

Five Mile Mountain Road



Swingbilly Swagger (Patuxent Records CD-346)

Billy Hurt, Jr.: fiddle, vocals; Brennen Ernst: guitar, piano, banjo, vocals; Seth Boyd: banjo, vocals; Caleb Erickson: guitar, vocals; J.C. Radford: bass; Danny Bureau: percussion

The Train That Carried My Girl from Town / Blue Sunday / Sally Was a Poor Girl / There is a Time / I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas / Wild Horse / Just When I Needed You / Goodnight Waltz / Pallet on the Floor / Only in a Dream World / Noël / Wild Bill Jones / Lynchburg Town-Don't Let Your Deal Go Down / You Ain't Talkin' to Me / KC Railroad Blues

I first heard of Five Mile Mountain Road on a YouTube video where they were playing *If the River was Whiskey* and I was captured by the swinging fiddle playing of Billy Hurt Jr... he's got exactly the right blend of technique and feeling to compliment the Americana

found here on this album, though sadly *If the River was Whiskey* doesn't appear here. Billy is joined on this album by multi-instrumentalist Brennen Ernst, Seth Boyd with many styles of old-time banjo, Caleb Erickson on guitar, J.C. Radford on bass and Danny Bureau guesting on percussion. Playing reels, rags, blues, Western swing, 1950s-era country, and early bluegrass songs and tunes, Five Mile Mountain Road know how to get their audiences dancing in their live concerts, and the tracks on this album with their upbeat tempos and driving rhythm section will make you want to dance too. You get 15 tracks and 50 minutes of entertainment here, with 9 songs and 6 tunes ideally positioned for maximum variety and foot-tapping enjoyment.

A good old train song starts the fun with a bluegrassy take on *The Train That Carried My Girl from Town* – vocal harmonies, train whistling double-stops from the fiddle and exciting instrumental breaks from the fiddle, two guitar styles and banjo let each of the players bring their own interpretations. *Blue Sunday* showcases the band's vocal qualities in a 1950s-era country approach. The honky-tonk piano from Brennen Ernst clinches this track for me. Clark Kessinger is a great inspiration for Billy and you can hear his influence on this one of the 'Sally' tunes, *Sally Was a Poor Girl*. The song *I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas* is a great dance-hall number and salutes the King of Western Swing, Bob Wills. It was first recorded by its writer Phil Harris and His Orchestra in 1928, and has been popularly covered by among others Louis Armstrong, George Melly and even the Osmond Brothers, though of course that was a cleaned-up version lyrically. The tune *Wild Horse* is another dance-hall number and I've known this as *Wild Horses at Stoney Point* or just *Stoney Point*. This version draws inspiration from Charlie Poole's recording made with the North Carolina Ramblers in 1926. A tasteful walking bass underpins the song *Just When I Needed You*. Vocal harmonies, honky-tonk piano, twin guitars, fiddle, shuffle rhythm... what more could you ask of a rendition of an old country song? Channelling Clark Kessinger again for *Goodnight Waltz*, Billy's fiddle playing is rich and warm with accomplished double-stops and harmonies while the band provides the perfect backdrop with romantic chord sequences and key changes. Banjoist Seth Boyd composed the lovely tune *Noëll* as a lilting tribute to his daughter and the up-tempo song *Wild Bill Jones* is a widely known song that I recognise from the Highwoods String Band. *You Ain't Talking to Me* is another comedy song I recognise from the Highwoods String Band which is a reworking of Charlie Poole's classic, which, in turn, owes a debt to Eddie Morton and his Orchestra. The band finishes off this album with another good old train song, *K C Railroad Blues*. Their inspiration comes from a TV recording by Buck Ryan in 1954 with added words from the African American father-and-son team of Andrew and Jim Baxter who recorded the song in 1927. With plenty of sliding double-stops and rocking bow strokes, Billy hits the peak of this style of fiddle-playing.

The band made this album at Patuxent Music in Rockville, Maryland and it was recorded,

mixed and mastered very well by Tom Mindte, achieving superb sound quality. The album comes with well-renowned banjoist, writer and researcher Stephen Wade's excellent and extensive liner notes and track listings, though perhaps because this is not a purely old-time album, there are no details about the key or tunings each track is in. The top-notch arrangements that the band has conjured up for each tune and song are indicators of the success they have had playing to live audiences. As a result, "Swingbilly Swagger" is perfect for a good time, with some 'swing' and some 'hillbilly' and plenty of swagger from the musicians playing super confidently, right up there with the best.

Jan Howard

Available from: Bandcamp, www.pxrec.com