

Lonely Tonight – Bill Runkle & Smith Hollow

[John Curtis Goad](#) | November 17, 2015 | [No Comments](#)



When you think “Del McCoury’s banjo player,” your mind probably automatically goes to Del’s son, 2015 IBMA Banjo Player of the Year Rob McCoury. However, before there was a Del McCoury Band, there was Del McCoury & the Dixie Pals. The longest serving banjo player for the Dixie Pals was Pennsylvania native Bill Runkle, whose picking can be heard on such classics as *I’ve Endured*, *High on the Mountain*, and *Rain Please Go Away*. Runkle played with Del throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, then performed with several regional groups in the years after that. He has recently returned to the bluegrass world, heading up Bill Runkle & Smith Hollow. The group’s debut album, [Lonely Tonight](#), is newly released from Patuxent Music.

Runkle’s banjo playing is the star of the album, which features five originals alongside a number of traditional favorites. He is joined by two members of Smith Hollow – guitarist Larry Conner and bass player Judy Winters – while guests Jeff Kidd on mandolin and Patrick McAvinue on fiddle round out the album’s band. Though Runkle is now in his seventies, and had taken several years off from playing prior to recording this album, his banjo playing is still crisp, and he tackles the tunes here with ease.

The songs and tunes here are very firmly in the traditional bluegrass camp. Almost all are upbeat; many have a good driving rhythm. The rollicking original *Marching Through Glenville* was also featured on last year’s *Patuxent Banjo Project* collection. It starts the album off in high gear, a setting also heard on the public domain tune *Bully of the Town* (which includes a mandolin break of note from Kidd, as well). Perhaps in contrast to its title, *Kickin’ the Dog* is a fun, bouncy number with an excellent traditional guitar break from Conner. *Black Mountain Hop* is an enjoyable variant on *Black Mountain Rag* and *Green Mountain Hop*, played in D tuning. Conner’s guitar shines again on this number, as does McAvinue’s fiddling.

Two of the tunes here have a bit of a Del McCoury vibe, certainly befitting an alumnus of Del’s band. *Carocus* (which can also be found on Rob McCoury’s recent *Five String Flamethrower* album under a slightly different spelling) features some intriguing banjo acrobatics. *Cheaters in the Soup* was written by Del in his Dixie Pals days, and Runkle actually played banjo on the original cut in the early 1970s. Both tunes are performed here in C tuning.

Three of the album’s thirteen tracks feature vocals. *Hello Trouble* seems to be modeled after the Lost & Found version from the late ’80s. It’s a solid version of the old country number. *Lonesome Feeling* is rendered in the slower, more lonesome style, with a mournful high lead,

taking more after the Osborne Brothers cut than the more recent, upbeat version popularized by Josh Williams. The closing track, *I'm Lonely Tonight*, is another original from Runkle. This track will be a treat for fans of ultra-traditional bluegrass, with lead vocals from guest Danny Paisley.

Though many of the songs on *Lonely Tonight* will be well-known to the bluegrass crowd, Runkle's takes on them are certainly worth a listen. The entire album is straightforward, no nonsense, traditional bluegrass, featuring straightforward, no nonsense five string banjo. Runkle is a fine banjo player and has surrounded himself with a strong group of musicians. Fans of classic bluegrass will likely want to check out this project.

For more information on Bill Runkle & Smith Hollow, visit the group's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BillRunkleandSmithHollow. Their new album can be purchased from several online music retailers or directly from the band.