

ETHAN HUGHES
SEARCHING FOR A HOME

Patuxent Music
PXCD-226



Combining a keen sense of musicality and musicianship on resonator guitar with a strong lead vocal, young Ethan Hughes has created a debut CD that will probably create some interest and excitement among fans of modern bluegrass. Eschewing the alt-grass or jamgrass-style that has propelled other young artists to strong popularity, Hughes has taken a more straight-up approach to his bluegrass here, showing strong influences from first and second generation bluegrass artists without ever sounding stuck in the past.

To bring his vision to light, he's assembled a strong cast of supporting musicians including Frank Solivan II on lead guitar to deliver a surprisingly strong sense of cohesion over the 12 tunes presented on *Searching For A Home*. The CD is propelled by strong performances by Russ Carson on banjo, Nate Gower on fiddle, Marc MacGlashan on mandolin, and Sav Sankaran on bass. MacGlashan has a very melodic, quick-fingered style on mandolin, which he employs to great effect on up-tempo tunes like "Deep River," which also features some excellent flatpicking guitar and fiddle work by the band. The band does well when it stays to tried-and-true bluegrass material, but falls short of some tracks like its effort at "Panhandle Rag," which drags when it should swing. A much better effort is the bouncy "Stay Away From Me," where the band gels and Hughes' laconic drawl fits the material to a tee. And they surprisingly pull off a speedy version of "Love Hurts" that is very effective and showcases the group's strengths.

For Hughes, the role model he seems to aspire to is Josh Williams; a strong bandleader with an appealing voice and command over his instrument on both rhythm and during solos. His playing isn't at the level of the top resonator guitarists in bluegrass yet, but as a young artist he has plenty of time to refine his technique and embrace a unique tone and style on his instrument. Time will also help improve his fledgling efforts at songwriting, which appear on two cuts here including the well-done title track.

Given time and the experience of being a touring musician, Hughes could develop into an excellent modern bluegrass performer. There's a lot to like on his first outing, and this CD will

undoubtedly leave many fans eagerly looking for his next project. (Patuxent Music, P.O. Box 572, Rockville, MD 20848, www.pxrec.com.)DJM