ken Irwin's opinion is that this video was a "key ingredient" to why Alison Krauss's career really took off. It was also an inspiration for other bluegrass artists like Rhonda Vincent and Nickel Creek who followed in her footsteps and made their own music videos (Henry 2013:321). Due to the music video or not, Alison Krauss started to get hired as a side musician on several projects and albums. Even in the 90's it was rare for a female to be in the position as a freelance side musician, but she received credit for it. After a twin fiddle project with Andrea Zonn *Bluegrass Unlimited*, who had not been exclusively positive to Alison Krauss on her latest records, called her playing: "sassier, hotter, tastier and bolder than anything she's done previously (Henry 2013:321)."

Every Time You Say Goodbye (1992) was the second album from Alison Krauss and Union Station. It included enough banjo to please *Bluegrass Unlimited*'s reviewer who now called her "the brightest star on the bluegrass horizon (Henry 2013:322)." The record must also have pleased the country and bluegrass community because in 1993 she became a member of the Grand Ole Opry. She was then the first bluegrass artist to join in twenty-nine years (Henry 2013:322)!

At 22 she was a Grammy winning vocalist, a prize winning and frequently used fiddle player, and a member of the Opry. If that wasn't enough; in 1993 she got her first job as a producer. Her production debut was *Everybody's Reaching Out For Someone (1993)*, with her favourite bluegrass family group; the Cox Family. The group had been on Alison Krauss's radar since the late 80s and Sidney Cox had written several songs for Alison Krauss, including *I've Got that Old Feeling* (Henry 2013:322). The female singers of the group allegedly also had huge impact on Alison Krauss's vocal evolution, and I will return to that later.

The Cox family were her first and second production experience. The second album she produced was *Alison Krauss and the Cox Family: I Know Who Holds Tomorrow (1993)*. This album won a Grammy, and Alison Krauss then went on to produce three more albums for this family band, the last one was released in 2015. She has also produced records for Nickel Creek, Reba McEntire, and Alan Jackson (Henry 2013:322). She has guested projects outside bluegrass, several within country music. Artists like; Alan Jackson, Phish, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Shenandoah, Willie Nelson and Keith Whitley to name a few. She has been

featured on several soundtracks, including *O' Brother Where art Thou?* in 2000. I will return to the *O Brother*- phenomenon in my last chapter. She also had a huge success collaborating with Robert Plant in 2013. Their album, *Raising Sand*, won her even more Grammys. In spite of her huge success, she has always had a faithful collaboration with Rounder Records on solo projects and projects with Union Station. When reading Tyminski's kind words of the label it is easy to see why she has stayed: "They knew they were going to lose money on so many of these projects, but it was never about anything but preserving that type of music and sharing it with the world (bluegrassmusic.com.com)." In the same interview he continues saying: "You have to have such a large amount of respect for anyone who gets into the record business for the reasons that Rounder got into it." It seems to me that Alison Krauss and Rounder have mutual respect for each other and the music, and that Rounder really understands Alison Krauss. Rounder's executive Ken Irwin has stated that they would not even consider a more Nashville looking and sounding project for Alison Krauss (bluegrassmusic.com.com). The lifestyle and sound associated with Nashville would fit neither Alison Krauss's person nor music. She keeps her private life private (Henry 2013:324) and her heart belongs to the people in bluegrass. Sierra Hull, the prodigy who Alison Krauss took under her wings at age 12 and now her close friend, confirms that Alison Krauss's heart is still in the right place: "She has the ability to cross over because of, you know, collaborations and things like that. But also could come back to this festival and jam fiddle tunes for three hours if she really wanted to (Hull, interview 17.07.16)."

Major Nashville labels would make contact with Alison Krauss, and she duly met them. She would draw the same conclusion as Rounder: "Switching to a major label just never seemed like the right thing to do, because we were already doing the right things. We had our needs met, and we were making the records we wanted to make (Henry 2013:323)." And maybe the reason is what Sierra Hull suggested when talking to me about Alison Krauss and traditional bluegrass: "... it's sort of home base for her, even though she has the ability to cross over and do a lot of different things (Hull, interview 17.07.16)." Many bluegrass musicians and fans see bluegrass as the only authentic form of country music (Peterson 1997:213) and a contrast to its more vulgar cousin in Nashville (Cantwell 2003:205). Alison Krauss loves the simple and strong message her home-base bluegrass brings to the table: "I just love the message", she says in an interview with the Independent. "It's a fantasy about simple life and basic values and there's not too much psychology or over- thinking things. It's 'one woman and

only this woman', you know? It's, 'I believe this and only this.' It's, 'I killed this person and I should have', or 'I killed that person and I shouldn't have'. It's very black and white and I love the picture it paints about home and family (independent.co.uk)." She has also mentioned to Bluegrass Unlimited that "I've always loved the message that bluegrass has, the purity of it (bluegrassmusic.com)." Alison Krauss has clearly managed to bring this perception to the next generation, to Sierra who tells me: "So, I think its hard not to think of it as authentic, just with it being kinda of as pure and simple (Hull, interview 17.07.16)."

Although Alison Krauss loves the simple life, and the simple message in bluegrass, her visual image has definitely changed throughout the years. When I started out this thesis I was prepared to give this a lot of attention, and I speculated whether this image was implied by Rounder, her management, or her colleagues. She did leave her management in 2000. Alison Krauss had been with DC Management for almost 23 years when it was announced that she was leaving for Borman Entertainment (musicrow.com). Denise Stiff (DC Management) had been a faithful manager both to Alison Krauss and the genre. She was even honoured at the Louise Scruggs Memorial Forum in 2007. Earl Scruggs stated that: "Denise has done wonderful things for Alison Krauss and for traditional music (cmt.com)." Denise Stiff was also executive producer of music for *O Brother Where Art Thou?* and producer of the *Down From the Mountain* tour (2000). She also represents other bluegrass, Americana and folk artists like Jerry Douglas and Gillian Welch (en.wikipedia.org) Borman Entertainment, on the other hand, represents other big country and pop stars, such as Lady Antebellum, Keith Urban and Michael Franti (musicrow.com). This change in management might be one reason for her visual change, and after reading about Rounder I don't suspect they would interfere. What I feel is a main reason, and also the reason for why I respectfully won't speculate any more on her appearance, lies in the comment by one of her closest friends:

She is a very vulnerable person. She's. I wouldn't say insecure, but, cause I think she's very strong, but... you know... she wants to be her, she doesn't want to be... She's not really into fame, but she cant help it, but... but... she's gonna be but (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).

With Alison Krauss's success and fame one might well assume that she would act like a diva, but the interviewer from The Independent describes her as having "distinct lack of diva syndrome (theindependent.co.uk)." This also became clear to one of her biggest fans, Sierra Hull (1991) when she first met her. At age 11, Sierra was invited by Alison Krauss to perform

with AKUS on the Grand Ole Opry. Sierra told Bluegrass Unlimited that: “I always imagined her being a sweet, wonderful lady. It’s just really great to meet a hero who lives up to the person you imagine them being (bluegrassmusic.com).” I have mentioned Alison Krauss being a role model musically, but she has also taught young women, like Sierra Hull, the importance of backing each other up and being supportive. As a successful bluegrass artist, and IBMA winner in 2016, Sierra tells me: “I’ve had a lot of good role models myself. So I would hope that I could be that for somebody else (Hull, interview 17.07.16)”

As a single mum after a broken marriage Alison Krauss assumed a realistic take on life, and she said to the Independent that: "I don't look for bliss, just contentment," and she adds. "I don't know if bliss is possible and I've always thought that my best times will be later in life (theindependent.com).” In the same interview she also mention that she has a second dimension to what she does and that is what keeps her both grounded and never without hope. “She says that her respect for God is at the core of everything she does, and that her faith gives her a hope she doesn't think she would have otherwise (theindependent.com).” With a realistic take on life, and with a goal and dimension bigger than herself, she has managed to keep both feet on the ground despite her success. Ken Irwin has described Alison Krauss’s focus in these words: “It’s remained about the music. It’s remained about her friends.... She’s an extremely loyal person. She just loves bluegrass and loves the people... When I offered that her first-week sales of 83,000 (*Paper Airplane*) were more than four times what most successful bluegrass albums can expect in total, she gets angry, her voice rising. ‘That’s a shame (bluegrassmusic.com)!” This explains why Jerry Douglas corrected me when referring to her as the Queen of bluegrass: “I think that she, she would rather lose that monarchy. She doesn’t like being the queen, king or empress of anything (Douglas, interview 16.07.16)” and I suspect that this is also why he so whole heartedly tells me: “I love her, she’s my friend, she’s my buddy (Douglas, interview 16.07.17)!”

Clearly, Alison Krauss has a big heart for bluegrass and its people. She praises the honesty and simplicity of the music, perhaps because it fits her down to earth and honest lifestyle. But on the other hand, she is the one pushing the boundaries of the genre she loves, and she does it so successfully. How is it that she is still perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist? As an introduction to this next chapter I will end this one with a quote from the (reluctant) queen herself:

“ I think that people respond to honesty in music, so I only choose songs that are the truth for

me. Whenever I've chosen a song because it's clever, it's always turned out to be a mistake (theindependent.co.uk)."

3.3. ALISON KRAUSS - HER VOICE

To explore how and why Alison Krauss is being progressive and pushing the boundaries, I will first dwell on the conventions of bluegrass. To appreciate progress we need to know which rigid genre rules set the tone for the bluegrass purists and how the genre rules are linked to the genre's perceived authenticity.

3.3.1. THE OLD RECIPE – THE GENRE RULES

Since the mid nineteenth century the term *genre* has been used to organize the growing popular culture (Holt 2007:2). Holt explains genre in music as simple as this: "... genre is a type of category that refers to a particular kind of music within a distinctive cultural web of production, circulation, and signification (Holt 2007:2)." People might argue that genre is artificial and that it gives us unnecessary boundaries when creating and listening to music (Holt 2007:2). In fact, Brackett refers to 'aesthetic boundaries' when analysing Hank Williams in *Interpreting Popular Music* (Brackett 2000:91). Simon Frith mentions how genre is a practical way of organizing the sales process (Frith 1998:75) and Holt writes about genre being "a major force in canons of educational institutions, cultural hierarchies, and decisions about censorship and founding (Holt 2007:3)." Genre is used to distinguish one type of music, with their rules and coding's, from other music. When a genre is named it is recognized and can only then be established as a genre (Holt 2007:3). Listeners, who can identify with the same genre, often share ideas of music and they are familiar with the same artists and recordings (Holt 2007:21). The genre tells them what they have in common both regarding musical preference, but also personal life. Holt also writes how genre tells us how, where and, with who people experience and make music (Holt 2007:2).

The importance of genre for the musicians is addressed both by Frith and Holt. Frith writes about how genre is a way of organizing the playing process. For the musicians involved it means that they have the same language, the same 'sound bank', to refer to when communicating in rehearsal, jam sessions and on stage (Frith 1998:87). It is practically for the

musicians to have a connection to the same genre. As Holt writes: music terminologies are very language and culture specific (Holt 2007:2).

A genre can't be static; it will evolve and change over time. This is the result of for instance technological development, politics, musical contradictions and what happens in the neighbouring genres (in this case country music or folk) (Frith 1998:93). Newby even writes about bluegrass in *The Rocky Mountain Region* that: "Bluegrass music is eclectic in nature and consequently adapting (Newby 2004:335)." I have not yet decided how adaptable bluegrass really is, and this will be a returning subject in this thesis. Frith mentions how the importance of the genre rules being changed varies from genre to genre (Frith 1998:93). My conception is that bluegrass musicians and fans link genre rules and authenticity close together, and that the bluegrass community view preserving as one of their main tasks. Dr of philosophy Jonathan King writes in his thesis how: "... the genre 'bluegrass' has commonly been portrayed as static, aesthetically conservative, a 'rear-guard' action seeking to maintain and reproduce a stable 'thing': 'authentic bluegrass' (King 2015:4)." Bufwack and Oermann's (2003) description of the bluegrass community in the 70s backs up both this assumption: "...a strong us-against-them attitude toward the rest of the music world, with rigid music definitions, and almost vicious internal gossip network and high self-critical nature. Change was threatening, and innovation was difficult (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:394)." The description of the bluegrass community in the 70s seems extreme, but not as far away from the situation you might find in some parts of the community even today. Visiting master classes and workshops at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016 I was handed out information sheets named; *Bluegrass Jamming Basics* (Appendix 3). These hand-outs contained rules, etiquette, and unspoken rules on how to behave both musically and socially in bluegrass jams.

In his chapter on authenticity Moore (2012) writes in *Song Means* that to be perceived as original and believable is: "...to be true to the origins of a practice (Moore 2012:259)." Several musicologists are presenting "purity of practise" as one place where authenticity can be found (Moore 2012:264). I will return to more theories on authenticity in the chapter below, but in light of the history of bluegrass, interviews, and record reviews it is safe to say that the bluegrass community is accentuating the values of being true to traditions.

Bluegrass was in many ways a reaction to commercialization and pop music at its time, and in war times an important reminder of what was conceived as real American roots (Peterson 1997:63), and this became more prominent with the folk revival in the 70's (Bufwack and

Oermann 2003:391). Also the question of authenticity rose as an objection to consumer culture (Moore 2012:260), but just like the situation of the bluegrass genre today, authenticity is no longer only associated with being the opposite of pop music. Stan Hawkins writes in *Settling the Pop Score* "... , pop, as a term in itself, is often applied loosely to refer to that broad expanse of music that has undergone industrialisation and commercialisation (Hawkins 2002:2). This definition does, as Hawkins states, refer to a 'broad expanse of music', which today would include bluegrass. Yet, this is likely to upset the bluegrass purist who Bufwack and Oermann referred to (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391).

Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys made the recipe for the genre during the 1940s. This recipe has been what the purists have struggled to preserve and is what have given bluegrass musicians a common sound bank and language for decades. King (2015) describes the importance of his genre rules in bluegrass like this:

Its acoustic palate, its idiosyncratic instrumentation, its lyrical tropes, its song structures, and the song repertoire itself are instantly recognizable, even easily parodied. Among musicians and fans there exists a conservative rhetoric of timelessness that inspires conformity to certain aesthetic tenets (King 2015:4).

The recipe, which we know was closely linked to what the bluegrass community perceive as authentic, gives us an understanding of why and how Krauss is considered controversial and known for challenging the rules. As Moore writes in *Song Means*: "... authenticity is a relative concept (Moore 2012:263)." He also writes "...there is no single authenticity (Moore 2012:263)." He argues that the term 'authentic' has to be used in relations to maintain a performance practice (Moore 2012:263). So, what does the bluegrass listener perceive as authentic in bluegrass music? I will now present the most important ingredients needed to create and preserve the bluegrass sound.

Hawkins writes: "... popular music needs to be evaluated on its own terms within the cultural context that makes it meaningful (Hawkins 2011:xi)." With this in mind, I continue the discussion of genre and authenticity throughout the analysis and also in my chapter; Authenticity: Past and present. The larger question relating to bluegrass today is what the listeners currently perceive as authentic compared to when the genre was newly established. What has changed about the way the listener approach the music? Such questions I will return to later.

INSTRUMENTS, TEMPO AND PITCH

There are many ingredients needed to create the right sound and to make up the “sound bank” for the musicians playing bluegrass. As mentioned earlier ‘The Scruggs-style’ on the five-string banjo is only one of them. The other traditional bluegrass instruments (all acoustic) are: Guitar, bass, fiddle, mandolin and later on the dobro. The rhythmic guitar combined with the bass make up the rhythmic section. Fiddle, banjo, mandolin and dobro play the melody, but also provide the rhythmic and melodic background for the vocalists (Rosenberg 2005:7).

