



Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs

Best of the Flatt & Scruggs TV Show, Vol 1 [DVD]

(Schanachie) Rated: N/A

US release date: 27 March 2007

Flatt & Skruggs

The Best of Flatt and Scruggs TV Show, Vol. 2 [DVD]

(Shanachie)

US release date: 27 March 2007

by Andrew Gilstrap

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"Goodness gracious, it's good!"

Product placement is certainly nothing new. Even in Hollywood's infancy, cigarette companies, diamond cartels, and others exploited the power of mass media to reach out to consumers. Ever since, advertising has grown increasingly more pervasive and sophisticated, to the point where a lot of it is all so much white noise. TV Shows like *The Office*, *30 Rock*, and *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* may provide product placement with a nod and a wink—sometimes even integrating the debate over product placement right into their plots—but end up providing product placement all the same.

In that context, Martha White's sponsorship of *The Flatt & Scruggs Grand Ole Opry Show* feels practically pure. At the very least, it follows a simple (and surprisingly unobtrusive) formula: here's your sponsor, here are some mentions of the sponsor throughout the show, here are some cooking tips that make heavy use of the sponsor's product, all surrounded by top-notch entertainment.

Maybe it's the fact that Martha White's products and kitchen experts are a perfect fit for the Flatt & Scruggs audience, but even when Flatt & Scruggs segue out of a kitchen segment by singing a jingle that praises Martha White's role in making a lip-smacking plate of biscuits, it all makes sense.

Of course, these DVD releases of *The Flatt & Scruggs Grand Ole Opry Show* aren't meant to be dissertations on advertising. These episodes from the '50s and '60s—much of it thought lost until the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum received dozens of episodes out of the blue (some of them found in the garage of a man who once worked for Martha White's advertising agency)—are all wonderful examples of bluegrass music.

The setup couldn't be more simple, or effective. A folksy announcer welcomes viewers to the show, and then introduces Lester Flatt as something along the lines of "the old boy that does the talking", "the old tater-eater" (this joshing apparently served the purpose of getting Flatt, who usually wore a pretty dour expression, to come on camera with a smile on his face). After that, Flatt, Scruggs, and their band, the Foggy Mountain Boys, stand in front of a single camera singing plenty of bluegrass and gospel numbers. Throw in a little bit of cornball humor, with periodic visits to the Martha White kitchen (where the announcer extols the virtues of Martha White's products, free of things like "risky pinches of salt, soda, or baking powder to add", as a Martha White's kitchen expert provides instruction on the preparation of corn bread, knick-knack sticks, or the like), and you've got yourself a show.

If these episodes contained only the expected Flatt & Scruggs fare, they'd be just fine—it's always fun to watch a genial, talented bluegrass band do its thing. But Flatt & Scruggs had a huge repertoire of songs, some of which never saw release on an album. So there's plenty here that should be new to Flatt & Scruggs fans. This is especially the case when the group welcome guests such as Maybelle Carter to the set. One episode even introduces a 7-year-old Ricky Skaggs.

The bonus features might at first seem slight, but they hold a wealth of information. The DVDs hold only two episodes apiece (it would be nice to get more per disc), but the liner notes offer nice, quick rundowns of the songs on each episode (whether they appear on Flatt & Scrugg records, any interesting historical tidbits, etc.) Each disc also includes a copy of the booklet, "Now You Bake Right: Flatt & Scruggs on Regional Television", which does an excellent job covering the landscape in which Flatt & Scruggs were performing, their relationship with Martha White, and how it helped their careers.

Overall, it's just a charming set of shows, from the general store and log cabin backdrops, to the fact that the Nashville address they display for recipe requests doesn't even need to include a zip code. As the announcer says, "Goodness gracious, it's good!"