

HIGHLIGHT

DEDE WYLAND KEEP THE LIGHT ON



Patuxent Music CD189

Tony Trischka's 1983 album, "A Robot Plane Flies Over Arkansas" (Rounder Records)—one of the pinnacles of newgrass music—is an instrumental tour de force. However, a brief vocal track, "John's Waltz To The Miller," pops up before the album's closing cut, its direct, simple melody providing a lilting respite before the album's final finger-twister. What elevates the tune (a Trischka/Wyland original) from simply pretty to profoundly beautiful is the voice that delivers it, belonging to rhythm guitarist Dede Wyland.

Wyland's best known for her tenure in Trischka's 1980s newgrass band, Skyline, and before that, the Milwaukee-based Grass, Food and Lodging. After Skyline, she concentrated on teaching, though whenever she's turned up as a guest or for the occasional showcase, it's served to remind listeners that Wyland remains among the most affecting, and downright beautiful

voices to ever glide atop banjos and mandolins.

Yet, since leaving Skyline in the 1980s...poof! At least in the public arena, Wyland seemed to disappear. A somewhat under-the-radar 1998 EP, "Everything That Glitters," did little to raise her profile, but "Keep The Light On" should (not to say "will"), because this is a great album, the disc fans of Wyland's have been hoping for, these many years. Simply put, Wyland must be heard by all lovers of the female voice in bluegrass.

Carrying over from her EP is banjoist Mike Munford, joined by Wyatt Rice (guitar), Rickie Simpkins (mandolin and vocal harmonies), and bassist Ronnie Simpkins to form the core band, along with bassist Ira Gitlin (another carry-over from the EP), guitarist Tom McLaughlin, and fiddler Darol Anger, each making single appearances, and guest harmonizers Randy Barrett, Dudley Connell, Fred Travers, and David McLaughlin.

The David Via title track, the re-recorded "Everything That Glitters," Felice and Boudleaux Bryant's "Devoted To You," Miller/Britt's waltzing-then-driving yodeler "Chime Bells," 11 cuts and 11 winners, each played with crisp, driving virtuosity. The Stanleys' "The Memory Of Your Smile" should satisfy lovers of the high lonesome sound, with its haunting, minor-tinged chorus both smooth and gritty. Closing the disc is a gorgeous new recording of "John's Waltz To The Miller." In a sensible world, this recording would install the tune in the realm of modern bluegrass standards. Let's hope. (Patuxent Music, P.O. Box 572, Rockville, MD 20848, <www.pxrec.com>.)DR