Another genre feature was that traditionally (with the few exceptions mentioned earlier), the musicians were all male (Rosenberg 2005:7). It was important to the bluegrass musicians that their instruments were acoustic. As Cantwell writes: “The acoustic instrument receives and communicates *his* strength, *his* touch, *his* shaping hand...” (Cantwell 2003:203). This statement is coherent with a genre where communicating struggle, longings and faith is important for the composer or musician to be perceived as authentic (Cantwell 2003:205).

The description of bluegrass being ‘folk on overdrive’ might be a result of the high tempo, high pitch, the High Lonesome Sound, the emphasis on virtuous music breaks and the characteristic drive (Ledgin 2006:2). The drive is a product of the high tempo combined with the mandolin chopping and banjo picking. This drive is to many musicians and listeners one of the features which is needed to label the music bluegrass. Jerry Douglas told me in an interview July 2016, when describing what bluegrass can’t survive without: “But it has this drive, this aggression, you know. It’s an attitude, and if that was lost, it wouldn’t be bluegrass music (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).”

Most bluegrass songs use 2/4, 4/4 or other combinations of meter that are able to be divided by two (Rosenberg 2005:7) The high pitch itself is also important in bluegrass. As Cantwell writes: “as an object of striving” and he continues with writing: “Heights are perennially associated with our ‘higher’ functions: with intellect and spirit, with moral perfection, and finally, of course, with God (Cantwell 2003:242).”

VOCALS AND LYRICS

Cantwell is referring to the work Alan Lomax has done on voice in folk-song style, arguing that there is a correlation between the voice and conditions of life (Cantwell 2003:205).

Lomax talks about pitch and nasality, both important features in bluegrass vocals (Cantwell 2003:207). His findings seem logical when knowing where bluegrass has its origin (Rosenberg 2005:6). He says for instance that agricultural societies have a tendency to sing in a higher pitch and that nasality occurs where children have had to become independent at an early age (Cantwell 2003:207). Cantwell also refers to a psychotherapist that has found that “over controlled behaviour may show itself in pinched, narrow, and often irritatingly nasal vocal tones” (Cantwell 2003:207). The nasal bluegrass vocal is supposed to reflect the rough upbringing and life in the rural areas in which bluegrass was created. The nasal sound was seen as a result of the tension between the brutal honesty of the lyrics and the character of the voice (Cantwell 2003:206). In an interview carried out by Brackett (2000), which focused on authenticity, the country artist Hank Williams says this about his own voice “The hillbilly singer sings more sincere than most entertainers because the hillbilly was raised rougher than most entertainers (Brackett 2000:86).”

Bluegrass vocals are often described using the adjectives above; high-pitched, nasal and narrow (Cantwell 2003:207). Also words like, piercing, cutting, hard-edged and clear are used. In technical terms we use words like belting; a closed up sound that is clear and with a minimal airflow (Scearce 2016:161) and twang; the nasal and piercing sound created in the nasal cavities (Scearce 2016:152). All these characteristics are a direct legacy from Bill Monroe’s vocal style, which went on to be called the “High Lonesome Sound (Rosenberg 2005:7 and Bufwack and Oermann 2003:391).” Traditionally the vocalist was meant to sing in the very highest region of their vocal range to reach the High Lonesome Sound (a technique similar to belting but with a more intense and shimmering timbre on the highest notes), the sound of Bill Monroe. One might argue whether a high-pitched voice is associated with male or female, and the answer has to be that this is defined culturally (Frith 1998:194). Frith (1998) writes about this high voice in soul music having the same purpose as in bluegrass: “...a high voice means not effeminacy (man as woman) but a ladies’ man, and we now take it for granted that a male voice will move up a pitch to register more intense feeling, that the more strained the note, the more sincere the singer (Frith 1998:195).” Also in bluegrass music this is a male voice, mostly because there were only men! And it has been, and still is, common in other genres as well (for example rock, soul and pop) to perceive a male vocalist with a high-pitched strained tone as a sincere singer (Frith 1998:195). Brackett (2000) also thinks this high male voice as often being perceived as authentic and eccentricity:

“In fact, singing in high register in a non-falsetto, straight tone tends to be associated with spiritual/sexual power and intensity in much music derived from British-American and African-American practice (one need only listen to the timbre and tessitura of a preacher in a sanctified African-American church service) (Brackett 2000:96).”

It is a discussion within the bluegrass community if the High Lonesome Sound is only possible to achieve if you are male, in the same way ‘falsetto’ is a sound only possible for male vocalists (Bufwack, Oermann 2002:409). When I use the term in my analysis on Alison Krauss, it is to describe a sound that is close to the male version in sound and that has the same purpose; which is to give the listener the sense of struggle and despair that the lyrics are conveying. It is not supposed to sound, or feel, comfortable (Cantwell 2003:209). If it does, a bluegrass fanatic will argue that the music loses its tension, and therefore also its meaning (Cantwell 2003:209). The perception of a voice sounding sincere when it sounds painful to sing is also found in other genres, and Alan Moore (2012) also links this vocal struggle to authenticity when analysing Joe Cocker: “He sings with obvious effort, with rather wayward tuning, in an uncomfortable high register, and with a huskiness that suggests a voice raw... ..connote a personal authenticity and integrity... (Moore 2012:107).”

You will also find that bluegrass vocalists suddenly change the volume in the middle of a verse or phrase. This has more to do with technique than what would have been a natural progression of the song’s build-up. The purpose is to provide the vocalist with the force needed to achieve the right lonesome sound in the higher register of the voice (Cantwell 2003:207). This ‘mechanic’ approach to singing might be the reason why bluegrass vocals are described as “relatively impersonal and rather stylized”, to quote Rosenberg (Rosenberg 2005:7). You might also find that bluegrass vocalists sing with exaggerated rounded vowels (Cantwell 2003:210). These vowels are most common with the vocalists from rural areas (fredbartenstein.com 01.09.16). This is not an uncommon phenomenon in other genres either. Frith writes about how: “...- folk singers adopt ‘quasi-rural’ accent, white reggae singers Jamaican lilt, European rappers New York street tones, and so on (Frith 1998:167).” Brackett (2000) comes across the same phenomenon when analysing Williams’ vocal technique within the country genre: “This vocal technique allows him to produce a variety of vowel sounds closer to spoken vowel sounds than the bel canto technique, which tends to produce a more consistent tone colour...” (Brackett 2000:90)

Bluegrass vocalists often sang as they spoke; with rounded vowels and with slang (fredbartenstein.com). They could also contract the words in a song, which for them sounded natural but might make the lyrics difficult to perceive for an outsider (fredbartenstein.com). This approach to singing gives the songs an authentic feel, and (to quote Frith) “makes it feel real rather than rehearsed (Frith 198:193).” The voice in bluegrass is supposed to be piercing and high pitched, as mentioned above. It is preferred in a straight tone and without vibrato or ornaments (Neal 2003:133), although the glissando is an effect that is often heard on bluegrass (Ledgin 2006:3). Bill Monroe used to tell his musicians to “separate your notes. Let your tones come through“ (Cantwell 2003:203). Bill Monroe transferred this to his singing. Why mention vibrato when it’s labelled; not bluegrass? Because you will find that Alison Krauss is slightly pushing boundaries and slowly introducing the bluegrass world to a new understanding of what bluegrass could sound like. In this case, the father of bluegrass himself mentioned vibrato and ornaments as being a genre breach.

Unison singing is rare in this genre. Close harmonies in duets (with a tenor above the melody), trios (with the melody in the middle) and quartets (usually in religious songs, adds a bass line) are what you normally find (Rosenberg 2005:7). Cantwell describes bluegrass-backing vocals like this: “The approach of one voice to another at a high volume and pitch is like the approach of a knife blade to a grinding wheel (Cantwell 2003:212).” With the idealistic vocal sound being cutting and piercing, this must be the ultimate result (Rosenberg 2005:7). When bluegrass harmonies are sung in the right way (with the right pitch, force and technique) it will produce a buzz, more than it will produce an overtone (Cantwell 2003:212).

The lyrics of bluegrass songs can be divided into categories: religious and secular. Secular songs often have themes like; heartbreak, memories of the old home/life and problems of modern urban and suburban life. Alcohol, death, pain and cheating are popular topics, and the lyrics are often sentimental (Rosenberg 2005:8 and Cantwell 2003:7 226). To sum up; it is rare to find feel-good lyrics in bluegrass. The religious lyrics are often divided into two categories: preaching or confessing. The topics here are the idyllic world, heaven, sin, forgiveness, Jesus and God (Cantwell 2003:226). Religious songs are on the repertoires of every bluegrass band, even today, and are a huge part of the bluegrass history and community (Rosenberg 2005:8).

I do not want to label bluegrass and country music ‘the same genre’, but when talking about the importance of lyrics, both genres have much in common. Although country music has a reputation of being the flashier cousin of bluegrass, both genres have the themes of the lyrics and the language used in the lyrics closely linked to authenticity (Brackett 2000:77). Brackett underlines the important role of the lyrics when analysing a country song: ”This may seem to be the obvious place to begin an analysis of a country song, since lyrics occupy a privileged space in the discourse of fans and critics of country music; and the forward placement of the voice in the recorded mix, the ‘naturalized’, conversational delivery of the lyrics. And their strongly narrative character all work to focus the listener’s attention on the voice (Brackett 2000:77).“

The lyrics and the voice go hand in hand when analysing and when listening to music (Brackett 2000:78). The voice is conveying the struggle of the lyrics, and the tension in the voice is underlined by the words. The word, the vowels and consonants are crucial in choice of technique, and the chosen technique has the power of giving the word a whole new meaning. Brackett writes how “... the lyrics and the focus of the voice are essential for communicating the ‘metanarratives’ in a given song.” (Brackett 2000:78).

With the genre rules, the ‘boundaries of bluegrass’, presented I am now moving on to my analysis of Alison Krauss’ voice in search for genre rules and breach, and authenticity.

3.3.2. HER TRANSFORMING VOICE – THE ANALYSIS

In my analysis of Alison Krauss’ voice the main focus has been on detecting what I have listed as genre rules regarding the vocal technique within traditional bluegrass. The reason for this analysis is not to provide evidence that her voice *has* changed. My thesis is built around my presumption that it has. I have also perceived that the changes are not only linked to a natural evolution of a voice, but also rather closely linked to moving away from one ideal vocal sound to another. It is inevitable that peoples’ voices change over time. Voices change as a result of ageing, circumstances in life, when adapting to voices around you (when moving physically or in the society, or music genres) (Frith 1998:197). I am analysing Krauss’ voice in search of two main findings. First: I am looking for genre rules and genre breaches of bluegrass on her recordings. Second: I am looking to find answers to *how* and

why she is still perceived as authentic when she is moving away from the traditional bluegrass vocal sound.

I will now focus on what I perceive as changes that are ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ when it comes to the genre rules presented earlier in this thesis. How is it possible that Alison Krauss can maintain the title; The bluegrass Queen, when she is pushing the boundaries of what we know to be bluegrass and what we perceive as being the sound of an authentic bluegrass vocal? Brackett (2000) writes in an analysis of Hank William about “... The aesthetic boundaries in which he operated... (Brackett 2000:91)” The same goes for Alison Krauss. Where is she, on the recordings, regarding the boundaries of Bluegrass? Up close or far away? Moore legitimizes the search for musical codes by saying that: “They can also enable us to identify a style in which the singer is singing, and the connotations that style may have, in relation to this particular performance (Moore 2012:103).” Through active listening, and with the help of tools for analysis inspired by Hawkins, Neal, Moore, and other scholars, I will attempt to identify the ‘vocal codes’ in Alison Krauss’s voice. I will describe what features in her voice are steering away from and what features are true to the traditional bluegrass vocal. Hawkins writes about musical codes that: “... musical codes can only assume meaning through the cultural context of their location (Hawkins 2002:9).” I will identify these codes, which have been contextualized within or outside bluegrass. I am also mentioning changes caused by natural ageing or progression as an artist, where this is natural, but then I will be sure to point that out specifically.

I do recognise that there are many other interesting angles on analysis regarding a bluegrass recording, and it is tempting to address them all. The clothes worn by the artists on the record sleeves, the positioning of the artist, the colours, the music video, the story of the music video, the label and the producer. Race and gender in the lyrics, the voice, and the music are also highly interesting topics and I sincerely wish I had time to address more. However, I need to narrow my scope, and focus on the vocal. These other topics mentioned above will be addressed in the analysis where they play a significant part when it comes to genre breaches or as a contrast or backing up the vocal in a specific track. I will mention genre features or violations when it comes to time signature, tempo, key, form, build-up, the production phase, music video, lyrics and instrumentation and playing techniques, but only in a slightly superficial way.

Other relevant topics when analysing bluegrass are the lyrics and also the ‘voice’ heard in the performance. I will not do more than scratch the surface of this topic in my analysis, but I do recognize that these are definitely interesting topics. “What is the relationship between the ‘voice’ we hear in the song and the author or the composer of that song (Frith 1998:185)?” is an important question Frith (1998) brings to the table when analysing. Who is telling the story; is it the lyricist, the artist, the one who recorded the original track, the record producers, the man behind the women or the women behind the man? Frith makes this question even more interesting when writing:

We hear the singer’s voice, of course, but how that voice relates to the voices described above (the voice of the lyricist) is the interesting question. To sing a lyric doesn’t simplify the question of who is speaking to whom; it makes it more complicated (Frith 1998:184).

Alison Krauss is not a songwriter, but this does not mean that she is alienated from the words, the feelings, and the stories told through the lyrics by the lyricist. As Frith points out:

It is in real, material, singing voices that the ‘real’ person is heard, not in scored stylistic or formulaic devices. The pop musician as interpreter (Billie Holiday, say) is therefore more likely to be understood in biographical terms than the pop musician as composer (Mark Knopfler, say), and when musicians are both, it is the performing rather than the composing voice that is taken to be the key to character (Frith 1998:185)

Frank Sinatra was also an interpreter, and never the songwriter (Frith 1998:186). Frith quotes Gregory Sandow’s words on Sinatra, and for me they could also have been written about Alison Krauss: “Because he *is* an artist, he can’t help telling a kind of truth; he can’t help reaching towards the root of everything he’s felt (Frith 1998:186).” Frith has found that when talking about pop voice “...we hear singers as *personally* expressive (even, perhaps especially, when they are not singing ‘their own’ song) ... (Frith 1998:186).” One reason for the pop voice (as opposed to the classical voice) to be detected as ‘personal’ and through where we find a singer believable and gets to ‘know them’ (Frith 1998:185 and 199) might be through the close link between the singing voice and body. The voice *is* a direct expression of the body (Frith 1998:192), when we hear a singer, we do not only hear her voice, but because we as listeners also have a body “we feel we know what they do (Frith 1998:192)!” This might also explain why those who ‘only’ interpret a song are the ones who ‘own’ it, and not the writer (Frith 1998:200). Moore mentions how “... there is no necessary contradiction between singing another’s material and convincing listeners of your authenticity in so doing

(Moore 2012:269.” Through the analysis I have found that Alison Krauss is a perfect example of this.

The singing voice in bluegrass was in early recordings and performances, not that easy (or even that interesting) to analyse. From the very beginning the singers, or musicians, didn't have the 'help' of the microphone, or any other electricity (Rosenberg 2005:6). Still today purists and traditionalists share one microphone on stage for a more 'authentic' sound. If Alison Krauss was one of those, her vocal evolution might not have happened. As Frith writes: “The microphone allowed us to hear people in ways that normally implied intimacy – the whisper, the caress, the murmur (Frith 1998:187).” The microphone entering bluegrass was a huge trigger for the vocalists to now produce “soft sounds, close sounds (Frith 1998:187)” to quote Frith. For a bluegrass vocalist this meant that you no longer had to belt your lungs out on the highest register of your voice (Moore 2012:106) or sound high and lonesome when feeling low. With the help of the microphone, the vocalist no longer had to be afraid of disappearing in the soundscape, but could become more of a natural centre of attention (Frith 198:188). What this new vocal approach did to the artists' (such as Alison Krauss) credibility is a question I will return to later in this thesis.

