

Five Mile Mountain Road



Patuxent CD-315

Five Mile Mountain Road / Rocky Pallet / Miss McLeod's Reel / Dixie / Lily Dale / Durang's Hornpipe / Under the Double Eagle / Milwaukee Blues / Shaky (Becky's

Song) / Billy in the Lowground / Next Sunday Darling Is My Birthday / Wildflower Waltz / Sugar Hill / Alabama Jubilee

Billy Hurt: fiddle, vocal; Seth Boyd: banjo, vocal; Brennen Ernst: guitar, piano, vocal; Steven Dowdy, bass, vocal

This quartet hails from Franklin County, Virginia, legendary, writes John Lawless in the album's liner notes, "for producing acoustic musicians and untaxed whiskey." While there are no paeans to moonshine here, plenty of acoustic music talent is on tap. Fiddler Billy Hurt, a disciple of Clark Kessinger, is the flamboyant front man, a big and bold bow master. Banjoist Seth Boyd is assured in both clawhammer and three-finger styles; he contributes the album's sole band composition, a tasty tune called "Shaky (Becky's Song)." Brennen Ernst is a steady presence on guitar, and, on "Miss McLeod's Reel," piano. Steven Dowdy makes slapping the bass sound fun.

If this album is a fair representation of its performances, Five Mile Mountain Road is essentially a good-time old-time dance band, one you'll need fleet feet to keep up with. The Kessinger Brothers' "Wildflower Waltz" excepted, the nine instrumental tracks tend towards barn burners. The band leans on familiar favorites, though there's variety in the delivery. "Under the Double Eagle" opens with flat-picked guitar and offers Scruggs-style banjo in what can fairly be called a bluegrass arrangement. The players keep tunes like "Durang's Hornpipe" squarely in the old-time camp, but purists they're not. "Lily Dale" is a Western swing standard, and that's how it's played here, with Corrina Rose Logston offering the genre's characteristic twin fiddle. And is that—heaven forbid!—an electric guitar solo I hear? As noted previously, these guys are not old-time purists, though nothing played here should cause the musically orthodox to go into shock. Much of the playing here's plenty orthodox, just with a wink and a nudge to the ribs.

The five vocals are a mixed bag. Perhaps a self-consciously country delivery fits "Sugar Hill," with lyrics like, "If you want to get your eyes knocked out / If you want to get a thrill / If you want to get your eyes knocked out / Come down on Sugar Hill." But the exaggerated nasal twang sounds like a cover for limited vocal chops, and there are three more like it. No one will write home about Boyd's singing

on the nicely swinging rendition of Charlie Poole's "Milwaukee Blues," but he sounds engagingly natural, and that's a plus.

Five Mile Mountain Road isn't blazing any trails, but they're not in a rut, either. These guys know how to play, and they convey an effortless sense of fun in so doing. Fourteen tunes and 42 minutes feel right for this band to introduce itself.

MARK HUMPHREY