



FRANK WAKEFIELD

Own Self Blues

Patuxent 182

Mandolinist Frank Wakefield is unlike many other living musician. He was inspired to take up the instrument after hearing the playing of Bill Bolick of the Blue Sky Boys. Soon, he was playing for Red Allen and the Kentuckians. By the 1960s, Bill Monroe took him aside and suggested that, since his playing so resembled Bill's, he better find his own style. He turned to the classical music he had watched on television as a teenager and began to explore the possibilities of combining his own music with chamber ensembles. Eventually, he played with both Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Pops. He was also a member of the Greenbriar Boys in the mid 1960s, then found himself on the West Coast playing with the Grateful Dead, the New Riders of the Purple Sage and his own ensemble, The Good Ol' Boys. Along the way, he appeared on numerous TV programs, including *The Mike Douglas Show*. His career would easily be satisfying for two or three musicians.

Own Self Blues features an ensemble comprised of fiddler Michael Cleveland, guitarist Audie Blaylock, and banjoist Mike Munford. They are joined by Jordan Tice on lead guitar and Darren Muller on bass.

The CD opens with the title tune, an angular blues with some interesting atypical blues chord variations. Frank's style is still Monroesque, but I doubt Big Mon would have ever written a tune with such an unusual melody. The CD includes Frank's best known tune, "New Camptown Races," with its modal harmonies not unlike Monroe's. Again, the rhythm is angular, with frequent stops and starts.

Where Frank and Bill really part company is with the inclusion of two classical pieces. "Bouree from the Lute Suite in E minor," by J.S. Bach, is arranged as an ensemble piece for mandolin and fiddle lead, banjo continuo with the arco bass setting a great foundation for this well-known baroque melody. Beethoven's "Theme and Variations in D," with just mandolin and guitar, is less successful.

The whole CD features one unusual and marvelous piece after another. Never feeling over-rehearsed, each piece seems to have

been captured at the peak of freshness. With his highly varied career, Frank Wakefield is not always the first mandolinist that comes to mind, but, after one exploration into the many treats on *Own Self Blues*, you'll be looking for more music featuring Frank's inventive playing. — TD