When doing the analysis I have used the schematic way of organizing the vocal analysis from Jocelyn R. Neal (2013), in *Country Music – A cultural and stylistic history*, as a base. I have altered the form slightly to fit my listening process (Appendix 2). The original form was used to analyse *Blue Moon of Kentucky* from 1946 written and performed by Bill Monroe (Neal 2013:135). The reason for using this form is to provide myself with a tool, which will be useful to quickly locate the vocal technique used in the track by finding the listening queues.

This vocal analysis focuses on the four positional aspects from Allan F. Moore as a starting point. Register, cavity, heard attitude to rhythm and heard attitude to pitch (Moore 2012:102). All of these elements are crucial when describing and analysing bluegrass vocals (Cantwell 2003:207). My findings will help me place that particular track and vocal close or far away from bluegrass. To quote Moore (2012): “I think that, unless there is documentary evidence to the contrary, it is important to assume that the factors are all under control, and that the sounds produced are all produced intentionally (Moore 2012:103).” Knowing the work ethic and attention to details, which Alison Krauss possess, combined with her being a

perfectionist, I am not in the least afraid to reach the same conclusion as Moore. I have also used Hawkins as an inspiration when organising my listening process and analysis. Hawkins writes how codes can be divided into two categories: Stylistic codes (socio-cultural noticeable through performance, genre and musical trends) and technical codes (Pitch, melody, rhythm, chord progression). He has also referred to a third category, developed by Allan Moore, the sound-box, “a space where codes interconnect to give rise to musical effects and gestures (Hawkins 2002:10).” I have kept these stylistic and technical codes in mind while doing my analysis, but my focus has, as legitimized earlier, mainly been on the vocal.

I have chosen to analyse the title track on 5 of Alison Krauss’ recordings with Rounder Records. I have chosen title tracks from albums that mark either a huge change musically, career wise or vocally for Alison Krauss. Some of the tracks are from her solo albums and some are albums with Alison Krauss and Union Station. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have consciously left out analysing her projects outside the genre. For instance the projects with artists like Robert Plant and Brad Paisley (for a full discography visit alisonkrauss.com). These projects have without a doubt been a part of her evolution as an artist and vocalist, but I don’t find it relevant to analyse those projects for genre features or breaches regarding bluegrass. These recordings have other sound ideals outside bluegrass and they are therefore not interesting for this particular analysis and thesis with a main focus on Alison Krauss and bluegrass.

1: TOO LATE TO CRY (1987)

Too late to cry released in 1987, and is her first solo album on which she sings. This is also Alison Krauss’ first album under Rounder Records, the label that signed her in 1986 after listening to the demo by Classified Grass. Luckily Ken Irwin was sold and she was signed, at age 14 (Henry 2013:318).

TRADITIONS ARE BEING FOLLOWED

”Too late to cry” immediately strikes you as bluegrass, as does the rest of the album. Even the ever-critical magazine, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, reviewed it. That in itself is a sign of being welcomed into, at this time, the ironically limited society of bluegrass. Her voice was singled out as “ the dominating female voice of the modern era” and the review continued with “the

entire music world is in for an adventure of the first magnitude.” (Henry 2013:319). It might seem that this reviewer had an eight ball, to be able to foresee the future to the extent that he did.

The song starts out in a traditional bluegrass tempo with the familiar bluegrass drive. The instrumentation is also traditional with, as mentioned, banjo and mandolin, and also upright bass, fiddle and acoustic guitar. The song is in 4/4 and the key C-major. The form of the song with verse-refrain-instrumental solo-v-r-s-v-r is traditional. There is a fiddle solo and a mandolin solo breaking up the song, all in familiar bluegrass manner (Ledgin 2006:3). The build-up of this song is natural for the genre. All the instruments are entering at the same time, with the mandolin and banjo slightly in the foreground of the soundscape.

LYRICS TO CRY FOR

The lyrics on this recording are also characteristic. From the beginning of the genre, if the songs weren't gospel, they had themes like love, death and family (Ledgin 2006:69). With its sad love story this song could be on every bluegrass artist's set list. Although It's not found in any literature on bluegrass, after listening to the genre for a while you get the sense of how right it is to mention the word "whisky" in the first line. What might not feel just as right is that Alison Krauss is 15 years old when singing the phrase: "Sitting all alone with my whisky on ice." She is also (mis)placed on a bar stool at a bar on the record cover, wearing a long skirt and a large blouse. She actually looks like a girl hanging out at a bar. When I was talking to Jerry Douglas in July 2016 he actually mentioned this particular song, and started laughing when he told me: "There's one song on the first record that we've always given her the business about, eh... 'Sitting here alone with my whisky in ice' [Laughter] ... And she's fourteen years old! ... Yeah, but it's like, she loved the song. She didn't pay attention. Now she pays attention! She pays attention to every syllable. You know (Douglas, interview 16.07.17)." What I initially thought to be a sign of an overly controlling, male producer telling Alison Krauss what song to record, turned out to be a really good example of her independence as an artist and musician! As long as her choice was true to the genre, it might not be worth mentioning. Luckily, *Song For Life* from the same record starts out; 'I don't drink as much as I used to', so that is reassuring. It is tempting to address the question of *whose* voice we hear on this track (Frith 1998:184). Is it the 15-year-old girl singing or the middle-aged man behind the lyrics? I will not go further into the discussion of the voice of the

lyricist in this thesis, but lyrics are a really interesting topic in this male-dominated genre. It would also have been interesting to see a music video with this track, but that was not even a topic at this time.

Traditionally all songs were written for male vocalists, the only vocalists, in bluegrass. In the early days of women in bluegrass it was even considered outrageous to change the key of a bluegrass standard to make it fit the female voice. This made it very difficult for women to for instance join in on vocals in jam sessions. This didn't change until it became more common to have female musicians on backing vocals and even female bandleaders in the 90s (Henry 2013:281). Still today it has to be mentioned that changing the key is OK, and this tells me that this still isn't always taken for granted. On a hand-out passed around at a slow-jam class at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016 under the headline 'Etiquette Stuff' you could read:

In more advanced jams, often the 'classic' arrangement of a particular number is followed, including choice of key, which instrument solos when, harmony parts, etc. However, if the classic version is in a key that doesn't work well for the lead singer, the singer calls the key and the others adapt (Appendix 3, *Bluegrass Jamming Basics*).

The song is written by John Harold Pennell, Krauss' earlier band mate, and it is tempting to believe that this song is written in a context where a woman singing the lead was not uncommon. The fact that the lyrics are written out: "I wonder why *he's* not with me tonight" might not be a genre breach, but more a sign of the genre evolving. For Alison Krauss to have her own solo-album would only a decade earlier have been outrageous (Henry 2013:65), so Alison Krauss as a bluegrass artist is in itself a sign of where the genre is heading at this point.

UNCOMFORTABLY COMFORTABLE

The choice of key, C-major, is where bluegrass fanatics may notice a character blip (Cantwell 2003:209).

Even if this is a fairly high key for a woman, and the melody in both the refrain and the verse centres around the higher level of the one line octave and up to a D in the two-line octave, it still sounds a little too comfortable for Krauss. Or, if you listen closely, it sounds so comfortable that it becomes uncomfortable on the deeper notes. The result is a nasal sound, but not with the traditional bluegrass sound, which is created in the nasal cavities and is perceived more 'clear' and 'cutting' than nasal. The nasal sound that is noticeable on *Too late*

to cry is created with the tongue curling up in the back and closing of the sound at the lower part of the throat, combined with the sound passing through the nasal area. This technique is here being used to sharpen the notes that are in the lower spectrum, so that they will not disappear into the soundscape of the banjo and mandolin. Krauss also uses this technique as a transition to the High Lonesome Sound on the higher end of the scale. Listening to later recordings I get the sense that this is a technique that has more to do with her voice not being fully developed than it has to do with the genre.

Why this song is played in C-major and not in a higher key is unknown to me. Knowing that Alison Krauss herself picked out the material for this record makes me wonder who had the final say when choosing the keys (Henry 2013:318). Maybe it is as simple as what sounded best on the instruments, her fiddle included. Or maybe we are witnesses to yet another example of the other instrumentalists or the producer, here being all male, to have the final say.

THE HIGH LONESOME SOUND

The lead vocal on this track, compared to the latest recording, gives you the impression of being far away. One reason for this is that the vocal is placed further back in the mix and is competing with the other instruments for attention. Also the technique used, the pitch and volume gives us the feeling that she is physically far away. This placement in the soundscape was normal from the very beginning of the genre when playing live. They didn't normally have microphones, and when they did they often shared one. The musician doing an instrumental break or the vocalist might take a step closer to the microphone or audience, but they mainly depended on volume to cut through the soundscape (fredbartenstein.com). The volume and the techniques used on this track create a distance between the musicians and me as a listener.

The obvious vocal technique used on this track, and also throughout the album, is belting. With or without twang and with the High Lonesome Sound on the higher notes. This technique depends on the force that the singer is bringing to the song. For the force, or punch, to be satisfying for a bluegrass listener, the key of the song and the range of the singer are crucial. It is not possible to belt in a key that is too low or comfortable, hence the nasal and closed up sound described earlier (Cantwell 2003:209). Alison Krauss herself has later described her voice as 'over singing' on this album (Henry 2013:319). I met with several of

her colleagues and band mates at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival July 2016, and several of them mention how there has been an obvious change in how she uses her voice. Leigh Gibson (the Gibson Brothers) and I talked about this when I was interviewing him 16.07.16:

LG: ...it's a funny thing when you're a young singer. You probably know that you have all this power, and you want to explore. And you realise that "I'm wasting my energy using that all the time." Cause when I listen to her records from the 80's she's hitting it!

SS: Yes, she is really belting it out!

LG: Yeah, all the time [Laughter]! (Gibson, interview 16.07.16)

I also talked to her close friend and band mate, Jerry Douglas, about this. He mentions how this technique is something that belongs in her musical past:

JD: But she can belt, you know!

SS: Yeah, she can! She doesn't do that very often.

JD: She doesn't do that very often, but she's really good at it!

SS: I kind of miss that from the old records.

JD: Well, she uses that as a secret weapon at this point [Laughter]. She can do that, and she used to do that a lot.

I suspect that she now finds belting to be a little too forceful, considering this is the technique that she has moved further away from on her later projects (Henry 2013: 319). I will return to my theories on why she has made this obvious vocal change later on.

THE LOSS OF THE TENSION

On this track Alison Krauss also uses a mixed voice (a relaxed chest tone) when the melody is not in the range for belting. This is a technique she depends on more and more throughout the years, but on this first album it is a rarity. This relaxed tone is not appreciated in the bluegrass community, especially at the time when "Too late to cry" entered the bluegrass world. In the book *Bluegrass breakdown* Cantwell goes as far as to say: "Where that tension is lost, in singers for whom high notes pose no difficulty, though the broader mimetic effects of the style will remain force, its moral dimension is lost." (Cantwell 2003:209). Knowing that bluegrass lyrics in the early days had the goal to convey feelings of despair, struggle, faith and love, it is a devastating loss to lose the morals! How Alison Krauss compensates for this loss, and is still perceived as authentic in her later albums will be addressed later in this chapter of analysis.

SUDDEN DYNAMIC AND ROUNDED VOWELS

Other genre features that are worth mentioning on this recording are the sudden dynamic changes, the vowels and the stylistic and impersonal voice. On this recording, where Alison Krauss wants to achieve the characteristic belting sound in the higher register, it depends, as mentioned earlier, on her force. It sounds almost like she suddenly shifts to a higher gear to achieve the right sound.

Alison Krauss's vowels on this recording are shifting between the traditional rounded bluegrass vowels (Cantwell 2003:210) and a slight immature and nasal timbre in the deeper range of her voice. The nasal timbre might be true to the genre, but I perceive the nasality on this track as being a side effect of a young vocalist trying to find her voice, and doing so in a key that is not ideal for her. She does have the traditional exaggerated round vowels and also the occasional slang way of singing, although this is more obvious on her second and third record. The rounded vowels are especially easy to detect on the [o]. Normally the [o] would sound more like an [ɔ:], but in bluegrass, and on this recording, you will hear a very distinct [o]. This contrast between the round vowels and the cutting nasal sound gives the song a really traditional bluegrass sound even though Krauss is pushing the boundaries in many, but still subtle, ways. This stylistic and almost recipe like way of approaching a song is why bluegrass vocals, also Krauss on this album, might come across as impersonal (Rosenberg 2005:7).

VIBRATO AND ORNAMENTS

Another technique that is noticeable on this track is the subtle use of vibrato and ornament. This is untypical in bluegrass. The voice is supposed to be piercing and high pitched and preferred in a straight tone and without vibrato or ornaments (Neal 2003:133). As mentioned earlier this is why Monroe told his musicians to “separate your notes. Let your tones come through“ (Cantwell 2003:203). Monroe himself transferred this to his singing, and as we can hear here Krauss is slightly pushing the boundaries. Although it is not too noticeable on this first album, it is worth mentioning because it will later become one of Krauss' tastefully executed trademarks on later recordings.

BACKING UP THE VOCALS

From the second they enter in on the refrain, the backing vocals are also backing up the ‘bluegrass feel’ of this song, although this arrangement includes two female voices. The melody is placed on top, with a female baritone and a low male tenor stacked below. With all male voices you would expect a male tenor voice on top, the melody in the middle and a male baritone on the bottom (Neal 2003:133). This three-voiced arrangement is therefore not straight out of the bluegrass textbook, but it gives the song the bluegrass edge we expect when the refrain arrives. Although the backing vocals are a little mellower (mostly due to the placement of the voices) than what Monroe would have preferred, the result is somewhat how Cantwell describes bluegrass vocals backing each other to sound like: a grinding wheel (Cantwell 2003:212)!

2: *EVERY TIME YOU SAY GOODBYE* (1992)

In 1992 Alison Krauss released her fourth album together with Union Station. *Every Time You Say Goodbye* is the title track on the album known for displaying Alison Krauss’s new signature sound: “a soft, whispery touch under immaculate control (Henry 2013:322).” It is also an album that gave Alison Krauss her second Grammy, and the band their first. Two years earlier Alison Krauss had released her second solo album; *I’ve Got That Old Feeling* (1992) for which she won her very first Grammy (Henry 2014:320). This album gave her a commercial breakthrough and both Newsweek and USA Today praised both her playing and her voice (Henry 2013:320), but Bluegrass Unlimited were not so nice. They disagreed to the lesser use of banjo, the use of piano and drums (Henry 2013:321). They wrote: “isn’t exactly bluegrass, “Over produced” and “not up to previous material” and she might have lost the purists with this record. But it has to be mentioned that one of the tracks, *Steel Rail*, has become a new bluegrass standard, so it couldn’t have been that bad! (Henry 2014:321). As a matter of fact, *Steel Rail* was on the list of *Bluegrass Jamming Favourites* at the Grey Fox festival 2016, listed right above the classic (and hit from *O Brother Where Art Thou?*) *Man of Constant Sorrow* (Appendix 3).

