



My Best Friend

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Posted on January 1, 2021

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Jay Armsworthy & Eastern Tradition

Patuxent Music

Listening to Jay Armsworthy, a veteran of the southern Maryland bluegrass scene for almost 40 years, is like enjoying a satisfying, home-cooked meal. There's no frozen TV dinner bluegrass on this new recording, which combines traditional bluegrass with original music and a handful of "country classics with a grassy treatment," as Joe Mullins describes in the liner notes. The current line-up of Eastern Tradition has been together since 2014 and it shows. This is authentic, heartfelt bluegrass in the style of Larry Sparks, the Stanleys, Flatt & Scruggs, and Bill Monroe.

Armsworthy plays guitar (and mandolin on one cut), providing most of the lead vocals. He is joined by fine tenor singer Lewis Layton on bass, Scott Walker on banjo and baritone vocals, Dale Eyler on fiddle, and the fabulous Leon Morris on mandolin and mossy vocals. Morris,

whom listeners may recall from his 1974 album, *Honkytonk Bluegrass* with Buzz Busby on the Rounder label, contributes two originals to this collection.

Jay, who produces events and hosts a bluegrass radio show in addition to leading a band, has spent enough time entertaining an audience to know folks like to hear something they recognize. Country fans will enjoy the Gene Watson hit, "Got No Reason Now for Going Home;" an up-tempo version of "Lucille" from the Kenny Rogers catalog; a sparkling instrumental cover of "When the Saints Go Marching In;" and Vern Gosdin's classic "Chiseled in Stone."

"Billy the Bluegrass Beagle" is an original that honors the recent loss of Jay's faithful canine companion of 14 years. Fans who can appreciate the beauty in the baying of a dog off in the distance at night who has treed a fox or a racoon will also enjoy "Pearl," previously recorded by Cedar Hill.

Jay does a fine job of singing and flatpicking on "(Some Call it Heaven), I Call It Home" which he learned from Paul Williams. Morris plays lead guitar and mandolin on his instrumental "Shreddin' It Down," and he sings the sentimental three-quarter time original "Angel in Heaven" to great effect.

Leon scalds off Ralph Stanley's "Lonesome Without You," a fan favorite. Scott "Oh Honey" Walker got his band nickname from his vocal on the chorus of the Flatt & Scruggs standard, "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down."

The set is rounded out by "The Needle," a song about addiction from the Hylo Brown catalog; "Worried Man Blues," which shows off a lovely tenor vocal harmony from Jay; and Monroe's "Travelin' This Lonesome Road." The latter re-creates the 1974 arrangement by Morris and Busby, with Leon covering Buzz's part this time and Jay singing Leon's part. This, children, is bluegrass music.

"Chiseled in Stone" is reprised in a live recording from Charlie Thompson and the Bottom County Bluegrass, captured at the Arcadia, Maryland Bluegrass Festival shortly before he died in 2016. Jay played Thompson's D-35 Martin guitar on this album, which is dedicated to the Maryland bluegrass icon's memory. If you haven't listened to Jay Armsworthy in recent years, it's time to listen again.