

Delmore Brothers

There was a boom of brother duets in the 1930s - a diverse genre combining tight harmonies and complimentary instruments. Often one singer would play standard guitar and the other would play mandolin, steel or tenor guitar.

Delmore Brothers: Comprised of brothers **Alton** (1908 – 1964) and **Rabon** (1916 – 1952), the Delmore Brothers began their career in 1931. These pioneers of country music combined the sounds of gospel, folk, and blues music to push forward the creation of still-emerging country music. The popularity of their music earned them the opportunity to be regulars on the Grand Old Opry, and they eventually became the most popular act on the show.

<http://sites.dwrl.utexas.edu/countrymusic/the-history/harmony-duets/>

Delmore Brothers were born in Elkmont, Alabama -a cotton growing area right between Nashville, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama. Alton Delmore was born in 1908 and Rabon Delmore was born in 1916 - the 8th and 10th children of a very poor farming family. Their father - Charlie Delmore was a tenant farmer and their mother Mollie was a singer and wrote gospel songs. Their mother taught them how to read traditional shape note gospel music and they spent weekends singing in church and singing schools. As boys they picked cotton (starting at the age of 5) and one of their big amusements was when the train passed through their little village - the train became an important theme in many of their songs. Alton bought his younger brother a tenor guitar when Rabon was 9 and they started using the tenor guitar as a lead instrument.

They started their duet in 1926 (at the ages 18 and 10) with Alton on vocal lead playing rhythm guitar and Rabon on harmonies playing lead tenor guitar. They mixed gospel, hillbilly, ragtime and blues. Blues was sung by blacks and whites and many of the Delmore Brothers songs are based on blues patterns.

They first recorded in 1931 but it was an unsuccessful venture. They left Columbia Records but were hired in 1933 to join the Grand Ole Opry and soon signed a contract with RCA Victor. In 1933 they released 17 songs on Bluebird (the famous RCA sub-label) and went to be very well known. Alton was a wonderful songwriter and many of his songs went on to be country classics covered by Jimmie Rodgers and Doc Watson.

They went on to tour the East Coast playing on radio stations and eventually settled in Birmingham, Alabama and then Cincinnati, Ohio. They had many problems with the music business, being cheated out of money owed them and not having rights for some of their songs. They recorded up until the early 50s and had one of their biggest hits in 1949. It was called 'Blues Stay Away From Me' and was a collaboration between country musicians and bluesmen. Henry Glover was an African American producer for the King label and he suggested a riff from a song he had composed. This song is sometimes considered the first rock 'n' roll song!

They are considered the most technically proficient, most creative and most musically sophisticated of the brother harmony duos.