Because of her progressive approach to bluegrass she kept pushing the boundaries of the genre and with that “did more than any of her contemporaries to attract mainstream-country attention to bluegrass” to quote Amazon in their review of *Every Time You Say Goodbye*. The

same reviewer calls the music on this album: “ ‘Bluegrass-lite’ that’s cut with pop sensibility and he also characterises Alison Krauss’s voice as “ goes-down-easy vocal (amazon.com).” Reading more reviews only stresses what I have always felt; it is Union Station who serve as the group’s bluegrass alibi. Already on this recording from 1992 her voice is described as sounding “as comfortable as a porch swing and lemonade on a warm summer evening (allmusic.com). Although the reviewer from allmusic.com is trying to appeal to an idyllic American dream with this metaphor, there is nothing in bluegrass that originally could be described as comfortable. Rather the opposite (Cantwell 2003:207). A reviewer from My Kind Of Country states how “Alison Krauss is best when singing ballads (mykindofcountry.com).” It is not easy to find any tracks with Alison Krauss singing up-tempo songs after this album. I know it is a speculative assumption; but knowing Alison Krauss’s constant strive for perfection, one might think that it wouldn’t take too many comments like this one to steer Alison Krauss away from more upbeat song in the future. Maybe Bluegrass Unlimited’s comment on her too ‘forceful’ vocal and her “tendency toward shrillness when pushing too hard (Henry 2014:319),” on her three earliest projects also made an impact on the young star.

Jerry Douglas, who played dobro on this recording, suggested another reason for her voice hitting a milestone with this album when I was interviewing him in July 2016:

But her voice really changed... I think, when I came in the band, there was a huge change. Because I wasn’t a foil against her, the dobro was like a singing thing that could like accompany her, and kind of just go along with her. Just flow along with her, it wasn’t percussive, that didn’t interfere with her voice so much (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).

Jerry Douglas also mentioned that the band changed their preferences at this point and started steering towards less classical bluegrass material and sound at this point in their career:

And the choice of material that we started to do at that point, it changed. So we’ve got more like a po... you know... I won’t say pop, but a... more like a... it was more introspective, more introspective. And the substance changes, changed. We weren’t singing about killings and fires and [Laughter]... armies and things like that. Or just... it was all about bad love (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).

It was a bold move by Alison Krauss and Union Station at this point to move in the direction of popular music, even though Jerry Douglas was reluctant to say the pop-word. They weren’t praised for this move at the time, but even purist Mike Compton might agree with them going ‘their own way’ if they had asked him today. In July 2016 he told me:

We can't really play and be a carbon copy of somebody else. I've tried! [Laughter]. ... And, it's not as rewarding either. You can, a person can play another person's mind, but you have emptiness in your heart. So if you can have somebody else's ideas with your own spirit, I think it's the best (Compton, interview 15.07.16).

BUT IS IT BLUEGRASS?

Today's listeners would undoubtedly describe this album, and its title track, as bluegrass. Everything from lyrics, structure, instrumentation and backing vocals are inside the boundaries of bluegrass today. However, fans and reviewers in 1992 had not heard or seen the changes we have witnessed the last decades, and the album was characterised as progressive in its time. It was labelled "mainstream country" and "contemporary country" (trageser.com). Not surprisingly, the bluegrass community didn't see eye-to-eye regarding this album. Whether or not they were opposed to or approved the changes, the reviewer from allmusic.com sums up the album's impact on bluegrass: "She has done a lot to make bluegrass a viable contemporary genre of music. *Every Time You Say Goodbye* does much to further that cause (allmusic.com)

A BELIEVABLE STORY ON TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS

As mentioned above, this could easily be found in the bluegrass section. Even Bluegrass Unlimited called her "the brightest star on the bluegrass horizon (Henry 2013:322)" in spite of her vocal change on this album. Or maybe they were pleased that she had taken into consideration what they had stated earlier? If they would later regret their comment on 'shrillness' when she moved even further away from bluegrass, I will never know.

Alison Krauss' former band mate and mentor, Pennell, also wrote this song. These lyrics are slightly more fitted for, on this recording, a 21-year-old woman. The lyrics are textbook bluegrass, with a classical broken heart and 'cry your eyes out' - theme. The voice of the lyricist and vocalist are more in sync, and Alison Krauss tells us a believable story of heartache. The lyrics are not particularly bound to one gender, they could easily have been sung by a man. The music video (which I will return to later), on the other hand, literarily places Alison Krauss in the kitchen, and we therefore assume that the lyrics and vocalist are crying out to a man who left her longing for his return. This 'picture' fits her fragile, whispery and close vocals perfectly.

The structure of the song is traditional: A-A-A-B-A-A-A-B-B, with two instrumental parts on banjo and fiddle. These ‘breaks’ are traditional and give every musician on a lead instrument the opportunity to step up to the microphone (Ledgin 2006:3). The time signature, key, instrumentation and build-up are also characteristic for bluegrass. With banjo in the lead, the mandolin, fiddle, dobro, guitar and bass are kicking off the intro in a high tempo, intensity and volume. Although they fade out slightly when finishing the intro and entering the first verse, this feels right at home in the bluegrass sphere. All instruments are more or less present throughout the song, and the intensity and volume increases slightly in the refrain (B). The upright bass keeps a steady beat throughout the song and the other string instruments take turns in being in the foreground. The bass and the guitar are the only ones who accompany the whole song.

With traditional instrumentation, build-up, and lyrics AKUS breaks traditions with their music video. One important spin-off from Alison Krauss’s solo album *I’ve Got That Old Feeling* (1990) prior to *Every time You Say Goodbye* (1992) was a music video (Henry 2013:321). This was Rounder’s first video production and it became the first bluegrass video with regular rotations on CMT and The Nashville Network. It also won a CMT award. Ken Irwin (Rounder) was convinced the video was a “key ingredient (Henry 2013:321)” for this album’s success. When releasing *Every Time You Say Goodbye* two years later making a video was therefore a natural choice. When starting this new ‘tradition’ Alison Krauss opened the door for other bluegrass artists, like Rhonda Vincent and Nickel Creek at first, but many have followed in her footsteps the last decade. Many videos have been made for Alison Krauss and Union Station, giving their music both more publicity and more depth. It has been an important tool in underlining the great stories told through their lyrics and music.

The story told in this video is of a girl pining over a man who left her. This is initially not a story which helps paint a picture of the strong independent women we have seen throughout bluegrass history, but more what is perceived as a ‘typical’ vulnerable girl put in a vulnerable situation by a man. To make the picture even worse, the girl (Alison Krauss) is placed in a kitchen, wearing a floral printed dress and looking miserable. Later in the video she is placed outside a wide open door gazing after the man who never shows. The scene implies that if he actually did show, he could just step right in continuing having a strong hold on his girl. Luckily, Alison Krauss is too strong a person to leave us with only this sad and stereotypical

picture! There is a parallel story happening: A story of an independent woman and a female band mate running the show. Frames of Alison Krauss standing in a circle playing with her band mates with blue skies as a backdrop, frames of Alison Krauss's silhouette while sitting on a chair playing the fiddle, and close-ups of a more blissful Alison Krauss singing. This story indicates not only that all band mates are equal, when placed in a circle wearing shirts and jackets (Alison Krauss in a skirt and not trousers like the boys), but also that Alison Krauss is strong and independent on her own sitting in the dark playing in a 'little black dress'. The sad bluegrass-like lyrics coupled with the strong statement made by the band and Alison Krauss shows me just how bold and progressive Alison Krauss and Union Station have been and still are!

BORDERLINE VOCALS

The vocals on this recording are balancing on the borderline between bluegrass and mainstream country (trageser.com). All of the three verses are characterized by the new "... soft, whispery touch (Henry 2013:322)." The well-known bluegrass tension is absent throughout the verses (Cantwell 2003:209). The more nasal mixed voice emerge a couple of times in the verse and so does the slightly more closed up and nasal timbre described earlier. Her characteristic vibrato is also emerging on this recording. It is Alison Krauss's trademark, although not a trademark for bluegrass. The vibrato often emerges at the end of a phrase or where the lyrics and melody invite her to dwell. The vibrato sounds controlled and intentional and adds texture to her changing voice. When the refrain enters so does her mixed nasal voice, which on this recording is only close to belting. The harmonies are again backing up the bluegrass feel. Alison Krauss herself has added the baritone while a male voice is low singing tenor. The sound of the backing vocals are not as grinding as one might wish (Cantwell 2003:212). Traditionally a lead singer with a more relaxed and mellow sounding voice is paired up with a high tenor who satisfies the 'cutting' and 'piercing' sound ideal (Rosenberg 2005:7), but this is not the case on this recording. This trio sounds all too relaxed and with the added airy timbre it sounds too comfortable to convince a purist (Cantwell 2003:209). Although the vocals on this track are borderline, they do feel genuine. Through her voice, the lyrics, and the music video, Alison Krauss tells a believable story, and Frith's words from 1998; "...as a listener we assume that we can hear someone's life in their voice ...(Frith 1998:186)" are fulfilled.

3: *FORGET ABOUT IT (1999)*

Alison Krauss released her second solo album in 1999, on which she was also the producer. *Forget About It* was ‘doomed’ as non-bluegrass from the start when Bluegrass Unlimited didn’t even bother reviewing it; they called it “all-country (Henry 2013:324).” Although Bluegrass Unlimited found it uninteresting, *No Depression* (The Journal of Roots Music) praised her for following her heart regarding musical choices. They wrote that she had “... a healthy disregard for both the jealous embrace of bluegrass exclusivists and her own commercial success (Henry 2013:324).” Nodepression.com also gave her credit for “following one’s muse (nodepression.com).” they also presented one possible explanation of why the critics were being particularly harsh to Alison Krauss at this point: “... perhaps because her hard bluegrass is so good... ...she ‘s received more than her share of criticism for daring to follow her heart, especially when she chooses to get softer rather than rock out (nodepression.com).

A review from All Music writes how “conventional country steps up”, that this is “an adult pop album with occasionally notes of country grace.” They conclude with this being a “marginal effort” done with uninspiring material, and that her voice, which is “capable of making wonders” saves the day (allmusic.com). Avclub.com writes that Alison Krauss, with the success of her last album, has “expanded her fan base while being true to her bluegrass roots”, but that this album is “washed of all but the most minimal bluegrass elements” and that it seems “too safe” (avclub.com). My Kind of Country calls the album an eclectic pop flavoured album (mykindofcountry.com).” They are praising the title track, which Country radio helped bring to the Billboard country chart as number 67 (mykindofcountry.com). Country Music also gives her praise and writes: “God bless Alison Krauss for her deep sense of country music roots and history, and her stubborn refusal to be stylistically bound by it (amazon.com).” With such a statement they suggest that it is her respect for the roots of bluegrass which makes her believable as an artist “moving even closer to mainstream like ever before (acousticmusic.com). Alison Krauss’ close friend, Barry Bales, who plays bass and does backing vocals on this record, ‘washed his hands clean’ on behalf of the whole band with one statement given to me in July 2016: “...we made other people make the labels. We grew up playing bluegrass and I think we respect it enough to not call everything we do

bluegrass. It's acoustic it's bluegrass based. We do a lot of bluegrass, but that's not exclusively what we do (Bales, interview 15.06.16)."

'SOFT-SPOKEN' BLUEGRASS

As the reviews suggests; Alison Krauss is on her way towards pop and "soft-spoken bluegrass and country (acousticmusic.com)." Robert Lee Castleman, a songwriter who AKUS will turn to several times in the future, is the writer behind the title track. Castleman is a Nashville based singer and songwriter and he mostly writes for country artists (Wikipedia.com). The lyrics do have the traditional theme of heartache, but they are drenched with memories, more nuanced feelings, and the lighter outcome of the 'victim' taking control and being able to pull through. In short: not as black or white lyrics as we are used to hear from bluegrass (Ledgin 2006:69).

The instrumentation and the song's build-up is also a deviation from the bluegrass tradition. The intro is of a layered fiddle and with a massive added timbre playing a short melody with harmony in a rubato. The intro leaves me expecting a dreamy and airy Irish pop song right out of a The Corrs album in the late 90s. The tempo is set right after the intro and the feel of the song changes and we are placed in the pop-country scene. The tempo is set by an untraditional shaker, which takes on the role of timekeeper throughout the song. Together with the drum set and electric bass they constitute the rhythm section. All this adds up to being a huge genre breach. Alison Krauss is singing lead, but is also backing herself on this track. There is also added timbre on both the lead and backing vocals. The key is E-major, again a too comfortable key for a bluegrass enthusiast (Rosenberg 2005:7). 'Comfort' is a key word through the whole album. Acousticmusic.com writes: "Krauss is smart enough to mostly stay within her comfort zone (acousticmusic.com)." I would argue that whether or not this is as smart as this review claims depends on the listener. A bluegrass fan might agree more with the reviewer saying it is seems "too safe (avclub.com)" and that the lack of tension makes this far from interesting within a bluegrass context (Cantwell 2003:209).

The song's structure and build-up is also more at home in the pop sphere. It contain a short and slightly soaring intro followed by A – A – B – A – A – A – B – C – Instrumental (A-A-B) – A – A – B – C. The bridge (B) is underlining the pop feel and so does the build-up of the song. The instruments are entering one by one throughout the song, in contrast to entering at

the same time, as bluegrass musicians normally would have. Not to mention the piano entering on the first bridge! This is a huge genre breach and a bold choice. There is an instrumental part breaking up this song. Unlike other bluegrass instrumentals this is a very mellow conversation between guitar and dobro and with the fiddle finishing off the conversation. This is not the usual showcase for the instrumentalists (Ledgin 2006:3). The traditional instruments are present, but not presented in the way we might expect. The fiddle, guitar, dobro and mandolin produce a comfortable backdrop for the comfortable vocals, and the characteristic banjo is long gone. Also the music video made for this track, which places the band and the love story in a cocktail bar, indicates that Alison Krauss has crossed over to a more mainstream audience (Ledgin 2006:48).

When analysing the vocals I had to stop myself from writing “airy and effortless” too many times. Wayne Donnelly, reviewer for enjoymusic.com comments on Alison Krauss’s ‘new’ vocal approach from *Forget About It* that: Krauss's thrilling High Lonesome" soprano vocals (and incandescent bluegrass fiddling) were shelved in favour of a meek, whispery delivery intended, I suppose, to sound intimate, possibly even sexy (enjoymusic.com).” This reviewer is right when stating the obvious fact of vocal change, but I find it slightly chauvinistic to indicate that airy and close vocals immediately imply sex. It also shows the reviewer’s lack of understanding when it comes to bluegrass vocals. Traditionally it is the technique producing the high pitched and nasal voice, which is perceived sexualized. The relaxed and airy timbre Alison Krauss has chosen would, within this genre, indicate the opposite. Cantwell (2003) writes: “- the tense vocal cords themselves, the nasal cavities, certain very narrow or very wide vowel sound - but these can all be turned to good advantage, challenging the singer to overcome the merely strangulated tone of sexual hysteria or the irritating whine of self-pity (Cantwell 2003:210).”

All the verses are sung in an unstrained tone, with an airy and relaxed timbre. Alison Krauss feels close and again she articulates so well that you get a feeling of her whispering in your ear. I can see why the reviewer from allmusic.com writes that she is “introspective and personal (allmusic.com)” on this album. Nothing seems coincidental with Alison Krauss’ vocal. Every consonant feels thoroughly placed, every tone feels well prepared and every phrase pays respect to the lyricist. [Nodepression.com](http://nodepression.com) writes “... she brings these songs to life with devastatingly thorough attention paid to every detail of the material’s often complex

lyrics, and to the sound of every note (nodepression.com).” The same review argues that this might be the reason why she has a “powerful sense of identity (nodepression.com)”, and I couldn’t agree more. This silky soprano voice (amazon.com) is interrupted a couple of times on this track, and brings her bluegrass heritage to the forefront for a moment. The first time she uses the mixed voice with a nasal timbre is in the bridge in two out of three bridges. It emerges again on the refrain (C), and more prominent this time. It is just too bad that this part is only repeated two times. This is also where the backing vocals remind us of Alison Krauss’s bluegrass career. The backing vocals only appear the second, and last time, this part is repeated. It is Alison Krauss herself who has added a comfortable alto, but in this case the lead vocal is ‘cutting’ enough to handle the softer backing vocal (Rosenberg 2005:7). The backing vocal does appear in more pop terms one time in this track; the third time ‘A’ is repeated a low and whispery alto backs up Alison Krauss’s already low and whispery lead, which collides with the genre rules of bluegrass (Rosenberg 2005:7). The song ends with a careful: Forget about it without any backing vocals and with the instruments fading out and finishing after a short intro. Although a reviewer wrote that this album “unintentionally -- most appropriately titled (enjoythemusic.com)” suggesting that this is an album we will easily forget, the way she brings the songs to life with her personal delivery gives her “impeccable controlled vocal the space to shine”, quoting *My Kind of Country*.

