

Al Jones & The Spruce Mountain Boys. Hardcore Bluegrass.
2014. Patuxent Music.

The title, Hardcore Bluegrass, for this release from old-school bluegrass singer Al Jones kind of says it all. Born in Grayson County Virginia, Jones is a fixture in the red-hot Washington DC bluegrass scene. He's been around the block and has a kind of old-as-the-hills Appalachian accent to his singing. It's the kind of accent and the kind of vocals that raise up the hair on the back of your neck. In a similar vein to Ralph Stanley or Danny Paisley, this is the kind of voice that's oft-imitated, but never bettered, unless you too were born deep in the Appalachian hills. At the ripe old age of 81, Jones' voice cracks with age but still has a ton of power, easily cutting through the other voices on this album to stand way out. The music is all old bluegrass, not that new-fangled speed demon kind of stuff. More like the old Louvin Brothers bluegrass that was content to ramble with ease through an old tear-jerker of a lament. It's great stuff, and a valuable document of the long-standing connections between Washington DC and Appalachia that Patuxent Music has spent so much time documenting. There's no gloss to the music, but it's all heart.