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## For Immediate Release

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### *A Guide to the Crooked Road:*

#### “Where America invented its music”

The “Crooked Road” is an old term for U.S. Highway 58, especially the part that crosses Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains at their highest peaks.

The “crooked road” is an unpredictable and individual musical route that a fiddler may take.

The Crooked Road is a highway, 253 miles long, connecting the Virginia Piedmont with the Cumberland Mountains in the state’s southwestern corner. It is Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail, an officially designated driving route that leads visitors to some of the best traditional mountain music to be found anywhere.

The Crooked Road runs through “one of the places where America invented its music,” writes Joe Wilson, author of the new book *A Guide to the Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail*.

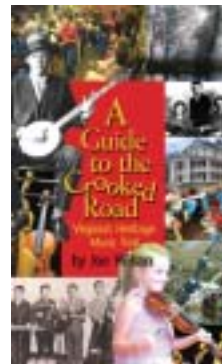
“Mainly this book is about the friendly people who have chosen to make this place their home for generations and keep a historic strand of American music with a fierce devotion that is most unusual,” Wilson writes. “They keep it with weekly jam sessions in places that are open to all, in festivals that are both community-based and historic, and in small museums and performance venues scattered along the road.”

Some of those sites are fairly well-known tourist attractions. The Blue Ridge Music Center Museum is on the Blue Ridge Parkway outside Galax, where the Hill Billies, the first commercially successful group in what would be called country music, was formed in a barbershop.

Further west, the Crooked Road comes to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum in Bristol, where the “big bang of country music” took place at the Victor recording sessions in 1927. Country Music Hall-of-Famers Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family were discovered at these sessions.

The Carter Family was from the coalfields near Hiltons, where the Carter Family Fold still hosts traditional musicians, including descendents of the original Carter Family band. Johnny Cash played his last performance here.

Other stops along the Crooked Road would be



hard to find for the uninitiated or those without the new guide: the Thursday morning jam sessions at the Dairy Queen in Rocky Mount, or the Friday night jams at the Cana Rescue Squad. Restaurants, accommodations, and other attractions are also listed.

“I suppose some who love the ancient music of Virginia will wonder if we may ruin it by making it more accessible to visitors,” Wilson writes. “The first song catchers . . . generations ago assumed this tough old music was on its last legs. But they have been gone for a while and . . . it is not in a weakened state.”

**Joe Wilson** is a music historian, folklorist, and chairman of the National Council for the Traditional Arts. Raised in the Blue Ridge Mountains, he learned ballads from his mother, guitar from his uncle, and “Jack” tales from a neighbor. He also heard his great-aunt, known to early radio audiences as “Carolina Sally,” play banjo on his back porch. He has produced 41 large-scale music festivals in 11 states, and was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Crooked Road. In 2001 he was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts.

**Title:** *A Guide to the Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail*

**Author:** Joe Wilson

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