4: *NEW FAVOURITE (2001)*

Before digging into this track it is important to know what had happened in the bluegrass world since Alison Krauss’s last record, *Forget About It (1999)*. *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, or the O’ Brother-phenomenon happened in 2000. The soundtrack for this Hollywood movie, on which Alison Krauss contributed on several tracks, had sold 7 000 000 copies by 2003 (Holt 2007:38). This had given bluegrass an enormous amount of publicity, and as Holt writes: “I had learned that the film and especially the music in the film were celebrated as something that was exciting and authentic (Holt 2007:36).” I will return to the use of the word ‘authenticity’ in this context in my last chapter “Authenticity now and then.”

The *O Brother*-phenomenon brought a massive change in the language used in reviews of all of Alison Krauss’s projects with Rounder following the year 2000. It is striking that what had earlier been perceived as huge genre breaches were suddenly not only accepted but also praised by several. Suddenly ‘contemporary bluegrass’ was no longer used as opposed to ‘real

bluegrass', but as a reason for bluegrass reaching out to the masses, and with this being something to be grateful for.

It is peculiar that Alison Krauss, in a post *O Brother America*, chooses to record vocals so stripped of bluegrass trademarks. At this point "Bluegrass wasn't 'just' hillbilly music. It was hip (Ledgin 2006:xx)", to quote Leding's introduction in her book *Homegrown music*. Alison Krauss could easily have chosen a more hard edge and nasal vocal timbre, and not only gotten away with it, but been considered trendy. This is not what Alison Krauss did; she followed the path from *Forget about it*, but this time in collaboration with Union Station, and made "contemporary-sounding country (avclub.com)." All Music also noted this unlikely choice of material and sound and wrote in their album review: "While Krauss and Union Station guitarist/vocalist Dan Tyminski got deeply in touch with their dust bowl Americana roots for their work on the film, their follow-up studio album is certainly the slickest, most progressive work they've recorded to date (allmusic.com)".

CLOUDS AND KISSES

I wonder what Bill Monroe would have felt when reading how the voice of the reigning bluegrass queen is being described as: "softer than a cloud and more intimate than a midnight kiss (amazon.com)." This vocal description is everything but a description of bluegrass vocals. I am tempted to quote Rosenberg's (2005) 'definition' on what bluegrass vocals sound like: "... , bluegrass is characterized by very high-pitched singing. This preferred vocal tone, often described as 'clear' or 'cutting' or, sometimes, 'piercing', is the direct legacy of Bill Monroe's singing style, which during the sixties came to be called 'the high and lonesome' sound (Rosenberg 2005:7)." Rosenberg does write how you will find exceptions of more 'mellow-sounding' vocals, but they are paired with a 'high and lonesome' tenor. Dan Tyminski backs Alison Krauss on this record, but his support of [oh]-ing and [aw]-ing might underline her sounding lonely, but its miles away from sounding 'lonesome'. Tyminski's does reach this textbook definition on his solo tracks, which make almost half of this album. Allmusic.com writes that the album "... seems almost neatly divided into two albums (allmusic.com)." I can agree on this observation, but I am not certain that it justifies the lack of bluegrass elements on 50% of the album if talking to a purist. I also think that Stephen Thompson's review for avclub.com was only partly right when stating "...Krauss and company may alienate a few purists, ... (avclub.com)" or allmusic.com writing: "... will

certainly not sit right with certain element of the band's core audience (allmusic.com)." I will discuss why later in this chapter of analysis. No matter what the critics and purists might say, I do believe that she has been really lucky with her closest colleagues. Her band mates, Union Station, seem to have her back when it comes to her new vocal approach. When talking about her vocal change with Jerry Douglas in July 2016 he told me:

But she found out that there's this place in her voice that's just a magic place. And that's her thing, you know. That's what she is famous for. And but, yeah... she can do anything any singer can do, but she's got this thing, this place in her voice that's just like... "O God!" so vulnerable, so fragile (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).

Her faithful bass player through the last decades, Barry Bales, told me his personal opinion on the evolution the genre has experienced: "I don't think bluegrass need to be a museum piece, you know. To take it and do new things to it is good for it. If you try to squash anybody's originality or creativity that's never a good thing (Bales, interview 16.07.16)."

NEW FAVOURITE?

Deliberately steering away from bluegrass-characteristics this song starts out with the guitar setting a slow, but steady tempo. There is added timbre in both the vocals and instrumentations, and when the bass drum enters in the intro, the tone is set for a lovely pop ballad. The time signature is 4/4, the tempo is slow, but the guitar makes sure that the track never feels too slow, on the contrary it gives you a constant feeling making you believe that this song will never end. This title track is stripped down in many ways. The instrumentation is narrowed down to guitar, dobro, drums and upright bass. There are no backing vocals on this title track, so there is no High Lonesome support of Alison Krauss's smooth delivery and with drums as a huge bluegrass 'no', this would never be placed in the bluegrass category if it wasn't for the other tracks it is coupled with on this album. Alison Krauss sings in an airy head voice throughout the song. It sound like there is no effort put in the beautiful phrases floating in the front of the mix. She feels closer than ever, and every breath is detectable and every small change in timbre can be heard and emphasizes the vulnerable lyrics. The vibrato underlines the situations of the 'voice' behind the lyrics; a person very much in love, but with a sneaking suspicion of an unfaithful partner. This suspicion leaves her feeling extremely insecure and heartbroken. The song is written by Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, a singer-songwriter couple within American roots music, and both Welch and Rawlings appears on the *O Brother Where Art Thou?*-soundtrack. I perceive the voice behind the lyrics as being a

woman. The story told in the music video backs up my assumption. It is dark, and from a car left with the lights on a woman (Alison Krauss), wearing a 'little black dress', is walking towards a designer house. She rings the doorbell and a man lets her in. They are placed at a dining table, him looking guilty and her looking scared and sad. After a couple of awkward scenes at the dinner table and in a lounge, the woman stands up and leaves. Looking devastated and heartbroken she walks back to the car. He has got a new favourite. There is no second story in this video. No female power and no happy ending. The band is placed in the garden. They are playing and the musical backdrop they create suddenly feels like a comforting answer to the silent female in the video and to the sad lyrics sung by Alison Krauss. The dobro is played by Jerry Douglas, and his description of how he approaches Alison Krauss' vocals really backs up my own perception: "Yeah, it is really a kind of painting. We, we create these landscapes... and she sings, and we paint around her. And we try to lift up the vocals and whatever she is singing about, you know (Douglas, interview 16.97.16)"

The only sign of light and hope in this song and video lies in the constant progression found in the bands playing. They refuse to change their pace or strength, offering the woman a safe haven, a train to jump back on, telling her that life will go on. This sad love story, hopeless at first, is a hot bluegrass topic (Ledgin 2006:69), but this alone is not enough to 'save' this track and call it bluegrass.

The songs build-up is actually what reminds me of a traditional bluegrass song, excluding the tempo of course. The instruments are all introduced from the start, and they act as a constant backdrop with minimal dynamic change. The dobro is somewhat an exception, because it is not a part of this steady rhythmic section, but it does enter already in the intro, and keeps 'answering' Alison Krauss's vocals throughout the song.

Jerry Douglas and his dobro playing gives Alison Krauss the space she needs to tell her part of the story. He never competes or interferes with her vocals, he only makes her interpretation more believable and provides her with a great tool for storytelling (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).

The dobro also has an instrumental break, but not with the traditional 'showing off and letting out steam' - kind of way (Ledgin 2006:3), but with telling the same story as Alison Krauss's

soft vocals, only without words. This track is therefore moving away from traditional bluegrass and toward mainstream pop and singer-songwriter traditions. The song consists of part A and B. A being the verse and B the bridge, which is repeated two times. The songs structure is Intro (1/2 A) – A –A –B – Instrumental (B) – A – Outro. The lack of dynamics in the vocals and instrumentations coupled with the slow and steady beat makes this slow train hard to stop, so the song is fading out. This is an uncharacteristic way to end a bluegrass song, but if it was labelled a pop ballad, this would be just fine!

5: *PAPER AIRPLANE* (2011)

Paper Airplane is the title track from the Alison Krauss and Union Stations (AKUS) album recorded in 2011. It is written by a well-known songwriter in the country and bluegrass community, Robert Lee Castleman (americansongwriter.com). The record is produced by AKUS and it is their first recording together as a band since *Lonely Runs Both Ways* (2004). In the meantime the band members have been occupied with other projects. In 2007 Alison Krauss experienced huge success with the collaboration with Robert Plant (Led Zeppelin) on the album *Raising Sand*. *Raising Sand* won six Grammys, including Album of the Year. This album was characterized as folk or Americana (biography.com), and not bluegrass.

Paper Airplane won a Grammy award for best bluegrass album of the year. This shows how much the genre has changed the last 30 years and how much credibility Alison Krauss and her band mates have in the community today. Why? If you ask a bluegrass fanatic today, or maybe even Alison Krauss herself in the 80s: this is not bluegrass! A reviewer wrote this about the album: “If you’re a country music fan, you’ll love this album. If, like me, your hillbilly musical tastes lean toward bluegrass, you’re likely to forget this one” (Cohen 2011:consequenceofsound.net).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A guitar-picking intro with the dobro carefully responding in the background. All with added timbre to soften it up. Alison Krauss’s close whispery voice enters, in the very front of the mix, with the dobro now tastefully responding to her. In their phrasing they both seem free regarding to the beat set by the guitar, and the mood for this title track is established. This is a beautiful track. A slow ballad where the vocals, instruments and lyrics are packed with

feeling, although not conveyed the way a purist would have. It is easier to point out the few features that remind me of bluegrass than it is to embellish what's not. I will try to do both.

The lyric of love, betrayal and loneliness is typical and makes us feel at home in the bluegrass genre (Rosenberg 2005:9). Also, the instrumental break after the first refrain is 'correct'. The instruments used on this track are just right, although there are some instruments missing (Ledgin 2006:3). Acoustic bass, guitar, dobro and mandolin are all represented, but both the fiddle (which is Alison Krauss's instrument) and the five-string banjo is left out. I have already mentioned the banjo as being a deal breaker on whether or not the music is bluegrass. The lack of the banjo, which by Alan Lomax quoted in Cantwell, is described as "Americas only indigenous folk instrument... (Cantwell 2003:61)", again rises the question of authenticity that I will return to later.

When it comes to Alison Krauss's vocals she actually contributes to the bluegrass feel on the refrain. When entering into the refrain the recognizable belting returns, and paints a picture of the struggle and despair that comes across in the lyrics. It never reaches the High Lonesome Sound (Cantwell 2003:209), but she uses other techniques to convince us of her pain, which I will address further down. Also on this recording, Alison Krauss's vowels are still more rounded than what we find in other genres (Cantwell 2003:210) and the characteristic glissando, which is often heard on bluegrass vocals, is frequently used (Ledgin 2006:3). To sum up the clear genre features in this song: you will find some of the traditional instruments with, a sometimes, characteristic vocal telling a depressing love story.

NOT THAT TRADITIONAL

The tempo and the build-up of the song are far from the bluegrass standard. Actually, after the recording in 1997, there are no recorded tracks where Alison Krauss sings the lead on an up-tempo song. Again, when knowing the importance of tempo combined with pitch to create the tension that's closely linked to authenticity (Rosenberg 2005:7 and Cantwell 2003:209), it is interesting that Krauss is such a beloved artist both inside and outside the bluegrass community when completely steering away from the traditional up-tempo tunes.

The instruments usually start off simultaneously in the intro and in the right (and often high) tempo; and this tempo is held throughout the song (Rosenberg 2005:7). This recording

however, starts out with only the guitar and dobro. As mentioned, the dobro brings a rubato feel. The real rubato returns at the end of the song; in the beginning and in the middle of the last verse. The song ends with all the instruments slowing down the tempo when Alison Krauss finishes the very last phrase (Ritardando). It is not uncommon with rubato vocals on a cappella performance, but it is rare to find in the middle of a verse, like we find it here (Cantwell 2003:108,131,132). During the second verse the musicians build-up the song so that it is natural to introduce the rest of the instruments in the refrain. This is the first time we get a real sense of the beat. This kind of build-up is prominent throughout the whole song. Instruments fade in and out where it is natural according to the lyrics and the story we are presented. Speaking of natural; when the refrain hits us, and there are no backing vocals, even though both the melody and harmonies are begging for it, we are once again reminded that this recording is perhaps falsely placed in the bluegrass category (Rosenberg 2005:7).

The song is in 4/4 and in the keys of Db-minor and E-major. The song being in 4/4 is considered normal, but starting out in minor and shifting to the relative key on the refrain makes it sound more like a pop ballad or folk song, it is uncommon in bluegrass (Cantwell 2003:125). The key also contributes to the melody yet again being comfortably low. The range of the melody within the key is narrow by bluegrass standards (Cantwell 2003:126). The melody stretches from a small F# to a one line H, and it never sounds uncomfortable to Alison Krauss. To compare this to the earliest recording, where the lower part of the melody went down on a one level c, this sounded uncomfortably low to her. Now she easily reaches the F# and the H and, especially in the verse, the familiar bluegrass tension is long gone. Keeping in mind Cantwell's words in on how the loss of tension contributes to the loss of the moral, makes us question why we perceive her as authentic (Cantwell 2003:209).

'TRADITIONAL' VIDEO

The official video for *Paper Airplane* is full of surprises, especially after listening to this track, which definitely has a more modern approach. The video starts out with an overview of an old farm and the pictures are in sepia, and gives you an authentic feel. In the distance you can both hear and see an old steam train passing by. You can also hear music and noises coming from the farmhouse. You hear instruments being tuned, someone is rehearsing, we get a shot of a man (the bass player, Barry Bales) shaving and we see Dan Tyminski at a table smoking. At last, Alison Krauss is introduced. She is wearing a flowered printed dress, which

looks like a period dress from the 20s or 30s. She is also wearing an apron, she plays the fiddle and she is placed in the kitchen. This traditional picture of a woman in a ‘typical’ female role is emphasized throughout the video. We see shots of her sitting alone on a swing, we see her standing alone on the porch gazing after a last love. The band is also wearing period clothing; sixpence, vests, braces, tweed jackets and baggy shirts. They are always filmed together. First walking down a hill and later in a tent, playing. In the scene where they are playing, Alison Krauss is consequently filmed in the foreground, separated from the group, and with different lighting. She is portrayed as a young, almost girly, woman who is dependent of a man for her life to go on. The video ends with Alison Krauss walking alone back from the porch and into the lonely and large farmhouse while she sings ‘Our love will die I know’. This video is in huge contrast to the secure, yet fragile, vocal delivery by Alison Krauss. It feels somewhat like a step back regarding the women’s place in bluegrass. If compared with the earlier videos, which placed Alison Krauss in a circle playing alongside her band mates as an equally important part of the band, this video seems a little ‘out-dated’.

