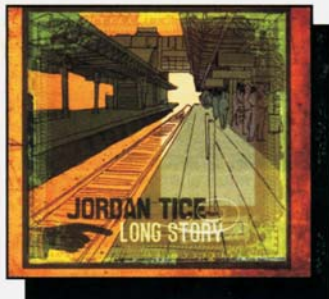


HIGHLIGHT

JORDAN TICE LONG STORY



Patuxent Music CD-176

In the '70s and '80s, Rounder Records was the dominant stable for progressive instrumental bluegrass or newgrass or "new acoustic" music or whatever other appellation you might choose. Sugar Hill, Flying Fish, and others added to the mix, but Rounder put out the most, by the best. Rounder's moved on since then, still an indie label, but huge, more diverse in their scope, and less involved with the kinds of projects that started or fostered the careers of players such as Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Sam Bush, Andy Statman, Tony Trischka, David Grisman, Mark O'Connor, and Tony Rice, among many others as leaders, as well as featured sidemen.

Though there are fewer such releases coming out in general as there were in the '80s—a sort of Golden Age—the gap is being filled nicely by a variety of labels, Patuxent Music being one of the newest, nurturing some of the youngest and most creative players just entering the big leagues. A recent, self-titled Patuxent disc by Corbett, Chrisman, and Tice (*BU*, Nov. '08) was one of the finest progressive

instrumental string records of last year, and this release by that trio's guitarist, Jordan Tice, is another winner.

The recording band that Tice assembled for "Long Story" represents the hot new string mafia, young virtuosi who have undoubtedly memorized many of those early Rounder, Flying Fish, and Sugar Hill albums (along with the tiny but mighty MCA Master Series that birthed *Strength In Numbers* and *Edgar Meyer* albums, among others), and have taken the ball from there. Tice, violinist Casey Driessen (Sparrow Quartet, Tim O'Brien Band), resonator guitarist Andy Hall (Infamous Stringdusters), and banjoist Noam Pikelnny (Chris Thile's Punch Brothers) are anchored by the bass playing of one of the progressive Golden Age guys, Mark Schatz.

What was true back then is even more so today—hot licks ain't enough. The best albums are driven by strong compositions, and Tice has chops in that regard to go along with his manual dexterity. When the springboard is strong material, improvisations tend to be better, and "Long Story" delivers on both counts. The tunes are engaging and melodic, and the pickers do their jobs, digging inspired solos out of the strong thematic foundations that only sound better with repetition. A couple numbers are also on the Corbett/Chrisman/Tice CD, giving us new takes with different soloists and arrangements. Also telling is that one of the best pieces on the disc is a slow number, "3 AM," harkening back to the Jerry Douglas' classic "Grant's Corner" in that the embellishments are subtle, never obscuring a truly gorgeous melody.

Jordan Tice is one of the new guys on the "new acoustic" block, and the neighborhood looks and sounds great (Patuxent Music, P.O. Box 572, Rockville, MD 20848, <www.pxrec.com>)JR