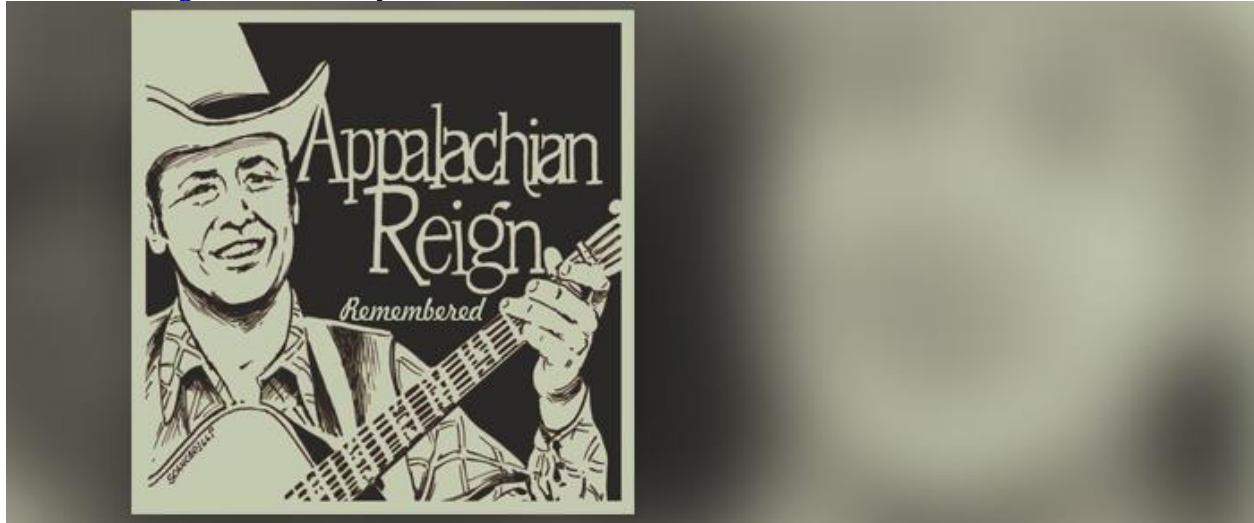




Appalachian Reign Remembered – Appalachian Reign

Posted on [August 30, 2023](#) by [Braeden Paul](#)



From 1975-1984, Tom Knowles and his band Appalachian Reign were fixtures in the Washington, DC bluegrass scene. Performing primarily at local night spots and festivals on the East Coast, Appalachian Reign consisted of various instrumentalists and vocalists throughout their nine year run, with Knowles being the one constant. No matter who was performing in the group, the band always kept a consistently tight and raw traditional sound, which is reflected on [Patuxent Music's](#) new compilation project, [Appalachian Reign Remembered](#).

Taken primarily from live cassette recordings ranging from 1978-1984, the audio quality of this material varies from track to track. That does not however take away from the high caliber of musicianship presented by Knowles and the various sidemen that have passed through Appalachian Reign.

Beginning with a comical introduction of the group's leader by legendary mandolinist Buzz Busby, this collection kicks off with *Running Away*, an original instrumental by Busby. Recorded at Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Rockville, Maryland on July 24, 1982, this tune is a wonderful example of Busby's fiery mandolin style, which is loved by so many aficionados. Along with Buzz on mandolin and Tom on guitar, this track also consists of Dave Norman on banjo and Earl Brown on bass.

One of the most interesting aspects of this group was their ability to take mainstream material and render it in a hardcore traditional fashion. A good example of this is *Rain* written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Recorded on February 9, 1980 at American University in Washington, DC, this track is a great display of Tom Knowles' smooth lead vocals, along with the harmony vocals of mandolinist Nevin Lambert and banjoist Stafford Markham. This performance also features Dave Goldman on fiddle and Jim Duke on bass. Other examples of the band's renditions of recognizable songs include *Amy* by Craig Fuller of Pure Prairie League, and *Amanda*, written by Bob McDill and popularized by country singer Don Williams.

This collection also contains several tried and true bluegrass standards. *Ole Slew Foot* was recorded at Partners II in Centreville, Virginia on January 14, 1984, and features perhaps one of the strongest configurations ever assembled by Knowles. Consisting of Joe Meadows on fiddle, Lamar Grier on banjo, Dave Auldrige on guitar and tenor vocals, and Earl Brown on bass, this track is an exciting tour de force from start to finish. Meadows' backup playing on this performance particularly stands out. *Sally Goodin* is a track that also spotlights Joe's powerful fiddling as well as the incredible banjo picking of Porter Church. It's another powerful example of why these men are two of the all-time greats.

Of the twenty two songs contained on this release, three of them were not recorded at live performances. The most interesting of these is *March Around the Throne One Time For Me*. Recorded during an informal jam at the United States Capitol in the summer of 1983, this track features Senator Robert Byrd on fiddle and lead vocal, along with Knowles, Meadows, Grier, Auldrige, and Brown.

Two of the tracks, *You Go To Your Church and I'll Go To Mine* and *Sunshine in My Heart*, were both recorded at a studio owned by Appalachian Reign alumni, Steve Spence in Herndon, Virginia in the summer of 1980. Both songs feature Knowles on guitar and lead vocal, Bill Emerson on tenor vocal, Bill Torbert on mandolin, Pat Murphy on banjo, and Bob Goff Jr. on bass. The latter track was written by Tom and is one of two songs on this collection that he wrote.

The other Tom Knowles original, *A Vision of You*, was recorded during a 1978 performance at the Silo Inn. This song without a doubt defines Appalachian Reign and their traditional roots. The track consists of Knowles on guitar and lead vocal, Nevin Lambert on mandolin and tenor vocal, Steve Spence on banjo and baritone vocal, Dave Goldman on fiddle, and Jim Duke on bass.

She Was a T-Bone Talking Woman and *When Lightning Hit the Outhouse* are two songs that spotlight the comedic side of Appalachian Reign. The latter track was written by Joe Meadows during his stint with Jim & Jesse, and from his introduction, it comes across as if the song had rarely been performed, if ever. It's obvious that the audience at Shakey's Pizza Parlor that night found themselves in stitches!

One of the many legendary musicians who occasionally filled in with Appalachian Reign was banjoist Don Stover, who appears on two tracks. *Reuben's Train* spotlights his unique style of bluegrass banjo while *The Old Coon Dog* displays his stellar old time clawhammer playing.

Appalachian Reign Remembered is a fine collection. It's evident from these performances that Tom Knowles always assembled a first rate band, rooted in tradition. While you can get this release as a download, I strongly suggest that you purchase [the physical CD](#). The seventeen pages of liner notes tell the complete story of this DC based band from Knowles' perspective. It's an intriguing read. Both Knowles and Tom Mindte of Patuxent Music need to be commended for bringing these historical recordings to light, and making them available for us to enjoy.