TIDY AND BELIEVABLE VOCALS

What strikes me immediately with Alison Krauss’s vocal on this track, is that it is tidier than on “Too late too cry” and she comes across as a more mature and conscious vocalist. In the first analysis I mentioned both genre features and genre violations that are not detected on this recording. This song is roughly divided in two: the verse, with the whispery delivery in a mixed voice and the refrain where she uses belting. The nasal closed up sound, on which I blamed her young age, is gone on *Paper Airplane*. Although a sign of a young and immature voice, it was closer to being a genre feature than a violation. Her vowels are still characteristic for a bluegrass vocal but you will no longer find the “slang approach” to her singing. This was not prominent on *Too Late to Cry* either, but really noticeable on her second and third album. She has also tidied up the use of ornaments and vibrato. It is not gone, but you can now detect a more controlled and subtle vibrato in some of the phrases. This is not bluegrass-like (Neal 2003:133), but it suits her fragile, whispery mixed voice.

And now to the main change, the biggest genre breach: “ Her marvellously controlled whispery delivery” as Murphy Henry describes it in *Pretty Good For a Girl* (Henry 2013:319). Her three earliest projects, including *Too Late to Cry*, contains only a taste of this technique. Now this is the main technique throughout the verse. She sings with an airy timbre

in a mixed voice, so close to the microphone that you can hear every breath, the creation of every consonant and the subtle changes in timbre where she emphasizes words to convey feelings of sadness and hopelessness. On this track the vocals are placed in the very front of the mix, and the familiar distance we normally feel between the vocalist and the listener in bluegrass music is gone. Alison Krauss sounds and feels close. This makes her vocal delivery everything but ‘stylistic and impersonal’ like other bluegrass vocals are described (Rosenberg 2005:7). This is where she pushes the boundaries and changing what we as listeners of bluegrass perceive as authentic. While following the recipe gave the traditional bluegrass music an authentic feel and their rules of authenticity helped them tell their story, Alison Krauss is now telling the same story by throwing out the recipe but keeping the main ingredients. When Ralph Stanley was asked why bluegrass is important, he answered: “It tells a story” (Ledgin 2006:7). When Janette Carter was asked why The Carter Family was so successful she answers: “It was so pure and they worked so hard at it and they believed in it, those songs and things” (Ledgin 2006:17). Alison Krauss might have mixed up the ingredients and thrown some of them out, but through the material she chooses and the way she interprets the songs she certainly tells a believable story.

3.3.3. CONCLUDING THE ANALYSIS

Throughout this thesis I have presented a few theories on why her vocal approach has changed to the extent it has. One theory mentioned suggests that the comments by reviewer of a ‘too forceful’ approach might be a reason. The evolution in bluegrass, which sends Jerry Douglas in her direction, might be another. His dobro has given her the opportunities to explore timbres in her voice and choose material she might not have otherwise. Another theory mentioned by her colleagues, is age. Not only as a number, but as representation of a life lived. Jerry Douglas and I reached a ‘conclusion’ while talking one night at the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016:

JD: Yeah, her voice has changed over the years, but she’s gotten older, you know. I mean, that does a lot to your thinking and the way you perceive things and the way things hit you, you know. It’s like, your emotions change. And then she has a son, and that changes, you know that, that changes...

SS: I know. It changes everything...

Alison Krauss might be a very private person, but she has never been afraid to let her personality shine through in her vocals. She has dared to let her music be influenced by her history, her life experience, her musical collaborations, her own taste and instinct. Maybe not

in the traditional High Lonesome way, but with her personal vocal delivery. She has therefore confirmed Frith's (1998) assumption that: "...as a listener we assume that we can hear someone's life in their voice ... (Frith 1998:186)." Her life pouring out of her voice has replaced the lack of authenticity in her non-traditional bluegrass voice. The way she tells us the story of heartache, or how she prays and longs for a world beyond this life, resonates with so many listeners. The themes, the colours, are the same but the approach, the tools, are different. By choosing an approach she is comfortable with, a technique, which she feels represents her, it is impossible to not find her authentic. The way she respectfully bends and stretches the rules, at the same time as attending bluegrass festivals and singing hymns on prime time TV, she has gained a lot of goodwill both inside and outside the bluegrass community. Maybe the answer to authenticity in this case is as easy as Scott (2010) writes it: "... authentic music may be defined as music that has the effect of making you believe in its truthfulness (Scott 2010:4)." Although her voice doesn't sound painful in the traditional way, it is impossible not to feel her pain!

I am aware that some people within the bluegrass community are worried about its future, I've met them and talked to them! But because of artists like Alison Krauss, I believe that they can cast their worries aside. Although disrupting the genre rules, she never disrupts the peace within the community. Her respectful, yet progressive, approach is heard in her voice. Maybe that is why bluegrass artist Leigh Gibson told me: "You can always hear bluegrass in her voice, ... (Gibson, interview 16.07.16)" Her love for the music, the people, and the message keeps her forever rooted in bluegrass. Her choice of staying away from the genre features, that used to represent the authenticity, makes her authentic on a level that also speaks to the listener outside the community. I will return to my findings in this analysis when reaching the concluding chapter of this thesis, but first I need to find the answers to one of the questions from the introduction: What is currently perceived as authentic compared to when the genre was newly established?

4. AUTHENTICITY: PAST AND PRESENT

4.1. THE AUTHENTIC PAST

Bluegrass; A de-commercialized genre (Neal 2013:154) and the most authentic form of

country music (Peterson 1997:213). The genre is seen as "...the living link back to the older acoustic forms of country and folk music (Peterson 1997:213-214)." It emerged just at the right time in history; a time where country music was being commercialized and pulled away from its roots (Cantwell 2003:88) and when the USA was struggling to gain an independence from Europe in terms of artistic inspiration:

..., many influential critics suggested that U.S. artists should find inspiration in authentic American works of the common people. A lively debate developed over which music 'of the common people' should be considered authentically American and taught to future generations (Peterson 1997:5 and 63).

It was under these conditions people looked to Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. To quote Cantwell

Who could look at dear old Stringbean, band-legged and lantern jawed, who handled his banjo as if it were a fishing pole, or at corn-fed Chubby Wise, or at demure Sally Ann Forrester wearing a rose in her raven hair, or at Lester Flatt, who always looked as if he had just been to the barber for his first haircut, and not feel convinced that Monroe had somehow put together the most authentic country band imaginable (Cantwell 2003:89)?

It seems appropriate at this point to refer to what Peterson (1997) mentions in his book *Fabricating Authenticity*; their choice of image might not have been as coincidental as it might have looked when the genre emerged. Peterson writes about the importance of costume and how it played a huge part in how authentic the country artists were perceived in the 20s: "...no loud costume was appropriate. The conventional clothing of the old-timer was the conservative dress-up, going-to-town clothes of a farm person (Peterson 1997:66)." So what might have seemed coincidentally authentic might have been a calculated marketing strategy. Strategy or not, Bill Monroe soon became the river from where the old music and sense of life flowed out (Cantwell 2003:98), and he and his band had not only de-commercialized but also authenticated hillbilly music (Cantwell 2003:72). Monroe was seen as the founder of this unique form of music, and it was a perception that he used his own life experience as inspiration (Peterson 1997:213-214). Even though we know that Monroe created bluegrass inspired by both jazz, blues and old mountain music, and that "... bluegrass is simply an attempt to present a multi-faced music over a single channel (Cantwell 2003:72)..." as Cantwell puts it. Still, the audience in the 40's and 50's agreed that bluegrass was authentic, or they perceived it as authentic. Historians and the government agreed on bluegrass being a genre worth preserving. But apart from where and from whom the genre emerged, do we find

authenticity elsewhere?

I have already discussed how genre rules and authenticity go hand in hand in the bluegrass community. When the genre emerged it was the sound of the music, the voice and the lyrics combined with the geographical and social origin that made people love (or hate) the music (Rosenberg 2006:260). The music felt real to the listener in the 30s and 40s. It was packed with feelings and references to a better world, the American dream, but also the struggle of everyday life in the countryside. Of course this was a truth with modifications, and as Cantwell writes: "...bluegrass is fiction, making reference to a certain loosely coherent, imagined world located chiefly in the past (Cantwell 2003:72)." But it was the dream of an idealistic world on earth or in heaven that was important, not whether or not it was true. The country experienced economic crisis at this time and the American artists lacked roots. Bill Monroe presented the listener with an idealistic picture of a perfect world built on traditional American values, and he made that world feel within reach. The audience believed Monroe. They felt he knew the struggle and striving they had endured. They heard their own stories told through his music. He belted out their heartaches and their dreams. One important reason for bluegrass being 'rediscovered' in the 70s, and even why its known today, is that people in the 50s "...perceived it as a vital new musical form coming from America's handiest folk pocket, Appalachia (Rosenberg 2006:13)." I have touched this topic throughout this thesis, and I will now present an overview of *what* within the music that made the audience detect the genre as authentic.

There are two main reasons why bluegrass touched so many and was perceived as the living link back to a simpler time and 'better' days: The vocals and the lyrics (Cantwell 2003:7). This does not mean that the instrumentation is not important! On the contrary! The instrumentation, the technique used on the instruments, the chord progressions, the tempo, the melody, and the songs' build-up are the backbone of the song and what keeps the vocals and the lyrics from falling apart! To be able to achieve the right pitch you are dependent on volume, and just as the pitch in bluegrass generally is higher than in other forms of country music, so is the tempo (Rosenberg 2005:7). This combination of pitch and tempo makes the audience (and the musicians) experience that the music possesses a unique 'drive' or 'punch', which complements the tension found between the voice and lyrics (Rosenberg 2005:7). One might say that these elements dependent on each other and you cannot find one without the other. Despite this I will focus on what was found within the vocals and the lyrics that made

the audience feel that bluegrass was the authentic American genre.

4.1.1. HIGH AND LONESOME VOCALS

I want to continue with a quote from Rosenberg (2006) on Lomax: “Singing the words and melody is not enough, he said; one must perform songs in the style of their culture. Singing style, he asserted, conveyed the emotional content of the song, making it the authentic expression not just of an individual but of the group (Rosenberg 2006:150).” As I have emphasized through the analysis; one main reason for bluegrass and Monroe being perceived as authentic lies in his tenor voice. The tension heard when Bill Monroe belts out the lyrics in a pitch that both sounds and feels uncomfortable, combined with the volume needed to produce this sound (Scearce 2016:161) makes an important genre feature which is closely linked to bluegrass’ authentic perception (Rosenberg 2005:7). Why is that? Monroe’s high-pitched nasal vocals have been linked to a tough upbringing and hard physical labour by musicologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Cantwell, Moore, Brackett, Frith and Lomax all mention how a high-pitched nasal timbre is being coherent with a tough life in the rural south. It is associated with struggle and striving, but they also write how it is often perceived as sincere. The pronunciation was also an important part of how ‘real’ the music, and the artist, was perceived by the audience. Frith mentions how singing in ‘slang’ makes the lyrics and the artist feel real (Frith 1998:193) and Alan Lomax’s work concludes that the voice: “... posited a direct and essential link between musical performance style and culture (Rosenberg 2006:150).” Implying that the way the melody is performed tells us a lot of the social and geographical background of the artist.

Brackett (2006) backs up the theory of a high-pitched voice being perceived as ‘real’ in his analysis of Hank Williams. He writes how such a voice makes country artists seem more sincere than artists in other genres (Brackett 2000:86). He compares this singing in a high-pitched non-falsetto voice with a preacher in an African-American church (Brackett 2000:96). Cantwell also addresses how the high pitch is “an object of striving (Cantwell 2003:242).” and that “Heights are perennially associated with our ‘higher’ functions: with intellect and spirit, with moral perfection, and finally, of course, with God” (Cantwell 2003:242). Frith (1998) also writes about how a high-pitched strained male voice is perceived as honest in several other genres within popular music, for instance soul and rock (Frith 1998:195).

Needless to say, the High Lonesome Sound of Bill Monroe played a huge part in his audience

perceiving him and his music as authentic. Technically this sound was produced using “- the tense vocal cords themselves, the nasal cavities, certain very narrow or very wide vowel sounds (Cantwell 2003:210). It also depended on vocalists singing “above one’s range (Cantwell 2003:209)” in a high volume combined with sounding as if he uses all his force to hold back the sound (Cantwell 2003:207). This produces the wanted clear and cutting timbre, which is such an important element in achieving the ultimate bluegrass voice. Cantwell (2005) describes the bluegrass voice like this: “A good bluegrass voice is made of the finest metal, carefully balanced and gracefully proportioned, heavy in the hand, with a gleaming surface and razor-sharp edge (Cantwell 2003:211).” Rosenberg writes how people: “... saw in bluegrass the latest authentic expression of poor, rural, working-class, pioneer America (Rosenberg 2005:13).” And how this had much to do with the “authentic veil”, as Rosenberg calls it, in Monroe’s high-pitched voice. He compares it to when “...Mother Nature sighs and retires for the night (Rosenberg 2006:63).” It is hard to argue that anything could be more ‘down to earth’ and authentic than that.

4.1.2. LONELY AND EVEN HIGHER LYRICS

Early in his book *Bluegrass Breakdown* Cantwell (2005) writes about the genres “signifying features (Cantwell 2003:7).” Not surprisingly he mentions two features: “...pinched nasal tones and sentimental lyrics (Cantwell 2003:7).” We now know how this characteristic nasal timbre is a result of a vocal technique dependant on pitch, force and tempo. The sentimental lyrics, which I also have mentioned in the chapter of analysis, are by Cantwell underlined as also being an important part of the genre. Cantwell (2005) writes about how the nasal sound and the brutal honesty of the lyrics coexisted (Cantwell 2003:206).

As mentioned earlier, one can divide the themes of the bluegrass lyrics in two: Religious and secular. Life, death, heartache, pain, alcohol, childhood, unfaithfulness and other sentimental topics are common in the secular category (Rosenberg 2005:8 and Cantwell 2003:7 226). These are topics every American (or one might say every person) can recognize from their own life. The striving and the rough upbringing in rural America might be more exclusive for a smaller part of the world’s population, but somehow people all over the country (and world) find this to be either relevant or exotic enough to be touching (Cantwell 2003:69). With *sentimental* being the headline for the lyrics in the secular songs, a longing for heaven is the main topic for the religious songs. This category is often divided into *preaching* or *confessing* lyrics with themes of heaven, Jesus, God, Christian life, forgiveness, and sin, as mentioned

earlier (Cantwell 2003:226). It is an unwritten genre rule that all bluegrass bands have a couple of these religious songs on their repertoire even today (Rosenberg 2005:8). This became even clearer to me this summer, when visiting the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016. All the concerts I attended included at least one gospel song. When Alison Krauss was invited to play at the Letterman Show in 1995 to promote her new album *Now that I Found You* she could easily have chosen one of the more mainstream sounding pop or country tracks from the record, but she chose a beautiful ‘hymn’ written by Union Station member Ron Block, called *Palm of Your Hand*. She might have lost one or two popular music fans by doing so, but she probably gained even more respect in the bluegrass community by making this choice.

Cantwell lists the vocals and the lyrics as significant features (Cantwell 2003:7), and after working with this thesis I have to agree. It is however difficult to keep them apart both when listening and analysing. This collaboration between voice and lyrics doesn’t only tell us the story within the song, but it tells us something about the genre, the audience, and it is important in how we perceive a song as authentic. On this matter, Brackett (2000) writes: “...lyrics and performance work to create a sense of a particular genre, a particular audience, and a particular relationship between performer and audience (Brackett 2000:78).” Also, Frith (1998) addresses the relationship between lyrics and genre when writing about choice of language: “... that song language is used to say something about both the singer and the implied audience. Lyrical language is an important aspect of genre conventions (Frith 1998:166).” He also links the lyrics to authenticity when he writes how: “...lyrics in country music provide a particularly graphic connection between the song as a commodity, the production and the interpretation of ‘authenticity’, and the commoditization of the very idea of ‘authenticity’ (Brackett 2000:78).”

