

Nate Grower



Patuxent CD-193

Nate Grower, fiddle; Danny Knicely, mandolin and tenor vocal; Mike Munford, banjo; Mark Schatz, bass; Jordan Tice, guitar; Tom Mindte, lead vocal; Nate Leath, pizza box

New Fall Reel / Big Sciota / Fire on the Mountain / Cherry River Line / Kansas City Kitty / Grey Eagle / Why Did You Wander / Uptown Blues / Leon Kennington Waltz / Whistling Rufus / Cattle in the Cane / Burning Well / I've Just Seen the Rock of Ages / Cedarwood

This new release from the Maryland label Patuxent presents a notable young bluegrass fiddler with broad taste and the skill to share it. Nate Grower is a native of Western New York, whose interest in bluegrass music is augmented by some classical training and a natural expressive dexterity.

Grower's fiddling has a depth of color that will remind some listeners of Alison Krauss' early instrumental work. *Old-Time Herald* readers whose tastes run towards bluegrass will be interested in Grower's takes on several traditional tunes, as well as the more eclectic selections here. The first tune is a sweet original bluegrass tune, "New Fall Reel," co-written by Grower and guitarist Jordan Tice, a conceptually modern bluegrass piece appealingly presented in a hornpipe structure.

Grower also tackles the festivalized version of "Big Sciota"—one of a handful of fiddle tunes I can think of of which I actually like the boiled-down festival version even more than the source rendition. His fiddling is extremely nice, though in the overall arrangement of the tune I could have stood a lot less atmospheric build-up. In "Fire on the Mountain" Grower and his bandmates go for all-out speed; the furious attack doesn't quite bring out the strengths of the tune itself, but the display of virtuosity is impressive.

Banjo player Mike Munford, whose brash three-finger style on this album I really like, turns to an older frailing approach on "Cherry River Line." Tom Mindte sings the song, of the relationship-falls-apart-when-the-boy-leaves-to-see-his-fortune plot family, which has some unusual and likeable verses such as, "Well, I used to court a young lady / Fine laces she did wear / Now she's choosed another buddy / Who lets her feet go bare." The arrangement, which leans strongly towards bluegrass, is solid and bouncy, and will remind *OTH* readers of the recordings by the Wildcats and Wandering Ramblers. One swift, sharp, pain-inflicting crack of the ruler down on the knuckles of the writer of this album's liner notes, for describing "Cherry River Line" as "unapologetic old time." I didn't realize an apology was warranted for playing old-time music. Bluegrass musicians shouldn't feel sheepish about liking old-time music any more than old-time musicians should heed any stigma about playing bluegrass. They're both wonderful bodies of music, so let's get over our inhibitions, and pull that calico from the wall.

"Grey Eagle" is played here as a short, bluegrassy fiddle-banjo duet; very nicely played, and one of my favorite cuts on the album. Also excellent is Mindte and mandolinist Danny Knicely's duet singing of the bluegrass classic "Why Did You Wander?" "Cattle in the Cane" sounds good, and gave me the notion that the cattle are probably grazing along Jerusalem Ridge. The album closes with another Grower original, "Cedarwood," a delicate, thoughtful, slow composition.

Clearly this is not an old-time album, but those readers who appreciate good bluegrass fiddling and band work will enjoy it. Grower is a talented fiddler whose sense of style and breadth of repertoire will appeal to many audiences.

SARAH BRYAN

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