
BLUEGRASS & BEYOND

FIVE MILE MOUNTAIN ROAD

Patuxent Music
CD-315



Five Mile Mountain Road is a four-piece old-time band from Franklin County, Virginia. The core of the band and its old-time sound consists of Billy Hurt on fiddle and Seth Boyd on banjo. Solid support comes from Steven Dowdy on bass (formerly of the Bluegrass Brothers) and multi-instrumentalist Brennan Ernst on guitar (who also currently plays banjo for Karl Shiflett). All four band members contribute to the vocals; lead vocals are performed by Billy Hurt ("Lily Dale"), Steven Dowdy ("Five Mile Mountain Road"), and Seth Boyd ("Milwaukee Blues"). Guest Danny Knically adds nice guitar work on several tracks.

This album emphasizes instrumental work, with nine of the fourteen tracks driven by the fiddle and banjo in the old-time style (even though Boyd plays three-finger banjo style on some tracks). Instrumental tracks include well-known old-time titles such as "Miss McCleod's Reel," "Durang's Hornpipe," and "Billy In The Lowground." Five Mile Mountain Road has captured a sound reminiscent of older country music when country, old-time, and bluegrass were not considered separate music genres. (Patuxent Music, P.O. Box 572, Rockville, MD 20848, www.pxrec.com.)JK

is still in demand decades later. It's due in part to their world view that they didn't go further. Growing up in Hickory, N.C., the Bolick brothers, Bill and Earl, came to music after finding it paid better than other Depression-era jobs. They could make far more money with a sponsor on the radio and doing public appearances throughout the week than they could working other jobs locally. They teamed up with Homer "Pappy" Sherrill in the early days on WWNC. From there, they moved to many stations including WGST in Atlanta, WSOC in Charlotte, WPTF in Raleigh, and WFBC in Greenville. Their sound was softer than other duos, and they dressed in business attire with Earl's guitar and Bill's mandolin as accompaniment. They eschewed the hard-driving sounds of bluegrass when it came along and resisted adding instruments to their stripped-down sound.

They found the music world was not as easy as just singing their beloved hymns and folk songs. They had to be entertaining, too. Bill took the lead with learning the material and moving the duo forward. Earl was not as committed to the musical lifestyle, but when need be, he created a hilarious alter ego, Uncle Josh. This character was outrageous, and Earl was personally subdued. Their journey is fully documented by the author with extensive footnotes, photos, and appendices that list the songs the brothers sang, a comprehensive discography, and a chronology of their careers.

It was Bill's conservative approach to trying new stations and taking some offers that curtailed some of their fame. They did not take jobs with larger audiences and greater potential, opting instead for something they knew. In spite of these decisions, their understated musical approach spoke for itself. One need only look at the multitude of recordings listed on a website such as Amazon to see just how popular the brothers remain today.

This is a thoughtful biography in which Bill, the more outspoken of the brothers, tells the story of their lives. Many other voices are included to add insight and context to the story. In these pages is an important and significant addition to the history of country music.RCB