The authentic past focused on what Moore (2012) describes as being true to maintaining a performance practice within a particular tradition (Moore 2012:265). However, there has been a noticeable change regarding the importance of preserving versus being true to your own performance practice the last decades. Although Lomax’s words on authenticity as “a performer who embodies the heritage and culture of the music being performed is more genuine and worthy of note than an imitator (Karppinen 2016:137)” are still not tossed aside in today’s bluegrass community, the wind has definitely shifted since the folk revival (Karppinen 2016:137). It is time to take a closer look at the authentic present, in search of the reason for Alison Krauss’ status in the bluegrass community.

4.2. THE AUTHENTIC PRESENT

In contrast to the vocals described above, one finds Alison Krauss and her “...soft, whispery touch (Henry 2013:322).” This takes me back to the main question of this thesis: *How and why is Krauss perpetually perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist when she keeps disrupting the boundaries of the genre?* Before answering, or even to be able to answer, this question we have to take a look at what today’s listener of bluegrass perceive as authentic.

4.2.1. SO WHAT IS AUTHENTIC?

The evolution seen and heard in bluegrass has left us with a slightly ‘untidy’ situation. Bluegrass is now a term that embodies what can only be described as several different sub-genres. As mentioned in the introduction, we first have **original bluegrass**, which we know was ‘created’ in the 40s and 50s by Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. The musicians and fans within this group are what Holt would call the center collectivities (Holt 2007:21). Secondly: **The purists**, with the goal of recreating the original sound. These musicians, who include some of my interview objects; Barry Bales and Jerry Douglas of the Earls of Leicester, are also a part of the core and the center collectivities. Both original bluegrass and the purists strive to preserve the original sound for future generations, and are most likely to link the genre rules to authenticity. Third: The largest group; the **progressive**. Some of the reasons for the situation we have today are already mentioned throughout the historicization and the analysis; Alison Krauss and her female and male colleagues through history, combined with commercialization, and the folk revival are some of the reasons. I will now take a closer look at a milestone in bluegrass history, which I suspect, has had a huge impact on what we today perceive as authentic bluegrass; *O Brother Where Art Thou?* And let us keep in mind; Alison Krauss’ contribution to this movie and soundtrack was huge!

In 2000 the Coen-brothers shook the world with *O Brother Where Art Thou?*. This movie turned out to be one of the greatest examples of folklore in popular culture and it put bluegrass back on the charts (Holt 2007:32). The story is set in 1930’s America, in rural Mississippi. It takes place during the Great Depression, and is about three fugitives’ adventure after escaping prison. The film is a comedy, loosely based on Homer’s *Odyssey*, and the movie title refers to the 1941 film *Sullivan's Travels*, and a fictional book about the Great Depression called *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (Wikipedia.no). The soundtrack for this movie was produced by T-Bone Burnett and the music is characterized as “early country and

bluegrass, and there are a few performances of African American work songs and the blues (Holt 2007:33).” The soundtrack won a Grammy for Album of the Year on 2001, and the artists and the genres represented gained huge success. Bluegrass artists like John Hartford, Gillian Welch, Emmylou Harris and Alison Krauss were only some of the artists benefitting from the movie’s success. The audience loved the authentic look of the movies sepia coloured pictures (Holt 2007:35), the authentic sounding soundtrack combined with Hollywood’s biggest stars appearing in the movie. The movie and soundtrack represented an authentic and unmediated history, which appealed to its audience and listeners (Holt 2007:35). A couple of questions come to mind when reading how authentic this movie and music was perceived: How authentic is a movie, which fabricates authenticity based on an already fabricated authentic genre and lifestyle? And what effect has the movie’s popularity had on the bluegrass community and music? The first question is too big a task for me to take on at this point, but still very tempting to address. However, I will try to answer the second; what effect did this movie have on bluegrass?

I believe that in many ways *O Brother* has changed what the listener perceive as authentic within bluegrass. It first hit me when I read one specific sentence in Holt’s *Genre in Popular Music* (2007) when naming the contributions of the artists on the soundtrack (Holt has misspelled Krauss’s name, and I have not corrected this in the quote): “Kraus sings the traditional ‘*Down to the River to Pray*’ in her pop-inflected style (Holt 2007:36).” This sentence contains a huge contradiction in bluegrass: Traditional and pop! Holt (2007) writes that: ..., the *O Brother* soundtrack was not designed for the traditional bluegrass fan (Holt 2007:48).” And that: “... the *O Brother* soundtrack to a great extent have been created by and for the general rock/pop domain of mainstream popular culture (Holt 2007:39).” *O Brother* made the newer and younger audience detect Alison and the rest of the soundtrack as ‘authentic’ bluegrass. To put it in a different way: *O Brother where art Thou?* changed the sound bank and the socially agreed rules (Frith 1998:87) of bluegrass! Is this bad? As Holt suggests: “The young urban audience is not deeply traditional and does not faithfully explore the history of the genre traditions with which they connect (Holt 2007:38).” So a million sold copies of the soundtrack doesn’t necessarily mean an equally high number of new purist bluegrass fans. It might only create a million new opinions on what ‘traditional’ bluegrass sounds like. For the center collectives; this can become a problem and a potentially personal and musical crisis! As Frith states: “It is difficult to explain how such arguments about genre boundaries work to people uninvolved with the genre in the first place, people ignorant, that is

to say, of basic (if unstated) agreement within a genre what their music is *for* (Frith 1998:86).”

4.2.2. PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY

While purists perceived the traditional genre rules as authentic, the modern listener might not. The paradox with authenticity is exactly this; that it is ‘perceived’. It is hard to legitimize calling the music alone authentic, without contextualizing it. Moore writes:

In acknowledging that authenticity is ascribed to, rather than inscribed in, a performance it is beneficial to ask who, rather than what, is being authenticated by that performance. Three types of response are possible, according to whether it is the performer herself, the performer’s audience, or an (absent) other who is being authenticated. Siting authenticity within the ascription carries the corollary that every music, and ever example, can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of perceivers (Moore 2012:272)...

What is felt as authentic is more or less a social agreement (Peterson 1997:5), and as Moore points out these rules vary from genre to genre and society to society. As such, given the right context something could potentially feel authentic to someone at some point in time (Moore 2012:272). Moore also writes that; “there is no single authenticity (Moore 2012:263).” As mentioned earlier authenticity is to be found several places, or even as Mike Compton puts it: “...it really depends a lot of times on the age of the person you’re talking to (Compton, interview 15.07.16). I have already mentioned the two most common understandings of why artists are perceived as authentic: “Through the maintenance of a performance practice associated with a particular tradition or through a maintenance of their own performance practice (Moore 2012:265).” This is also mentioned by Karppinen (2016). Similarly, Fabbri’s view on authenticity is taken up by Frith (1992) in *Performing Rites* when he states how the socially accepted rules for authenticity can be divided in five (Frith 1998:91): First: *Formal and technical rules*. These are rules, which in bluegrass history, used to be especially closely linked to authenticity. Second: *Semiotic rules*. These rules are described as the way ‘truth’ and ‘sincerity’ is conveyed through the music. Knowing the old genre rules on lyrics and voice this is also a headline fitted to bluegrass in the past. Thirdly, you have; *behavioural rules*. These rules concern the artist’s behaviour on stage and off stage, and also in interviews. This is one category, which I find to be just as important today as it was when the genre emerged. The fourth category consists of; *social and ideological rules*. These rules concern the ethics represented in the genre. Fabbri mentions gender in this category, but also how the music is a

social force. The topic of gender is still important in bluegrass today, and as you know through this thesis; we might not have reached full equality with neither gender nor race yet. The fifth category; *commercial and juridical rules* is referring to the production and finances (Frith 1998:93). Although Fabbri's take on the rules of authenticity is interesting and a starting point for an analysis or discourse, both in bluegrass and in other genres, it is problematic in the way it talks about genre as something static. Frith comments on this by saying: "Genres are constantly changing – as an effect of what's happening in neighbouring genres, as a result of musical contradictions, in response to technological and demographic change (Frith 1998:92)." And this quote is, ironically, applicable to the rigid bluegrass genre. I have chosen to focus on the two, perhaps most common, definitions of authenticity discussed by Moore (2012) and Anna Karppinen (2016), among others. I believe that the questions regarding the importance of artistic integrity and as a counterpoint; preserving the heritage and culture (Karppinen 2016:137) are the most important topics in the discourse of authenticity in the bluegrass community today.

It might well seem like it was Bill Monroe who made hillbilly music authentic through bluegrass, but he alone couldn't possibly do that without the listeners detecting it as authentic. Listening to traditional bluegrass demands imagination and an understanding of a certain culture to find it authentic. As Cantwell (2003) points out:

To hear Monroe's music one must attend to several independent lines at once, as one does when listening to jazz; one must 'hear' the breakdown fiddle roaming in the background; hear the gospel hymn somehow lodged in the harmonized chorus of the nostalgic song, the balladeer's cry in a tenor harmony, or the blues singer's in the ringing of a banjo break (Cantwell 2003:72).

The audience, and especially, those from the Appalachian regions, did hear their history and their music represented in Monroe's performances, and were therefore the ones identifying it as authentic. As the genre spread, people and musicians in the north also heard bluegrass as "authentic and home-grown 'folk music' without any appreciable commercial background (Cantwell 2003:69)." People accepted and appreciate that Monroe created bluegrass, and his music represented his 'authentic' American upbringing. Fans of the genre saw Bill Monroe as the authentic genius creating this genre and that his inspiration was drawn from life in the Kentucky Hills (Peterson 1997:214). As Peterson puts it; Monroe "...was the founder of a perfectly unique form of music that had grown up neutrally out of his own life experience (Peterson 1997:213-214)." In his PhD dissertation Jonathan Tobias King (2015) writes:

Despite its initial appearance as a new sort of *sophisticated* country music (Monroe's Blue Grass Boys all wore unconventionally formal attire), and its dependence on modern mass media for its dissemination and popularity (amplification and radio broadcast were integral to its success), one dependable aspect of bluegrass's identity has been a sense of nostalgic authenticity, linked to "bygone" ideals of purity, straightforwardness, and honesty. Implicit in "Molly and Tenbrooks" are the emphases that bluegrass players and fans place on the textural/timbral signature of the bluegrass ensemble, expressed in a canonical pedigree of repertoire, and closely associated with familiar tropes of lost or disappearing rurality (King 2015:6)

While this might have been the situation four decades ago, today's situation is more correctly portrayed by Rosenberg (1985) who writes: "The combined efforts of Bill Monroe, Ralph Rinzler, and other folk musicologists might be seen as inventing tradition for bluegrass, but the form has continued to evolve well beyond the orthodoxy they tried to establish in the 1970s (Rosenberg 1985 in Peterson 1997:214)."

The evolution of bluegrass has moved the sound ideal further and further away from the traditional sound. Alison Krauss and Union Station are some of the musicians to 'blame'. With a focus that used to lie on being true to maintaining the traditions of bluegrass, we now find it more common to detect authenticity when an artist is true to his or her own musical vision (Moore 2012:265). This also seemed to be a common perception amongst the artists I interviewed at Grey Fox (2016). Alison Krauss' bass player, Barry Bales, shared his view on preserving the genre when talking to me: "It's important to preserve it. I don't think bluegrass need to be a museum piece. You know, to take it and do new things to it is good for it. If you try to squash anybody's originality or creativity that's never a good thing (Bales, interview 15.07.16)." Barry is certainly not alone with this opinion. Charles Clements (The Lonely Heartstring Band) also emphasizes how personal creativity is a focus in today's bluegrass community:

I think it is more important to build and innovate and pay honour to your past and try to be a great musician and a great instrumentalist.... eh... a big goal of ours is to move the things forward and just do what we love without fear of like upsetting the history and tradition (Clements, interview 15.07.16).

Even the older generation of bluegrass musicians, those having played alongside Bill Monroe, share this 'modern' view on preserving vs. innovation. Mike Compton told me when talking about what we need to pass on to the next generations: "The roots of the music. To go back and listen to what the traditional sounds are and bring it forward and add to the new influences (Compton, interview 15.07.16)." In all of these answers you find a convincing

argument as to why preserving is important, but also that innovation is valuable. Bluegrass is not the only genre driven forward and surviving because of change, but it is a genre where preserving is also preferable. As Frith points out: "... the relative importance of the different sorts of rules varies from genre to genre (Frith 1998:93)." And when talking to Sierra Hull, who represents the youngest generation in bluegrass, even she mentions the importance of never losing sight of history:

It sounded like those people weren't trying to make music to do anything other than just, you know, soothe their soul, in a way... Just writing songs for the sake of hearing music, not... no real motive, or money or fame or anything like that. It was just music that in some ways developed out of just people in the mountains playing music, you know (Hull, interview 17.07.16).

This is a view, not surprisingly, shared with the older generation of bluegrass musicians. Mike Compton told me in an interview at Grey Fox (2016) that: "If you wanna play a music well, I think it is important to find out all you can about where it came from. Sort of like your own parents and grandparents, and all that. You learn a lot from the history (Compton, interview 15.07.16)." I do know that both purists and progressive musicians agree, to some extent, that both preserving and innovation is important for an 'authentic sound', but how is it possible for bluegrass to balance this search of authenticity found in personal preferences and musical integrity with being true to its traditions?

4.2.3. PROGRESSIVE PURISTS

We already know how several men and women, Alison Krauss included, have been pioneers in the evolution of the genre. In spite of a climate welcoming neither change nor women (Bufwack and Oermann 2003:394), the artists survived, and so has the genre. Maybe one of the reasons for its survival is what Frith (1998) suggests in *Performing Rites*, where he also refers to the work of Charles Hamm's:

"Performers can thus shape, reinforce or even change genre." It is out of such 'transgressive' performance that genre histories are written: old genres 'fail' when their rules and rituals come to seem silly and restrictive; new genres are born as the transgressions become systematic (Frith 1998:94).

The artists (such as Alison Krauss and Union Station) and projects (such as *O Brother Where art Thou* and *Down from the Mountain*) have made sure that the genre rules never became 'silly'. As mentioned by Holt (2007) the discourses following these artists and projects might help keep the genre alive: "...how the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* fed a discourse on

bluegrass that made it authentic and cool to certain youths, (Holt 2007:77) ... ” When I was doing my interviews at Grey Fox (2016) I realized that all of the young artists I interviewed had Alison Kraus and Union Station as role models and that they were their gateway into bluegrass (Hull and Clements, interviews July 2016). One might conclude that innovation is both the reason for this genres evolution away from its roots, but also a main reason for its survival. We do find people sceptical to the use of genre over all, which Holt suggests: “There are only two kinds of music, good or bad (Holt 2007:3).” But later in his book Holt mentions how taste alone can’t replace genre (Holt 2007:4). Genre is much more than how Frith first defines it in *Performing Rites*: “Genre is a way of defining music in its market or, alternatively, the market in its music (Frith 1998:76).” Genre is more than just a practical label. It doesn’t just define music; it defines people. Frith does also write: “In deciding to label a music or a musician in a particular way, record companies are saying something about both what people like and why they like it; the musical label acts as a condescended sociological and ideological argument (Frith 1998:86).”

As mentioned, Moore (2012) writes how authenticity can be found through either the “maintenance of practice associated with a particular tradition, the other through a maintenance of their own practice (Moore 2012:265). In the first category you will in bluegrass find the originals and the purists, the musicians and fans that would define themselves as center collectivities. In the second category you will find the progressive musicians. My theory is that if these groups of musicians were all we had, we would see in bluegrass what we see (or hear) in country music. Country music, as a genre, has moved so far away from its roots, that purists within this genre are no longer willing to be associated with where the genre is today (theboot.com). This might result in the original sound of country being lost forever, or ‘fail’ as Frith puts it (Frith 1998:95). I believe that this is a scenario that the bluegrass community will never have to experience. Why? In bluegrass you do have the purists (true to traditions) and the progressive (true to themselves), but most of the bluegrass musicians and fans find themselves in a comfortable place in the middle; they are **progressive purists!** Let’s us take a closer look at my theory on how and why this group of progressive purists has emerged.

