

HIGHLIGHT

BLUESTONE WHAT GOES ON



Patuxent Music CD-272

Now and then, a band will release a new project that really makes me sit up and take notice; this is one of those occasions. Bluestone has been around for about twenty years and, to my knowledge, has three previous releases. They are now recording for Tom Mindte's Patuxent Music, a label that's also been around two decades. In recent years, Patuxent has produced some awesome music by artists with impeccable credentials—Frank Wakefield, Danny Paisley, and Scott Brannon immediately come to mind. But there have been many others, too, and now they've added these fine artists to their stable.

Bluestone, working out of southern Pennsylvania, derives its name from the "blue" in bluegrass and the "stone" in the former Keystone band from southern York County. Guitarist/lead singer Carroll Swam and mandolin picker Dick Laird played bluegrass with Keystone; Swam goes back even further to

the 1960s with the Baltimore, Md.-based Franklin County Boys. Another former member of the Franklins is resonator guitar wizard Russ Hooper, who has played with virtually every Baltimore band in the past sixty years. Fiddler Jon Glik is also an accomplished veteran of the Baltimore bluegrass scene, as well as working with David Grisman, Peter Rowan, and Dave Evans, to name a few. Gifted Baltimore banjoist Tom Neal has played with Cliff Waldron, Bill Harrell, and Del McCoury, among others. Also in Bluestone are Dick Laird's two talented sons, Heath on bass and Jeff on guitar.

Members of Bluestone consider themselves to be firmly traditional, and I believe them. Some of their best numbers are jewels from the past: Roy Acuff's "As Long As I Live" and Red Allen's "Troubles Keep Hanging Around My Door." In fact, one of my favorite titles is "What Would You Give In Exchange" where Dick and Jeff Laird recall the tight harmonies of brother duets from an earlier era. However, Bluestone is not afraid to venture into more contemporary modes when the opportunity presents itself. "A Step In The Right Direction" is my favorite number on the set. The beautiful lead singing of Carroll Swam evokes a feeling eerily similar to that of John Starling with the original Seldom Scene. And Dick Laird doesn't hesitate to tackle the instrumental "El Cumbanchero"—a brilliant display of mandolin virtuosity. Space constraints prevent comments on all the titles, but there's fine original material as well as forays into country hits and even a Beatles tune. Instrumentally, Bluestone is right on track, but their vocals are what floats my boat—these guys can sing. *What Goes On* is recommended without reservation. (Patuxent Music, P.O. Box 572, Rockville, MD 20848, www.pxrec.com.)WVS