Bluegrass holds a unique position when it comes to musical participation (Rosenberg 2005:366). The whole community is now built around jam sessions, festivals, master classes, courses and participation, which the schedule from the Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival 2016 is

one good example of (Appendix 4). The bluegrass fans are musicians and musicians are fans (Rosenberg 2005:366). Rick Newby (2004) describes the situation we see in the bluegrass community in his book *The Rocky Mountain Region*:

Bluegrass fans not only like to listen to music; they like to play music. A U.S. Senate resolution designates May as Worldwide Bluegrass Music Month (S.J. Res. 228, 1989) stating, "Bluegrass is a music which since 1946 has encouraged fans to play as well as listen to it and stress both teamwork and individualism which mirrors the American character." Amateur musicians looking for others to play with often belong to state bluegrass organizations like the Idaho Bluegrass Society mentioned above or the Colorado Bluegrass Music Society (CBMS). These groups publish newsletters and post Web sites with informative articles and schedules of music happenings. The CBMS sponsors regular jam including Thursday Jams at Whitefence Farm and Tuesday jams in cooperation with Swallow Hill Music, a folk music association based in Denver. Jam sessions need not be formally scheduled, though; they occur regularly in private homes, restaurants, bars, on college campuses, and at campgrounds (Newby 2004:335).

Maybe the situation seen in bluegrass today started out as a reaction to the commercialization of the genre in the late 60's when, because of economical reasons, several bands were 'forced' to follow the music trends of the youth (Rosenberg 2005:305). Whether this is the reason I can only speculate, but by the end of the 70's bluegrass jams, classes, songbooks and instruments were accessible to 'every one' (Rosenberg 2005:366) And thanks to jams, festivals and classes; professional and unprofessional musicians are offered 'schooling' in the traditional style. Because of people's different backgrounds, sound ideals, perceptions on what's traditional, age and taste; change was inevitable. In this environment; a perfect balance of respect for history and focus on individual musical integrity, is where the progressive purists were born. Although King (2015) didn't single out this group and name the progressive purist, I believe that his description of the environment in Jam sessions is a perfect example of the dynamic this group has brought to the bluegrass community:

Yet, quite significantly, the performance of bluegrass music commonly foregrounds a productive tension between this conformity to canonical tradition and a commitment to performative originality. A rhetoric of timelessness and nostalgia exists in tension with a pervasive standard of individuality and creativity that undercuts any perception of stagnation. As such, it can be seen as a complex aesthetic negotiation between types of rurality and urbanity, and between related discourses of tradition and modernity. Rather than limiting the possibilities through confounding contradictions, these tensions allow the music a particular significance as a site of discursive experimentation in the minds of performers and many fans. Bluegrass, which has been dominated by projects aimed at preserving authenticity, can therefore function as an intriguing case for a study of musical genre dynamics (King 2015:6).

So, where do we find these progressive purists? Surprisingly enough, they are represented everywhere; within the group of originals, purists (Jerry Douglas, Mike Compton and Barry Bales) and progressive musicians (Sierra Hull and Charles Clements) and fans! I found several examples on this through my fieldwork at Grey Fox 2016. For instance in my interview with the ‘purist’ Mike Compton: “I think, I think every form of music and art really have very specific things that make it what it is. You can mess around with the boundaries a little bit (Compton, interview 15.07.16).” When I talked to the young and progressive Sierra Hull she told me: “All these songs that they wrote and did. Kinda what all of us after that have learned those songs. And they’re kinda considered standards. So I think its still great to continue to have those songs around (Hull, interview 17.07:16)... “

But Sierra also has a realistic and more progressive view on preservation:

I think there’s gonna be nobody that’s already, you know, done it like those founding fathers kind of did it. There’s already been one Bill Monroe, so I mean... Though I think it’s important to preserve it as much as we kinda can. And in the sense of, you know, listening to those albums and trying to learn from those people. I don’t think we’re gonna really do it the way they did it, so I think its kinda more important to just take what they’ve done and learn from it. And try to expand upon, you know, your own creative thing moving forward (Hull, interview 16.07.16).

For a young musician as Sierra it might not be surprising that she believes in “moving forward”, but I credit the festivals and jams, where she grew up, for her respect for the genres past. Maybe innovation is not a very surprising thought from a woman in her 20s, but it is impressive to hear one of the purists say: “...bring it forward and add to the new influences (Compton, interview 15.07.16).”

For a progressive purist, both innovation and preservation are important to the music and the community. Bluegrass isn’t just a genre; it’s a lifestyle, it’s a concept. The music was always meant to represent the listener, the fans, and their dreams and hopes. With the progressive purists alive and well, I feel secure that this is taken care of, and I therefore share Barry Bales’ calming comment regarding the future of bluegrass:

I mean, there is always gonna be the fringes that go out... But I think its gonna continue to grow and evolve and there are cycles where it goes back to more traditional and ‘more old time’ sounding and then it gets more progressive. And it’s an ever changing and ever growing thing (Bales, interview 15.07.16).

Earlier in this chapter I did discuss what the bluegrass community used to detect as authentic through the genre rules. Just as the genre has changed, so has the ‘ideal’ sound. Alison Krauss has become a perfect representative for this large group of progressive purists, combining the ‘traditional’ values of the music through her convincing personal vocal approach. When talking to Alison’s protégé, Sierra Hulls, she summed it up so nicely during our talk at Grey Fox (2016). Here are her thoughts on authentic bluegrass music today:

I didn’t think we can do it that same way. That’s why I think that if I only cover the songs that those people had written. Like, I can’t do ‘em justice quite the same way that, that they could. ‘Cause, so... what I find people, at least in my music, it seems people tend to connect to... more to me singing about what I really know! Just, because I can connect to what I really know! ...Yeah, so that’s authentic to the individual even though it’s in a completely different way and a completely different time (Hull, interview 16.07.16)

And although Leigh Gibson (the Gibson Brothers) represents a completely different generation in bluegrass, but still one of the musicians that I have chosen to call a progressive purist, he agrees with Sierra. When I interviewed him at Grey Fox (2016) I challenged him to define what makes bluegrass authentic, and he answered: “It’s hard to put a finger on what is authentic. I think you know it when you hear it. Ah... that you’re not pretending to be something. It’s coming out of you (Gibson, interview 17.07.16).” Rosenberg describes bluegrass fans like this: “Their loyalty is not to the musicians but to a musical concept, an ideal against which they measure every bluegrass performance (Rosenberg 2005:362).” So, what is the ideal concept? After the 60s, *O Brother*, and the general inevitable evolution we are still left with values that embody traditional, pure, and progressive bluegrass: Although with a different approach, bluegrass is still perceived as authentic! For a wide range of the bluegrass community, authenticity is now to be found in the landscape between respect for the genres’ roots and respect for the individual creativity. Alison Krauss, with her roots and heart still placed safely within the borders of bluegrass, but with a musical approach that oozes integrity and credibility, finds herself in the center of this authentic landscape.

When asked the question, “What can’t be taken out of bluegrass?” my interview candidates answered, banjo and the drive (Appendix 1). Throughout my analysis of Krauss’ voice, it is obvious that her latest recordings are lacking both. This fact, combined with her untraditional bluegrass voice, should easily have placed her outside the genre borders of bluegrass, so why isn’t she? Allan Moore might have an answer: “... notion of personal integrity still has such power to address listeners (Moore 2012:262).” Alison’s songs might not have the ‘traditional’

drive, but they are certainly driven by her storytelling ability and her honest vocal approach.

Karppinen (2016) theorizes authenticity in the light of *credibility*. These two words, and concepts, are in many ways overlapping, and one might say that it is difficult to achieve one without the other (Karppinen 2016:138). Karppinen is referring to the work of Stephen Davies and presents a definition on credibility that could also easily have been a description of the group of progressive purists within bluegrass. Karppinen writes that:

..., credibility is the most important factor in determining the value of a performer or a piece of music and can be equated with critical acclaim. Furthermore, credible music is intelligent or serious and has an element of rebelliousness, as well as some subcultural connection (Davies 2001:303-306 in Karppinen 2016:138).

We believe Alison's personal vocal, combined with keeping to the *behavioural, social and ideological rules* (Frith 1998:92) of bluegrass, she is a classic example of a successful progressive purist, with an aura of credibility. She has done more to bluegrass than any other bluegrass artist, and Leigh Gibson even credits her with being the reason for the bluegrass festivals today: "She really was... she is a big reason for why we're having festivals like this today. She kept them alive (Gibson, interview 16.07.16)." And Charles Clements, from the younger generation, shared his thought on why she is still perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist:

Why is she perceived that way? I think her voice. Eh...Her character probably. Her whole personae is very the country, kind of sweet funny girl next-door country girl thing, you know. Even on stage. Eh... maybe that's it? ...I think she loves the community, and she is still involved with it (Clements, interview 15.07.16).

Karppinen (2016) presents another aspect of authenticity, which could be ascribed to Alison Krauss. She refers to Gillian Mitchell's work, which is tied to the works of Alan Lomax and states that: "... a performer who embodies the heritage and culture of the music being performed is more genuine and worthy of note than an imitator (Mitchell 2007:46 in Karppinen 2016:137)." With a history, personality, and heart placed within pure bluegrass, Alison Krauss has managed to make musical changes the community almost detects as traditional. It sounds so natural and effortless that she several times has managed to do what the Stanley Brothers had done before her when bringing a cappella song into bluegrass: "By bringing this form into bluegrass (a cappella), Stanley added to the genre an element which sounded traditional, old- time, and authentic, even if it was innovative (Rosenberg 2006:320)." This is what Alison Krauss has done time after time. She might have been

pushing the musical boundaries of bluegrass, but she never disturbed the *concept* of the music (Rosenberg 2005:362). Even though Alison Krauss' musical approach is innovative, she is still representing the bluegrass community. The authenticity ascribed to Alison Krauss is therefore best articulated by David Sanjek, quoted in Karppinen (2016), where he defines authenticity as "the degree to which a musician is able to articulate the thoughts and desires of an audience and not pander to the 'main stream' by diluting their sound or the message (Karppinen 2016:137)." This might be why Cantwell (2003) respectfully (both towards Krauss and the genre) gives Alison Krauss this beautiful presentation in *Bluegrass*

Breakdown:

With an intimate vocal style unthinkable without the technical resources of the contemporary recording studio or concert stage, she has opened up dimensions of the music formerly unknown in it: drive and power, certainly, but also tenderness, delicacy, and nuance; sorrow, yes, but also a profoundly touching kind of braveheartedness that is as unblemished as it is imperturbable. And also, necessarily, where there are fiddles, mandolins, and banjos, wildness - but not one that threatens to blow the place apart. There is too much at stake for that (Cantwell 2003:xvi).

As I move close to the end of this thesis, certain things both saddens, and comfort me. With a slight fear of ending up as a quote from an Alison Krauss and Union Station song: "All the answers that I started with turned out questions in the end", I am still taking on this last chapter, and hopefully concluding this thesis.

5. CONCLUSION: AN UNLIKELY AND RELUCTANT QUEEN

Let's revisit the overarching question of this thesis one last time: How and why is Krauss perpetually perceived as an authentic bluegrass artist when she keeps disrupting the boundaries of the genre? Despite being a woman constantly disrupting the genre rules, Alison Krauss is still highly regarded in the bluegrass community, and by many considered the Queen of bluegrass. Through reading history, conducting interviews, listening and analysing music I have found that Alison Krauss is both a reluctant and an unlikely bluegrass Queen! First of all; Alison Krauss, the private person, has shown herself to be anything but royal. Her down to earth personality, which shines through in her neutral and dressed down clothes both on and off stage, her dedication to the bluegrass community, her 'shy' and 'goofy' appearance in every interview, and her career moves, all explains why her friend, Jerry Douglas, told me: "She doesn't like being the queen, king or empress of anything (Douglas, interview 16.07.16)." In the words of Charles Clements she is just the "sweet funny girl next door

country girl (Clements, interview 15.07.16)...”

Secondly, she is an unlikely royalty for many reasons. The most obvious reason being that she is female! Alison Krauss, bandleader, producer, or freelance musician, was never a mere incident, and her fame did not come easily. After reading the history of the women before her time, and talking to the generation of women following in her footsteps, I know that this is a topic that should not be put on the shelf prematurely. Yet, Alison Krauss has been a huge role model for young women in bluegrass, and thus strengthened not only her gender, but also the genre.

The main reason why Alison Krauss is an unlikely choice as a monarch is the way she constantly disturbs the boundaries of the genre. The genre features, and the authenticity they used to represent, have been replaced by authenticity elsewhere, and this allows the bluegrass listener to still detect her as an authentic bluegrass artist! I know Leigh Gibson was talking in past tense when he told me this about what used to be the purpose of a bluegrass song: ”Songs resonated with a population that was displaced (Gibson, interview 17.07.16).” My presumption is that, although the sound ideal might have changed, the purpose of the music has not! I believe all groups of people, throughout history, have somehow at some point felt displaced. Alison might not convey this displacement the way Bill Monroe did, by using the old bluegrass recipe, but Alison Krauss has found a recipe of her own!

Alison Krauss has replaced the High Lonesome Sound, the realness in the slang, the belting, the tension in the uncomfortable singing style with authenticity in other places: A personal vocal delivery! She brings the listener closer rather than higher. She tells the story by letting the words rather than the technique speak for her. The songs build-up and the choice of instruments and vocal techniques are closely linked to the lyrics. In the words of Jerry Douglas: “She pays attention to every syllable (Douglas, interview 16.07.16)!” The ‘tension’ and ‘drive’ are located where the lyrics and her voice are taking us, both musically and mentally. This makes her believable, gives her credibility, and the listener perceives her as being authentic. Jerry Douglas confirms her reluctance to compromise when it comes to her musical beliefs: “There’s a thread there yeah, there’s a thread there...That is she’s... she stays true to her vision (Douglas, interview 16.07.16).” Alison Krauss chooses her own material and she has a unique ability to move us with the songs that move her. She has stated: “I love music of any form that moves me. I don’t care where it comes from” (Henry 2003:316). We believe her, although she is no longer a textbook bluegrass singer, she is now a first class

storyteller.

I suspect that this is why the bluegrass community has not been able to shut her out, and why the rest of the music world cannot do anything but to let her in. She has brought bluegrass to the masses, by making it believable for the mainstream listener, and not at the expense of the bluegrass listener. As Leigh Gibson, her 'purist' bluegrass colleague puts it:

I don't want to say that she's forgiven, for not being bluegrass, for I think she's doing music that she likes. And that's... You can always hear bluegrass in her voice. I still hear it. Vocally she has changed a lot, her approach is much softer, but maybe that's how she feels (Gibson, interview 16.07.16)...

Lets not forget, she is a woman, which in itself was a huge genre violation (Rosenberg 2005:7). Maybe there is liberation in being in the wrong place at the wrong time? Maybe her colleagues didn't expect her to sound 'right', because her gender is 'wrong'? Alison Krauss could never sound like Bill Monroe, so why try? But thanks to the women fighting a battle decades before her time, she was given the chance to follow her heart. Alison Krauss is true to herself, and that's why credibility and authenticity is detectable other places than with her male colleagues. Her respect for traditions and the purists, combined with her constant search for what *feels* real to her, makes her the perfect representative for the progressive purists. In the words of a reviewer from Bluegrass Unlimited: "Many a bluegrass purist has been seen casting principles aside when Alison Krauss steps up to the microphone (Henry 2013:317). " And now I know why! Emmylou Harris once said: "We can't know where we're going, until we know where we've been (Ledgin 2006:9)." Having talked to Jerry Douglas, close friend and colleague of Alison Krauss, I don't think she knows exactly where she's going, but I suspect her status within the bluegrass community is due to nobody ever having to question where she's been!

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APPENDIX

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